

What is a Sport? What isn't?

When ESPN launched the first 24-hour sports network many wondered if they could fill airtime. For television purposes—covering sports around the clock—anything that had an athlete participating qualified as a sport. For viewing purposes, fans may have a different opinion.

Yes fans, this is the time of year where there is a lull in sports. Every sports fan knows it. If there is not some disparity in the definition of a sport then we would all be equally satisfied with watching golf matches, track and field events, and car racing as we were with watching college football, the Super Bowl, March Madness, the NBA finals, and the World Series. What do athletic activities that surface in the upper echelon of sport's programming have in common? Could these activities be classified in their own category as a sport separate from what we might classify as a game, a match, an event, a fight or a race?

Using criteria that are evident in the upper echelon of athletic activities is one way to develop a tighter definition of what classifies as a sport. Here are those six criteria:

1. A physical activity requiring athleticism
2. A competitive athletic activity that directly pits athlete(s) against athlete(s)
3. An objective directly correlates team efforts toward one and only one non-objective outcome (The point system is not left to objective vote or ruling).
4. There is strategic offensive and defensive interaction between opponents
5. Action involves a continuous clock, stopped only by infractions
6. Fouls against the opponent are part of the action but governed by officiated rules

Another way to determine what is a sport is to determine what isn't.

This method requires only one criterion: anything that can better be classified as a game, a match, an event, a fight, or a race is objectively not a sport. In order to be more subjective I will use the above criteria to divide the sports from the other activities. For the purposes of this article though, I will not define the other classifications, but rather for your curiosity I will still assign my classification for each other activity represented here.

Some Examples of athletic activities that qualify as a sport (In alphabetical order)

1. Baseball
2. Basketball
3. Football
4. Rugby
5. Soccer
6. Volleyball

Some Examples of athletic activities, which may or may not involve an athlete, but would not qualify as a sport (Also alphabetized). *In parentheses is one or more of the criteria not met to be a sport and then the assigned classification of that activity.*

1. Bobsledding (4,6;Event)
2. Boxing (3;Fight)
3. Dancing (Perhaps all, 3,4,5,6;Event)
4. Field Events (4,6;Event)
5. Figure Skating (3,4,5,6;Event)
6. Foosball (1, possibly 3,4,5,6;Game)
7. Golf (1,3,4,6;Match)
8. Gymnastics (3,4,6;Meet/Match)
9. Pool (1,4,5,6;Game)
10. Racquetball (5, possibly 3; Match)
11. Swimming (4,6 ;Meet/Match)
12. Table Tennis (1, possibly 3,4,5,6; Game)
13. Tennis (Possibly 3,4,5,6; Match)
14. Track (Possibly 3,5,6; Race)
15. Wrestling (3; Match)

One may question: what qualifies as an **athletic activity**? Though I did not attempt to define this at this time, you will notice that none of the examples we dealt with, whether a sport or not, did not qualify to meet criteria #2. Events like cook offs, may very well pit athletes against one another, but I would argue—no matter how much one adds elements of physicality, team play, offensive & defensive strategy, clock management and officiated contact—that it does not make it an athletic activity requiring athletes. Yes, no matter how you cut it, only an out of shape chef thinks cooking could ever measure up to being an athletic activity worthy of criteria #2. Thus a second question that comes into play is: what qualifies a person as an **athlete**? We'll save the rest of that debate for another time, too.

If you are wondering why any of this matters you either don't watch sports, you don't care that baseball has so many games to the point that midseason doesn't matter all that much, or you are under the opinion of the minority who think that there is not a break in sports to view right now (Ratings would say otherwise). There is some truth to the improvements made to viewing games, matches, events, fights, and/or races. So, enjoy your golf. I'll enjoy my nap. The countdown to sports watching for me—with baseball playoffs and college football still coming up—continues.