

Watching NASCAR What's the Appeal?

Last Monday I got home around 7:45pm and switched on the Television to continue my love hate relationship with House MD, a show I no longer love but still feel I have to watch. I expected to be greeted with the last few minutes of the Simpsons but was instead was found myself watching a bunch of cars driving around a track at very high speed, yes I was watching the Daytona 500. I was not too thrilled to see a bunch of cars driving around a track at about 200mph until one of them made it 500 miles, this was really not my cup of tea. The race which should have taken place Sunday had been postponed until Monday due to rain. Unhappy with this development I left the TV on Fox in the hopes that at eight o'clock they might announce when they would be airing the next episode of House. No announcement came but I continued to watch, even though I would eventually change the channel I found myself switching back to Fox throughout the night to see how the race was progressing. I found this odd since I am not a fan of NASCAR and on the whole find the sport very boring, but it is the most watched sport in America. I began to wonder what makes NASCAR so compelling, why do people find it so captivating? Why does someone like me who has zero interest in NASCAR find herself switching back to the race after watching only a few minutes? I think fans are captivated by this sport because all the sport is about is driving a car and since most people have driven a car they can relate to it. In addition with the occurrences of crashes and other events during the race it is human drama being played out in a small compact environment, and without the complex penalties and fouls of other sports spectators can follow the sport from the first moment they watch it.

Plenty of people are football, baseball, and basketball fans, but most spectators have not played, nor do they have the talents required to play these sports at the level that the professional athletes who participate in them do. We don't undergo rigorous training regimens for hours every day of our lives like most athletes have to, we can't even comprehend what it would be like. Athletes have the bodies of superheroes with bulging muscles and perfect bodies, while most people can only dream of having bodies like that. However, the world of NASCAR is easier to relate to. In this sport people drive cars, which is something almost everyone can relate to. Whether it is a toy car or a real vehicle everyone has driven a car at some point in their lives and everyone dreams of being able to drive very fast. While I enjoy watching football I could never see myself playing however since I have driven a car I can see myself in one of those cars driving very fast around the Daytona Raceway. As for the looks of the drivers, they look like healthy in shape people. Their muscles due not appear to be bulging out of their uniforms; this of course could be because they wear full body suits but whatever the reason the drivers look like people and not superheroes. I think if I were in better shape I could look like one of the drivers and I'm sure I am not the only person to feel like that.

As for the race itself it's very easy to follow. In football and basketball there are so many rules and penalties it can be hard to follow games. I find when I'm watching these sports and the referees stop the game sometimes I wonder why. I either didn't see the foul committed or I don't understand what foul has been committed. However in watching just a few minutes of NASCAR I could completely understand what was going on. There were no fouls, and even if there is a crash the race never stops. The goal of the race is obviously to win, but the important part is to gain position and drivers doing this by trying to pass other drivers. I know none of the rules of the sport and I was able to follow it from the

first moment I watched it. Of course there are rules but unlike football where you need to understand what a holding penalty is to understand why a player lost yardage I did not need a complete understanding of the rules to follow the race. In football as a spectator I frequently need to see a field of players and determine who is open to try to understand who the quarterback is going to try to go to. However in NASCAR all the cars are in a pack so I don't need full view of a field to understand what's going on, my focus can remain in one area making it easy to watch.

The races are not without drama. During this Daytona 500 after 600 feet, about one and a half laps, there was a major crash involving several cars. The drivers involved in the crash included defending champion Trevor Bayne, the only woman in the race racing in her first Daytona 500 Danica Patrick, and several others. All the cars had to be taken off the track and tended to. As the repair teams tended to their drivers and cars I found myself becoming involved with the dramatic story line. How bad was the damage to the cars? Would the racers be able to continue? If the drivers could continue how would they make up the lost laps? The only racer to get back in the race was Danica Patrick even though she was almost 60 laps behind. As her team fixed her car she remained in it. The cameras showed her seated in the car as the repairs took place and she looked so focused and determined to get back on the track I felt for her. I could relate to what I thought she feeling, the desire all of us have when we train and practice for an event but then something beyond our control happens and we can't do it. All we want to do is overcome the obstacle and get back out there and complete the task. I can imagine that is what Danica felt, I found myself cheering for her to get back into the race and do her best. When she did get back in the race I knew there was no way she make up the lost distance but I cheered for her just the same.

While I did find the Daytona 500 interesting I do not see myself becoming a fan of it. While it is easy to follow and has some intriguing aspects to it in the end I don't see it holding my interest long term. Sports like basketball and football may be more complex but it is the complexity of them that holds my interest. The variety of strategies and plays in these sports make them more interesting to watch over a long period of time. I am happy I watched the race because now I understand NASCAR and the fascination with it a little better, and as a sports fan and writer I think it is important to have an understanding of all different sports.