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SERANGOON JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 Preliminary Examination 2015

GENERAL PAPER
Paper 2
Insert

8807/2
14th August 2015
1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your **name** and **CG** in the spaces at the top of this page.

Submit the insert together with your answer booklet at the end of the examination.

This Insert Booklet consists of 3 printed pages including this page

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- 1 Sports has become far more than contests with rules played on fields, pools, or courts. Our current conception of sports is more than just a ball moving between groups of athletes, or a struggle for a finish line, or an effort to impress judges, as various critical studies will attest. Sports has produced something more than just the usual trappings of sports that bleed into other aspects of society: the refereeing and record keeping, the public accounts of events, the hero worship of the victors, and the training of youth. 5
- 2 Sports has produced, especially in the information age, a remarkable evolution in the dialogue about sports. What was fifty years ago a sports section of a local newspaper and perhaps a radio hour, and later, a local news update, has become an entire wing in the marketplace of ideas. There are now twenty-four hour sports networks on radio and television, periodicals and books of every kind, and endless websites devoted to sports in all of its forms. Very few of these outlets are actually concerned with reporting about sporting events, at least in an objective sense. Especially with the sudden explosion of the blogosphere, the recent trend in sports is not simple enjoyment of the contests on some aesthetic level, but a constant need to debate and argue over the underlying meaning of the games. The forms these arguments take are as diverse as the games themselves. There are radio talk shows, devoted mostly to second guessing coaches and allowing fans to vent their frustrations on an emotional level. 10 15
- 3 There are TV shows where panels of so-called experts debate increasingly hypothetical situations. There are those who seek meaning in numbers, pouring over and creating new stats, and arguing which translate into indicators of real world success. Then there are those who seek to disengage from the subjective experience of sports and seek to understand the field in an academic way that appreciates sports' place within society. All of these perspectives penetrate to different levels of sport, and all have their own functions, from the angry fan driving to work who needs a morning distraction and outlet, to the intellectual who uses sports to explore man's social needs. What is interesting is that such a wide and diverse strata of society use sports, and the dialogue about sports, for so many different ends, and that they all presumably continue to find something of worth in those pursuits. 20 25
- 4 Today, sports teaches that effort leads to victory, a useful lesson in a work-oriented society. Sports also helps people navigate the tension between team loyalty and individual glory. Sports culture has influenced students: it discourages whining, and rewards self-discipline. It teaches self-control and its own form of justice, which has a more powerful effect than anything taught in the classroom. 30
- 5 Sports is also most certainly an industry. Wherever large amounts of capital are created and concentrated, both in the hands of the owners and the hands of athletes themselves, there is going to be society wide interest. Sports has become a mostly corporate entity, and athletes are essentially bought and sold on an open market. The intrinsic character building lessons that have long been held up as sports' shining virtue have been replaced by corporate interests. Dr. Stanley Eitzen, a professor of sociology at the Colorado State University, notes that sports has been "transformed from an activity for individuals involved in sports for its own sake, to one where they do it for work, and where loyalty to players, coaches, and owners is a quaint notion that is now rarely held." 35 40
- 6 Sports is increasingly becoming a product to be bought and sold, and the huge increase in sports dialogue can be seen as a testament to that. "It has come to the point," Jay J. Coakley, author of *Sports in Society*, observes, "where participants can prove themselves in sports through their ability to consume as well as their ability to master physical skills." Seasons in sports have become too long and the arenas too gargantuan. Athletes have become a separate gladiator class, and the recruitment process gives them an undue sense of their own worth. Spectators have been reduced to an anonymous mass of passive consumers of other people's excellence. Coaches have a greater incentive to 45 50

satisfy the braying crowd with victories than to teach good habits. Yet, while it is useful to look at modern sports as a commodity, it is not an all-inclusive perspective. Many do still play sports for the sake of playing, and it would seem that judging sports as just another part of the entertainment industry misses much of the emotional connections, cultural bridges and cultural walls that sports creates and reinforces.

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- 7 To explain the depth of devotion to sports and various teams, sports is often analogously compared to organised religion, and the comparison is an apt one: sports has its saints and its devils, its shrines and its customs, its prayers (the concept of rooting), and like religion, sports both informs the culture at large and is moulded by it. While it is easy to compare sports to religion, it is another thing to call sports a religion. But sports may very well be a kind of progeny of religion, as a social function that has taken up the slack of religion's retreat from modern society. In industrial society, sports has overtaken many of the previous functions of an organised religion. In a segmented society, big-time sports is one of the few avenues for large-scale communal participation, often crossing class lines. Such an avenue induces large numbers of people in a region to share common emotional experiences.
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- 8 Another perspective on the place of sports in a modern society is that of a kind of oasis of truth. Sports has clear winners and losers, clear rules that give an opportunity for us to view objective truth forged somewhere between brute physical force and aesthetic beauty captured by human form. The popular public conception is that sports create an equal playing field that strips away social and political advantages. Modern sports assume equality. In a society like ours that prides itself on egalitarian values but is often forced to painfully confront its own inequalities and injustices, the allure of the sports as centre of truth is particularly compelling. Mass sporting sports are the emotional hubs at the centre of vast networks of analysis, criticism and conversation. They generate loyalties and emotional debates that are at once completely meaningless and totally consuming.
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- 9 Many scholars argue that sports reflects and informs society. This, I believe, is true. But to then assume that sports accomplishes nothing but the reduction of the population to a position of complete passivity is to assume that the same is true of society itself. There are moments of transcendence in sports, just as there are in society, and there are revolutions in sports, just as there are in society. Sports, like any large and important social institution, is a complex weaving of forces and concerns just as the culture itself is. Sports allows us to view the very best, and the very worst, of ourselves.
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