

Scoring in Games Assembly

This morning I would like to take the opportunity to reflect upon games, scoring systems and life strategies. Games are enormously important in almost every culture on earth. In fact, if I had to reflect on what characteristics distinguish human beings from other animals and define us as a species, I think that I

own. The British are not only fanatical players of games, we gave most of
It is difficult to think of one global sport that wasn't a product of this island.

Obviously we invented football, the world's most popular game. In 1848,
University undergraduates laid down the modern rules of the game. There
which has gradually evolved over 700 years to the sport we know today.

Tennis, on the other hand, has a scoring system of immense subtlety and brilliance. Here I am not merely referring to the arcane use of such terms such as love, 15, 30, 40, deuce, etc. the point is a little more complex – the scoring system allows the game to be flexible and varied.

If one tennis player is significantly stronger than the other, the scoring system allows for a game to be won with four blows of the racquet. Four aces = game. However, if the two players are more evenly matched, then the requirement for a player to win by two clear points once deuce has been achieved can lead to an absorbing and extended battle. Thus tennis can accommodate both the savage execution of a weaker opponent and a subtle and extended play and interplay.

Further, once a player has won a set in tennis, the score is then reset to zero. Yes, one player is a set up, but the other player has the opportunity to regroup and is not disadvantaged in any way (other than by his or her level of skill) in winning the next set. In basketball there would be no such hope. By allowing a tennis match to be competed over three or five sets, the scoring system of the game allows and reflects the swings and reversals that can occur in any sporting contest, and in life itself. Already a game that requires a combination of skill, restraint and power, tennis achieves a greater lustre by a scoring system that is something close to brilliance.

Let us take another example. In shooting or archery, there is a very simple scoring system. The participants fire at the target. If they hit the very centre, they can score the maximum 10. If they are slightly out in their aim, then they will strike the next scoring circle out, and gain nine. And so forth. Very obvious; rather boring. This is a scoring system which makes very little strategic demand upon the players. Their approach is required to be simple: aim for the middle of the target. Compare and contrast this scoring system with that of darts. All the games involve the projection of a

or archery
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Others will adopt a more cautious approach. They will aim for the 16.

It is not the best score that they could possibly have, but it will probably mean that they get a better outcome than those who adopted a riskier strategy and failed. It doesn't have quite the same heroic appeal as the first strategy, but it is a lot safer and will give you a greater chance of admittedly slightly less success. Is that a strategy you find yourself adopting?

You probably employ a mixture of approaches, depending on your confidence in any given situation. And this is just one example from one game. I'm willing to bet that the strategies you bring to bear in just about any sport or game are both reflective of your approach to life, and perhaps can serve as guides to your own decision-making. This is so much so that there is a whole branch of study called Game Theory: "the study of mathematical models of conflict and cooperation between intelligent rational decision-makers." Game theory is used in economics, political science, and psychology, as well as logic, computer science, -6 (is(om on)-1 (n)-1 (j)-6 (tx