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THIS SPORTING LIFE

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I've always loved the world of sport. Indeed, my very sense of identity is wrapped up with what Theodore Roosevelt called the "vigorous life." I've enjoyed playing games for as long as I can remember, but I can't imagine a day, or a week, or a month, going by without engaging in some sort of regular exercise. Those periods when I've been hurt - with a sports injury, of course - have driven me mad. It's as if I've been bound up in a tightly-wrapped ball of twine from which I can't escape. One of the discouraging things about growing old - or at least older - is that such periods seem to plague me with increasing frequency, and my body takes longer to heal from my self-inflicted wounds (though I realize that in this august - and aging - group such a complaint will hardly be taken seriously). But even as I've grown older, I've tried to remain as active as I can.

My love of sport is connected to the dynamics of my family life, past and present. My mother never, to my recollection, engaged in any kind of physical activity. But my father was something of an athlete in his prime - as he told me time and again - and I always kept the stories of his triumphs in mind. Among Donald Hall's wonderful collections of essays and poems is an elegant little volume entitled Fathers Playing Catch with Sons, and the title itself captures the timeless sense of parental involvement that was certainly part of my upbringing. In the title essay, Hall writes, in ways that resonate for us all: "My father and I played catch as I grew up. Like so much else between fathers and sons, playing catch was tender and tense at the same time." And yet, even as I sought to shape myself

in terms my father inadvertently, or perhaps subconsciously, defined, there was an ambivalence about following in his footsteps on the one hand and a competitive urge to do even better - and go even further - on the other. In a curious sense, sport is a kind of metaphor for my life.

My father played catch with me when I was young, and I remember those moments fondly. I also remember him at annual Rutgers University History Department picnics, where he was a slugger of some repute (Hammering Hank, they called him back then). The younger generation of pre-adolescent kids was consigned to running bases as the heavy hitters swung their lumber, but that was all right. I was pleased simply to be included. For the truth of the matter is that I was a baseball fanatic, eager to do anything to be involved with the game. I can remember listening to our radio - in the years before we had a TV - as the Yankees won the American League pennant, and then the World Series, five years in a row. We lived in New Jersey, in the shadow of New York, and so I can be forgiven my loyalty for the Bronx Bombers. But we also returned to Cincinnati every summer to visit my mother's family, and I rooted for the Reds as well. I was part of the group that elected eight Reds - Ted Kluszewski and Roy McMillan and Johnny Temple and all the rest - to the All Star team back in the mid-1950s, prompting Major League Baseball to take the selection out of the public's hands entirely, at least for a time. I was, in the terms Stanley Troup defined in a graceful Literary Club paper some years back, the consummate fan.

I also played baseball as well. I remember playing running bases with my friends for hours on end, and choosing up sides for sandlot games, in preparation for a new Little League that was about to start near our home. But my life was disrupted when my father won a Fullbright grant to work in England for a year, and the whole family had to join him abroad. At the formative stage in my youthful baseball career, I was taken away from the fray, denied the chance to sharpen the skills that should have served me for the rest of my life. I learned how to play soccer in England, and was evidently reasonably good, and I learned to play

cricket too, and won an award as the best new player on the team (never mind that I was the only new player on the team). But the real problems surfaced when I came home. Somehow, I had lost my edge as I became reacquainted with the national game.

On our return, we had moved to a new community, and at the appropriate time, I tried out for a Little League team there. Alas, I was something of a klutz on the diamond. The grace with which I fantasized playing the game had disappeared. I suppose with careful coaching I could have regained my lost skills, but my father was busy getting back into his professional life, and we never managed to find the necessary time to practice together. I went to the tryouts as a greenhorn, unsure what I was supposed to do. This was, unfortunately, back in the days when managers actually cut candidates from the team, rather than find a place for everyone who tried out. The only boys of marginal skill who managed to stay on the team were those whose fathers hung out at practice and ingratiated themselves with the men in charge. And this was something my father refused to do, though, I can remember dearly wishing he had found a way to help me out. And so, inevitably, I was cut from the team.

All winter, I practiced throwing a ball against a brick wall for hours on end and sharpening my swing in the basement. By springtime, I had improved, and I just knew that this time around I would make the team. But in the draft I was selected by the strongest club, and once again, after a couple of weeks of practices, I failed to make the grade. This was when all Little League players on the team got to keep their caps at the season's end, and a baseball cap was a mark of pride. Once again, I was going to have to go bareheaded all winter long.

I remember coming home in tears the night I got the news. My parents were sitting on the porch, and after comforting me, went over a list of spelling words I had to learn for the next day. I was a good speller, and breezed through the list without faltering, and I remember my father saying, "Now this is what is really important." I know it was a genuine - and compassionate - effort to comfort me, but it didn't work at the time,

and somehow seemed to drive a nail even further into the coffin of my stillborn baseball career.

Over the years, I learned to hold my own on softball teams at camp on Cape Cod, and thus salvaged a semblance of athletic pride. But that ill-fated inability to make the Little League team back in Highland Park is still one of the disappointments of my early life.

At least, as time went by, there were other sports. My father in his prime also played squash, and while I never saw him play, I remember the hard, black rubber ball in his top dresser drawer. Now that I think about it, I wonder why he never took me to hit the squash ball around the court - as I did with my own children when they were young - but at least I knew there was such a game. I also recall my father's favorite squash story, which I have heard more times that I can count over the years. Evidently one of his regular partners was a Rutgers geographer named Guido Weigand, and Guido and his wife wanted to have children but were unable to do so. During one particularly intense match, my father drove the ball into poor Guido's private parts, accidentally, I assume, but in the process he must have jarred something loose, because once Guido was able to stand upright again, he managed to father a healthy brood.

Still, I had never played squash myself until I got to see Harvard - that Ivy League bastion in Cambridge where everyone plays this aristocratic game - and had a chance to step onto the court myself. There was an athletic requirement that all freshmen had to meet, and squash seemed easier than doing calisthenics (back in the days before Nautilus machines), and so I took up the game. I was pretty miserable, I'm sure, but each Harvard house had squash courts in the basement, and inevitably over a period of four years I must have improved. I played some more when I went to do a Master's degree at Columbia, and actually got reasonably good when I spent nine years studying and teaching at Yale after that. I even managed to beat some of the people on the freshman ladder one year, and played respectably on a team in intramural competition, when I served as a faculty fellow in one of the Yale residential colleges.

But squash was not my salvation - running was. And here again, my own involvement was wrapped up with that of my father. He had been an outstanding high school runner in his prime, and had run a quarter-mile in the still respectable time of 49 seconds. In college, at the University of Cincinnati, he never improved much more, but had a chance to run against the incomparable Jesse Owens in an Ohio meet. While on the faculty at Rutgers, he sometimes helped officiate at track meets, and I can remember running around the track and playing on the hurdles whenever he took me with him. I must have been pretty fast myself, for when I was in 8th grade, my gym teacher took me to a high school meet with the team he was helping coach, in an effort to interest me in the sport the next year. Once I got to high school, while sitting in homeroom in the late fall, I heard an announcement asking all people interested in the track team to report to the gym after school, and recalling my father's exploits, I found myself reporting to the coach to see what was involved.

Only a couple of us turned out for winter track, and I was a little intimidated by Jay Dakelman, our coach. He was a short, roly-poly man with a gruff manner who was fond of telling us his grandmother could run faster than we could. At first I figured that he must have had a very fast grandmother, but I finally realized this was just his way of spurring us on. And, beneath the crusty façade he was really a decent soul who got the best out of us and in the end helped me get into Harvard, where I wanted to go.

All too soon, I found myself out on the roads, and I learned how stiff you could become after a first day of practice when you weren't used to running more than a few yards at a time. But I persisted, and in a couple of months had begun to get in shape. This was long before the birth of the running boom, and winter track was just in the process of becoming an organized sport, but there were occasional meets, and Jay decided to take a couple of us to a huge open meet in New York.

We got there early in the morning, and I found that my race - the novice half-mile - wasn't scheduled until late in the afternoon. I also discovered that there were several hundred people, in twenty heats, entered in the

race. At about 2:00 PM, I began to warm up, then cooled down, then warmed up again, then cooled down again, in a nervous process that continued for the next couple of hours. At last, around 6:00 PM, my race was called, and we were divided into heats and made to sit on the floor, as we waited for each heat to be run. I cooled off one last time, and inevitably stiffened, and was an anxious bundle of taut nerves and tired muscles by the time the race began. My fantasies of triumphant glory evaporated in the first 220 yards, and I soon found myself lodged at the back of the pack. Slogging through the four interminable laps in 2 minutes and 40 seconds (recognize that the world record is now a full minute faster) I was hopelessly embarrassed and wondered if perhaps I wasn't in the wrong sport.

But I persisted, for reasons I'm sure were related to family dynamics - I really wanted to outshine the old man - and I lasted long enough to become better by the end of my freshman year. Slowly but surely, my time dropped until I had run a 2:12 half mile and won a series of freshman races. I even got a chance to run in many of the varsity meets, and as the third-best half-miler on the team, I was selected to run in the Central Jersey meet, a major achievement for a freshman in those years. I didn't do very well, to be sure, but just going there, wearing my varsity uniform, solidified my commitment to the sport. Even the baseball and basketball jocks took notice of my exploits, and for the first time in my life I felt like a real jock myself. For a scrawny, insecure kid who hadn't even been able to make a Little League team, this was an important step.

Curiously, my father never came to see me run that year. We didn't have a track of our own at the high school, and so all meets were away. And my mother had just had her first bout with breast cancer, with a hysterectomy following a radical mastectomy, and I recognize now - though I didn't then - the upheaval her illness caused in our home. But, even without admitting it to myself, I think I really wanted him to come see me compete.

I improved gradually over the next couple of years, and my father did come to see some of our meets. But I never really fulfilled my early promise until the end of

my junior year. At our conference meet, on a glorious spring evening, I found myself in the race of my life. I'm sure no one expected anything of me, but I found myself near the lead at the end of the first lap, and then, for reasons I still can't fathom, I bolted to the front and took a 10-yard lead. It was as if I was Forest Gump, involved in an out-of-body experience, as I still held a lead with 150 yards to go. Coming off the turn and heading for home, I tightened up, and two people passed me, but I still managed to finish third and win a medal. I had run 2:04, dramatically better than I had dreamed of before, and was hooked for life. Actors talk about the smell of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd. I felt something of the same thing as I heard the cheering in my race. My father must have had a class the next morning, or a meeting that night, for he wasn't able to see me run that race, but I remember my sense of pride as I came home and told him in abundant detail how I had done.

Running got me into college. I was valedictorian and had decent SAT scores, but in the summer of my junior year, coach Dakelman wrote a letter to Bob Rittenberg, a former Harvard runner he had met at a clinic telling him about me. A week later I received a letter from Rittenberg inviting me to come to Cambridge to Harvard while I was working at a camp on Cape Cod. About a month later, he showed up in his Volkswagen beetle to introduce me to Harvard - and the track coach - for the first time. We stayed in touch, and I sent along clippings when I anchored a two-mile relay team to victory in the indoor state meet and helped our team with the state championship for the first time, and I'm persuaded this made the difference as the college admission process ran its course.

Unfortunately, my college track career, was doomed. I got to Harvard as a respectable runner who had never quite been able to break two minutes for the half-mile (another one of the disappointments of my athletic life), but when I reached Cambridge, I found that one of my freshman roommates was Walter Hewlett. Walter was the son of William Hewlett of Palo Alto, who ran a modest company that made scientific instrumentation. (Bear in mind that this was in 1962, long before the advent of microchips and calculators, to say nothing of the

computers and printers that have transformed our lives.) But the Hewlett family had more money than mine, and after Walter ran a 4:08 mile in high school, his father sent him to New Zealand to run with Peter Snell, the reigning Olympic champion at 800 and 1500 meters. I didn't have a chance. I ran for a while, grumbled at Walter when he left his sweaty jock in the living room (especially when I was bringing a female visitor to our suite) and soon found there were other things I wanted to do. Gradually I drifted away from the sport. I ran in occasional intramural races, but by and large left running behind.

Then things began to change. In the Peace Corps, in the Philippines, I coached a track team, and found myself running with my students in an effort to spur them along. Rolando Conopio was a gifted athlete and I took great delight in chasing him around the track, hoping to shame him into running ever faster. When I returned to the United States to attend graduate school at Yale, I found myself starting to run again, just to get in shape. Two miles a day gave way to three and four, and finally I attempted a 10-kilometer race, then a 10-mile race, and I was hooked.

Always driven to set goals for myself - another subconscious legacy from my father - I wanted to run a mile under five minutes before I got my PhD, and to complete a marathon sometime in my life. The mile proved easier. While going through the throes of writing a dissertation, I stayed in shape by running on the roads, and the day before commencement, I attempted to reach my goal, running all alone. Disappointed when I came in a few seconds over the mark, I returned to the track the day after graduation, and this time I succeeded by a large margin. It didn't mean anything to anyone but me, and it wasn't anything I could share with anyone else, but I was quietly proud of my accomplishment.

A marathon was something else altogether. Somehow the notion of running 26.2 miles still boggles my mind. But Frank Shorter had just won the Olympic marathon, and the running boom had started in the United States, and perverse though it seems, this was something I really wanted to do.

The turning point for me came when I was turned down for a Yale junior faculty fellowship I thought I deserved. Gaddis Smith, an older colleague who was a better historian than runner, had just completed the New York marathon (slowly) and I figured if he could do it, so could I. I called him up to go for a run together and found he was already training for another marathon. We went out for a 15-mile run - further than I had ever gone before - and I managed to finish without collapsing from total exhaustion. Maybe this was something I really could do, I thought. The next week I got up to 18 miles, and was on my way. Refusing to believe that I was hardly adequately trained after these two runs, I ventured down to Asbury Park, for the Jersey Shore marathon. My friend Gaddis had sustained an injury and had decided not to go, but I went on my own.

The first few miles were wonderful. I breezed through them in sub-7-minute pace, which translated into sub-three-hour pace, and I had visions of glory, just like in that ill-fated race in my freshman year. At the halfway point, I was still on sub-3-hour pace, but I had begun to develop serious blisters from the almost brand-new shoes I had foolishly decided to wear. At about 18 miles, long after I had begun to slow down, I hit the proverbial wall. This is where your body has gone about as far as it can go, and has burned up all the glycogen in your muscles, and now begins to burn protein itself. It's worse than anything I can imagine as you struggle with yourself to keep on going. Unsure about what came next, I made bargains with myself, running the distance between three telephone poles, then walking the distance to the next one, then cutting down the distance to two poles, and finally alternating running and walking one pole at a time. Somehow I managed to finish, in the respectable time of 3 hours and 24 minutes, and was awarded a coffee mug (and a tee-shirt) for my efforts. And once blisters the size of silver dollars healed and I was able to walk up and down stairs without cringing in pain, I was ready to try again.

The Boston marathon came next. By this time it had become a spectacle, with more than 5000 entrants, and a qualifying time had been imposed. For me, this would have meant running under 2:50 in a prior race, and this was out of the question. So I just showed up, started at

the back of the pack, and had the time of my life. Running through Wellesley, with the women of the college and the residents of the town forming a passageway five-deep on either side, was a wonderful experience. And even Heartbreak Hill - in Newtown between the 18th and 22nd miles, failed to dim my spirits. I finished in 3 hours and 16 minutes, without having to walk at all.

A few years later, I moved to Eugene, Oregon, which was the self-styled running capital of the world. It was the home of Bill Bowerman, who developed the waffle-soled shoe by using his wife's waffle iron and helped found the Nike shoe company, and who also started the running boom after a trip with his team to New Zealand where he discovered that even the middle-aged could run, as long as they were willing to settle for long, slow distance and take their time. And there was a group of academics my age, men and women both, who congregated every noon to run together, and these people quickly became close friends.

Other marathons followed, and my times got progressively better. Close to three hours, I began to dream of breaking the magic barrier. Maybe I hadn't been able to run faster than two minutes in the half-mile as a kid, but I would atone for it by running a sub-three-hour marathon instead. And so one summer I settled down to serious training. I think I was working at the same time, writing one book or another, but I also ran between 60 and 80 miles each week. Sometimes I ran twice a day. Every Saturday, my friends and I went off for a 20-mile training run. I ran a half-marathon at well below the requisite pace, and ran a couple of 30-kilometer races at the same speed. The marathon, I was sure, was going to be a piece of cake.

Race day brought with it typhoon-like conditions. The rain was coming down so hard my shoes were soaked before the first half mile, and the added weight made every step even harder. Still, I managed to hold on to sub-three-hour pace for the first 20 miles, when the course turned back to the finish line - and into a 15-mile-an-hour headwind. Inevitably, I slowed down. I finished in 3 hours and 4 minutes, the best time of my life, but, in still another in a series of

disappointments, had again failed to reach my self-assigned goal.

What did my father - and step-mother - think about my efforts on the road? I'm quite sure they thought I was mad. Exercise, they undoubtedly felt, was something best left to the young, and as I approached my forties, I was certainly no longer a child. I took considerable ribbing from them when they came to visit and I still wanted to go out for a run. I don't think I was a fanatic - at least not a total fanatic - but I loved the sense of competition, both against others and against myself. To quote Donald Hall once again, as he reflects on his side of sport: "I need to leave behind my own ambitions, struggles, and failures; I need to enter the intense, artificial, pastoral universe of the game, where conflict never conceals itself, where the issues are clear and outcome uncertain. I enter an alien place, or the child in me does - and the child plays. . .for a while."

There was another side to the satisfaction I received then - and still receive now - from my running. I got a sense of harmony - and emotional balance - from pounding the roads that I'm not sure my parents even understood. We all have to learn how to suffer fools in our own way. I realized, when my father was President of the University of Cincinnati, that he was far better at this necessary skill than I could ever hope to become. I'm still not sure what his secret was, but I maintain my own sense of equilibrium by running miles on the road.

Over the years, my own children began to try sports of their own. My daughter Jenny was a gymnast, then a diver, and now gets her greatest satisfaction from dancing, while my son David wrestled and then became passionately involved with rowing. But over the years they've occasionally agreed to go out for a run with their old man. I've always been an apostle of aerobic running, where you can run and talk at the same time, and on these runs we've often had good conversations. On one occasion, for example, I learned that my still-teen-aged daughter had just started taking birth control pills for the first time. Several years later, when my son was preparing for a NOLS - National Outdoor Leadership School - program, we ran together every morning and these

sessions, too, gave us a chance to talk. Somehow, running along together served as a kind of equalizer and made sharing confidences easier, and that's something I've valued whenever we've had a chance to jog along together. It also gave me a sense of being even more involved in my children's lives than my father had been in mine.

As I've gotten older - and slowed down - I've been far less competitive - and less driven - than I was in earlier years. I have no desire to run another marathon ever again in my life. Nor do I care much about running as fast as I once could. At the ripe old age of 55, I'm content to slog along and hope I can continue to do so for years to come.

For I've discovered other sports that I can do at the same time. For example, mountain climbing. I had never climbed a modest peak, much less a mountain, until about ten years ago. Then I met Sara, now my wife, who is hardly much of an athlete herself. But she was bound for Kenya, and I wanted to go over there to visit her, and was trying to figure out some kind of excuse to justify the journey to myself. At that point in our relationship, I wasn't willing to fork over thousands of dollars I didn't have to spend two weeks in Africa just to visit her, and so I rationalized the trip by deciding to climb a mountain too.

Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa, but it was located in Tanzania. Mt. Kenya, the second tallest, was closer to where I was going to be. Much to my surprise, Sara proved game and said she'd climb the mountain with me. She's still not sure what made her make such a foolish decision, but I like to think it was love.

And so we borrowed equipment, hired a guide and porters, and headed for the entrance to the park. Sara had been in Nairobi, situated at an altitude of about 5,500 feet, longer than I had, and handled the height better than I did. She hated climbing, but still was willing to continue to Point Lenana - the highest peak all but the most experienced technical climbers can manage to reach. I, on the other hand was in the first stages of altitude sickness - my head hurt and my stomach

felt as though it was ready to erupt - and when asked if I wanted to climb for another half an hour to reach the summit, I declined.

Still, I was hooked. Never mind that I had learned on my first roller coaster ride (in Japan, at the age of 24) that I was scared of heights. Mountain climbing was slower, and more deliberate, and I never really had the feeling that I was hurtling out of control. And so I decided I was ready for another mountain.

The next summer, Sara was heading back to Africa, and once again, I wanted to join her. Conveniently, Kilimanjaro was still there. Sara gracefully declined to make this ascent, saying that one mountain was more than enough for her entire life. Instead, I decided that Jenny and David would come along.

Now that I knew what altitude sickness felt like, I was better prepared to deal with it. I had no desire to subject myself to pulmonary edema, with its possibly lethal consequences, but I knew that I could at least withstand modest discomfort and still reach my goal.

Alas, Jenny and David were the ones who suffered from altitude sickness worst of all on this climb. Soon after we passed 15,000 feet, Jenny began to feel awful, and by the time we stopped for the night at about 16,000 feet, she was a mess. One of our guides said he would take her down in the morning, while David and I would go with another guide in our push for the summit. We set off at midnight, but about 500 feet higher, David decided that he was too sick to go on. I was disappointed, for the guide said we needed to turn back, but dutifully turned around and headed down. A few minutes later, we came upon some other climbers, and our guide mercifully made arrangements for me to join that group. And so I trudged on in the wee hours of the dawn, all the way to the top. I felt miserably sick - something like I felt when running my first marathon - but this time I decided that I was simply not going to turn back. Once again I made bargains with myself, taking 3 or 4 steps and then pausing for breath, forcing down a quarter of a bland cracker or a gulp of water every few minutes in a futile attempt to keep my stomach under control. But at long last I made it to Gilman's Peak - at about 19,000 feet -

and felt as though I was standing on top of the world. Or at least on top of Africa.

Other mountains followed. The summer Sara and I were married, we went to Mexico on a program sponsored by Earlham College - her institution - to learn Spanish. We were staying in the city of Cuatla, and I could see Popocatepetl, a semi-extinct snow-capped volcano that rose nearly 18,000 feet. I decided to climb it. All alone this time, I took a bus to a small lodge at about 13,000 feet, and found a guide who agreed to take me to the top. Once again we started out in the dark. This time, as we got closer to the glacier, I was given crampons - which I had never used before - to strap on to my boots to give me better footing, and an ice-axe to pound into the snow in case I began to fall off the mountain. Roped to my guide - again for the first time in my life - I wondered for a moment if I was getting in over my head.

As we climbed higher on the sleek, snow face, I made the mistake of looking down. We had been moving up sideways, for the mountain was too steep to ascend any other way, and I suddenly realized that I wasn't going to be able to turn back, even if I wanted to go down. There was no choice but to continue pushing up, where eventually, after the summit, we could come to a gentler path on the backside of the mountain heading down.

Somehow we managed to slide on our bellies across a couple of crevasses, without falling in. And, finally, again crawling on our stomachs, we reached the top. I felt sick again - I was getting used to the experience - but at the same time enormously proud of myself for having made it to the top.

Several years ago, when my sister Karen and her 13-year-old son Mike visited me while I was teaching at the University of Nairobi, I decided to try Mt. Kenya again. Somehow my failure to reach the top rankled, like my failure to run a half-mile under 2 minutes in high school or my inability to run a marathon in under 3 hours in middle age. And so a group of 5 of us set off. Once again, Sara said that she might be plucky, but she wasn't stupid, and had no desire to venture up the mountain again. Karen and Mike had come over with a friend of my

sister's and her son, and so now we also had to deal with the demands of youth. I tried to caution Mike and his friend that altitude sickness could strike anyone, and told him the truth that it was adolescent boys trying to climb too fast who suffered the most. But he had grown up at an altitude of over 7,000 feet in Wyoming, and never felt a thing.

We made it up to 14,500 feet without incident, where my sister and her friend declined to go any further. I set out at 2 AM with the two boys and our guide. They continued to climb as if the mountain was close to sea level, while I struggled to keep up. We reached the point at which I had stopped 6 years before, and this time I was ready to press on. I had been living at 5,500 feet for more than 6 months, and I knew I could reach the top, which was close to 17,000 feet. The final ascent was through a patch of scree - a mixture of gravel and ice - interspersed with some larger rocks. It should have been easy, but it had rained the night before, and at that altitude the rain had turned to ice. The entire side of the mountain was now covered with a slick, shiny sheet that sent shivers down my spine. I felt even worse as I watched Mike and his friend Garrett scamper up toward the top like mountain goats, oblivious of my growing fear. I was afraid of losing my footing, and filled with intimations of my own mortality, I decided I preferred not to roll all the way down to the bottom. This I told myself was just another one of the disappointments of my life that I was now learning to accept.

Then the guide intervened. Insisting that I follow him, he kicked toe-holds into the ice that I could use to make it to the top. I was still frightened, but dutifully followed him, forcing myself not to look down, and in the end, much to my insane satisfaction, reached the summit at last.

So now, what's next? Why Everest, of course. I've been fascinated with Everest for as long as I can remember. During that year in England when I was ten, and left baseball behind, my mother took me to see a film called The Conquest of Everest, describing the triumphant ascent by Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay. I was hooked. Several years ago, in a Kenyan cabin which had

a good library of old books, I stumbled on Hillary's own account of the climb, and spent most of the night devouring it to the end. This, ironically, occurred at just about the time of the terrible tragedy on Everest when an unconscionably large number of climbers lost their lives. After reading Jon Krakauer's haunting account of that disaster, Into Thin Air, I have no desire to challenge the wretched odds of either reaching the summit or making it back alive. Parenthetically, I don't have the \$60,000 it would take even to attempt such a trip.

But I still want to see the mountain. And so I dream of going to Nepal with Jenny and David, and my nephew Mike, and my step-brother Kenny, on a trek up to the base camp, located at about 21,000 feet. I want to hike up to the Khumbu Ice Fall, and to see the ladders stretched across each gaping crevasse. I want to look up and see the summit looming overhead. I want to gaze at the top of the world, but that's enough. We had planned to go this May, the one month such a trek is possible, but Mike graduates from high school, and we all want to go witness this rite of passage. And so we'll wait until next year. But we're going to go.

If my father thought my commitment to running was mad, how has he dealt with my mountainous exploits? I'm sure he thinks they're crazy, too. But we've reached a point where he simply shrugs his shoulders and keeps his own counsel, and leaves me to my own devices. Maybe that's maturity on his part. Maybe it's a reflection of old age. Whatever the reason, I appreciate his forbearance, and at this point, that's about all I can ask.

For I'm addicted to the world of sport. When I'm not doing something athletic myself, I can't get enough of stories about this world in books or magazines or films. I remember my father bringing home one of the first very issues of Sports Illustrated, and I still read the magazine to this day. Just recently, I was fascinated by Frank Deford's eloquent article about Roger Bannister, the first sub-4 minute miler, and Edmund Hillary, two of the athletic heroes of our time. The best part of Jon Krakauer's earlier book Into the Wild was his account of climbing the Devil's Thumb, an ice-

covered peak along the Alaska-British Columbia border. Years ago, even before my own distance-running career had gotten off the ground, I remember watching a film, based on an Alan Sillitoe novel, called The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner. It was really the story of one man's alienation, and, at the tender age of 17, I think I managed to appreciate the troubles described, but I liked the running scenes best of all. Films like Bull Durham, celebrating the curious world of minor league baseball, give me a sense of raucous delight. I agree with Donald Hall that "Roger Angell writes the best prose of all baseball writers of all time." And I was one of those who watched all 18 hours of Ken Burns' marvelous series about our national game.

But my favorite book about sport remains Hall's own exquisite Fathers Playing Catch with Sons, in part, I think, because it is a book about much more. I laugh with glee each time I reread his account of going to participate in the Pittsburgh Pirates' spring training camp with Gerry McCauley, my agent and friend, as part of a loony effort by athletic duffers to experience big-time baseball that, for all its craziness, reflected a passionate love for the game. And I find that it brings me back again and again to the family dynamics summed up so beautifully in his title, as I ponder my connection with my father - and my daughter and son - in my own life.

It's not always easy growing up with a man who does so many things so well. It's even harder to find oneself following in his footsteps, at least part of the way, wondering all the while about the internal dynamics of making such a choice. For better or worse, I found myself trying sports my father had tried, feeling aware of his example, while still trying to make such sports fit the contours of my own life. I took a certain satisfaction in following that pattern, even more satisfaction in reaching a level of achievement in some areas that surpassed what he had done.

But this dynamic went far beyond the world of sport. Here I am, the son of a historian, teaching and writing history as my livelihood too. This is not an unheard of pattern, to be sure, and father/son combinations like Arthur Meier Schlesinger senior and junior come to mind.

But it still caused substantial soul-searching, on my part at least, as I decided what I wanted to do. Years ago, when my sister Karen was having a hard time deciding what she wanted to do, we both remembered my father subtly depicting, in ways I don't think he fully understood, the benefits of the academic life. Who would want to be a lawyer - or a businessman - we both remember him saying, when one could revel in the life of the mind. We both smiled when he became President of the University of Cincinnati and became a kind of corporate executive, albeit an intellectual one, in spite of himself.

I struggled with these issues, as I tried to figure out what I wanted to do with my entire life - and not just my athletic life. I gravitated to graduate school, rather than law school, for it let me continue doing things I did well, wondering all the while if this was what I really wanted to do. I must say it felt better and better as the years rolled by, and I found my own voice, in the classroom and in my writing, and discovered that I really enjoyed the path I had chosen. It felt good, too, deciding that I didn't really want to be an academic administrator - like him - realizing I was much happier shaping my teaching and writing career in my own way.

But as I think back to these decisions, I am struck by how closely our lives are intertwined. Paths chosen inevitably reflect the influence of others, and this is something I can now accept. All the same, I'm glad my own children have struck out even more dramatically on paths of their own, barely nodding at my livelihood, or my father's as Jenny now works as a public health professional and David as a computer engineer. Yet both, I'm glad to say, share at least something of my love of sport.

For in the final analysis, this love of sport has an importance in my own life that transcends my relationship with my father. There is - or was - something exquisite about taking a 20-mile run and not feeling tired, with endorphins, those natural chemicals that promote a feeling of euphoria, pulsating through my brain. Or reveling in a sense of well-being after a particularly hard-fought squash match or even a satisfying round of golf. I delight in the kind of quiet fatigue, tinged

with a feeling of well-being that creates a sense of harmony and a feeling that all is well. Is it better than sex? I wouldn't go quite that far. But then, why does one form of satisfaction have to preclude another?

As I've failed to achieve a variety of personal athletic goals, I've come to realize that there are far worse things that have happened: the death of my mother after an interminable illness, the near-catastrophic accident suffered by my daughter before she was one; the pain of a horrific divorce. But perhaps sport, despite my failures, has helped me get through those troubled times.

I can't conceive of withdrawing from the world of sport, regardless of how old I get, and I'm pleased to see others join me. My sister Karen, who was once a superb horseback rider, is now running several days a week - and enjoying being fit for the first time in her adult life. My 17-year-old nephew Mike, who is a better athlete than I ever dreamed of becoming, indulges me on an occasional run, or in a game of golf, even if I can no longer provide as much competition as I could when he was ten. I'm ready to try new activities - kayaking, skiing, rock-climbing - at the drop of a hat, even as I cling to those I love best. I'm willing to suffer ailments - bone spurs and stress fractures and strained tendons - for the satisfaction of being in harmony with myself.

For sport governs the rhythms of my life. In his title essay, Donald Hall writes, "Baseball is fathers and sons playing catch, lazy and murderous, wild and controlled, the profound archaic song of birth, growth, age, and death." For me that observation extends beyond baseball to the entire world of sport. I may be slower, and stiffer, and shakier, than I used to be, but I still can't imagine ever forsaking this sporting life.
