



# THE PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNEY OF SCOTT KRETCHMAR: EXPLORING HOW SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY MEAN

*A TRAJETÓRIA FILOSÓFICA DE SCOTT KRETCHMAR: EXPLORANDO COMO SIGNIFICAM O ESPORTE E A ATIVIDADE FÍSICA* 

*LA TRAYECTORIA FILOSÓFICA DE SCOTT KRETCHMAR: EXPLORANDO CÓMO SIGNIFICAN EL DEPORTE Y LA ACTIVIDAD FÍSICA* 

 <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.143363>

 **Cesar R. Torres\*** <crtorres@brockport.edu>

 **Francisco Javier López Frías\*\*** <fjl13@psu.edu>

\* SUNY Brockport. Brockport, NY, United States.

\*\* Pennsylvania State University. University Park, PA, United States.

**Abstract:** Scott Kretchmar is a foundational figure in the philosophy of sport. His influential work began with his first peer-reviewed article in 1972, and his scholarly contributions remain significant, even in retirement. In 1989, he became one of the first philosophers of sport inducted into the National Academy of Kinesiology of the United States, and his career reached a pinnacle with the Clark W. Hetherington Award in 2021. In this article, we first trace his academic and professional trajectory. Then, we overview his main scholarly contributions, categorizing them into four core sets of interrelated research preoccupations: (a) the metaphysics of play, games, sport, and competition; (b) the role of physical education; (c) the ethics of sport; and (d) the meaning-making and spiritual aspects of sport. Though not exhaustive, our analysis highlights Kretchmar's pivotal role in establishing and expanding the philosophy of sport, underscoring his enduring impact.

**Keywords:** Sport. Ethics. Sport Philosophy. Play.

Received on: Sep. 17, 2024  
Approved on: Oct. 18, 2024  
Published in: Nov. 11, 2024



This is an article published in open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0)

## 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Scott Kretchmar is one of the most influential scholars in what, since the early 1970s, has been known as the philosophy of sport. He started contributing to the specialized literature at that time and, even in retirement, his scholarly production continues to flourish up to this day. In 1972, Kretchmar published his first peer-reviewed journal article elucidating what the inaugural editor of the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, Robert G. Osterhoudt, regarded as the core aspiration of the incipient discipline: “reflective apprehensions of the nature and significance of sport” (1974, p. 2). The impact of his contributions, which deal with sport but most broadly with physical activity and physical education, was duly and rapidly noted by his peers. For instance, Earle Zeigler (2005), another pivotal figure in the establishment and development of the philosophy of sport, said that by 1982, a mere ten years after obtaining his Ph.D., Kretchmar was not only “rapidly rising,” but also one of “the ‘leading contributors’ of the time” (p. 261). By the end of the 1980s, his scholarship and leadership in kinesiology, a field that encompasses all disciplines focusing on the study of physical activity, including the philosophy of sport, was widely recognized and highly regarded. Thus, in 1989, Kretchmar was inducted as a fellow into the National Academy of Kinesiology (NAK) of the United States, becoming one of the first of a handful of philosophers of sport ever to achieve this distinction, one of the most prominent in kinesiology.

The thirty years following Kretchmar’s induction into NAK were equally, if not more, fertile than the preceding two decades. His scholarly efforts in the philosophy of sport, coupled with his tireless diligence in advancing kinesiology, culminated in the bestowal of the Clark W. Hetherington Award upon him in 2021, the highest honor conferred by NAK. The nomination dossier explained that, in a career spanning more than five decades, Kretchmar has “become one of the world’s leading philosophy of sport scholars” and that his academic and professional efforts have “spearheaded and transformed the philosophy of sport into a mature and burgeoning subdiscipline. He is one of its most prolific pioneers and advocates” (Van de Mars; Torres; Wiggins, 2021). Similarly, the nominators highlighted the volume, breadth, depth, significance, and impact of his publication record, remarking that “Perhaps more than any other member of our profession, Professor Kretchmar has persistently and effectively articulated through his many publications the necessity of taking a multidimensional (rather than unidimensional approach) to the study of Kinesiology” (Van de Mars; Torres; Wiggins, 2021). These accolades, and the other numerous awards Kretchmar has accrued throughout his career, indicate that he has been an indispensable maker, in the widest possible sense, of the philosophy of sport. This paper provides an overview of his role in the making of the discipline. We start by sketching his education and professional trajectory and finish by concisely introducing and discussing his copious and pathbreaking scholarly contributions, which we categorize into four core sets of interrelated research preoccupations.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on and borrows from Torres (In press), but significantly expands it.

## 2 EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY

Kretchmar was born in 1944 in Cleveland, OH, into a Lutheran family. His father, an alumnus of and later a physical education teacher and baseball coach at Oberlin College, in Oberlin, OH, was his role model. Kretchmar attended this institution and, unsurprisingly, majored in physical education, although he discovered his bent for philosophy there. Inspired by Oberlin College's ethos and goals, and attracted by the legacy of pioneer physical educator Delphine Hanna to the institution, he traded his dream of a professional baseball career for one centered around teaching and researching – his two passions. Immediately after graduating from Oberlin College in 1966, Kretchmar enrolled in a PhD program in physical education at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles, CA, where he studied under the guidance of Eleanor Metheny, a symbolic theorist, and Howard Slusher, an existentialist, whose work he had read as an undergraduate student after Ruth Brunner, one of his professors, familiarized him with these philosophers (Kretchmar, 2021a, 2021b). He graduated in 1971 with a dissertation entitled "A Phenomenological Analysis of the Other in Sport," in which he argued that "In sport, man encounters the Other. Factors of teamwork, competition and sacrifice, among others, help to determine the nature of relationship" (Kretchmar, 1971, p. 2). As explained later in this paper, these issues, and many others connected to them, constitute one of Kretchmar's core sets of research preoccupations. On this point, not long ago, he acknowledged that Metheny's guiding intellectual inquiry of "how a movement means" got under his skin as a graduate student and that "In one way or another, I've been working on answers to that very question for over 50 years" (Kretchmar, 2021a, p. 31).

Be that as it may, in 1969, while still in graduate school, Kretchmar was hired at Emporia State University, in Emporia, KS. His tenure there was short, as he was wooed in 1971 by Warren Fraleigh to the State University College at Brockport, located in the homonymous village in NY. Fraleigh, a leading philosopher of sport who knew Kretchmar's father and was keeping an eye on him, had arrived at this institution the year before. As dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, Fraleigh hired numerous freshly minted PhDs to implement innovative holistic programs. During the 1970s, Kretchmar was one of ten philosophers of sport who were on the faculty at different times. He rapidly distinguished himself as a teacher and scholar, serving as chairperson of the Department of Physical Education from 1979 to 1982. In 1984, Kretchmar was appointed chairperson of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at The Pennsylvania State University, in University Park, PA. He served in that role until 1989, spending the remainder of his career at this institution and retiring thirty years later, in 2019, as professor emeritus. During this long tenure, in addition to continuing and deepening his remarkable academic production, Kretchmar trained fourteen PhDs and welcomed several scholars from around the world as postdoctoral researchers or as graduate students on their way to earn degrees at their home institutions (Kretchmar, 2021a, 2021b).

It is worth noting that Kretchmar played key roles in formalizing the philosophy of sport. In 1970, there was neither an organization for philosophers of sport nor

a specialized publication to publish and disseminate their scholarship. Previous discussions at different venues led to the creation, in late 1972, of the Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport (PSSS) (now known as the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport – IAPS), an initiative led by Fraleigh and Paul Weiss, a philosopher at The Catholic University of America, in Washington D.C. Kretchmar served as a member-at-large in the organization's inaugural executive board. When the first full annual conference of PSSS was hosted at the State University College at Brockport the following year, he was a member of the organizing committee. Kretchmar later served PSSS as secretary-treasurer (1977-1978) and as president (1981-1982). Immediately after its creation, PSSS founded the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, the gold standard publication in the discipline, whose first issue appeared in 1974. Kretchmar provided editorial leadership for this publication from 1998 to 2002. Recognizing his efforts on behalf of the organization, in 2005, IAPS awarded him its Distinguished Service Award. Five years later, the association honored Kretchmar by naming its newly created Student Essay Award after him in recognition for his support to the philosophers of sport he trained as well as for his disposition to assist any graduate student who sought his mentoring and advice. Remarkably, he stands out as the only scholar to have received twice from IAPS its Distinguished Scholar Award (1998 and 2006) (Kretchmar, 1997; Torres, 2014).<sup>2</sup> While advocating for and providing leadership for the philosophy of sport, Kretchmar also presided over NAK (1998-1999), served as a founding member of the American Kinesiology Association (2007-2010), and was the founding editor of the *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport* (2007-2012), among other accomplishments. All along, he continued to reap multiple distinctions that cemented his unique scholarly and professional stature.

### 3 SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT

Kretchmar has been a fecund and creative scholar who has significantly shaped the contours and the standards of the philosophy of sport. As seen above, early in his career, he embraced Metheny's concern in investigating the source of meaning in "the act of moving, with particular reference to the forms of movement called dance, sport, and exercise" (1968, p. ix) and made it his own.<sup>3</sup> Kretchmar's lifelong and fruitful dedication to exploring the relationship between meaning and these types of physical activity has led to an interdisciplinary, multifaceted, wide-ranging, and impactful scholarly oeuvre. Though these characteristics challenge its categorization, his scholarly record can be said to include, risking oversimplification, at least four core sets of interrelated research preoccupations: the metaphysics of play, games, sport, and competition; the role of physical education; the ethics of sport; and the meaning-making and spiritual aspects of sport. Despite their particularities and connections, as a whole, these four core sets of interrelated research preoccupations manifest some foundational commitments. Kretchmar (2005b, 2018c) believes that humans are problem-probing, meaning-seeking, and story-telling creatures. As well, he considers

<sup>2</sup> See also the Honors and Awards section of IAPS's website. Available at: <https://iaps.net/honours/> Accessed on: Sept, 2, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> See also Metheny (1967).

that logical analyses should be complemented with varied life experiences, advances that holistic understandings explain better the nature and value of physical activity, and maintains that pragmatist approaches provide more solid answers to questions related to the various ways in which humans move (Kretchmar, 2005b). In the end, as philosopher of sport Alun Hardman posits, “Kretchmar is an unabashed advocate of movement cultures and insists that establishments of higher learning need to fully embrace them” (2007, p. 97). Even more, Kretchmar has contended that good living cannot be neutral to physical activity because that ignores “the fact that we are bodies” and that “Our intelligence, our ability to solve problems, our cherished freedoms to understand and to do – all of this and more – developed as we moved” (2005b, p. 246).

### 3.1 FIRST CORE SET OF INTERRELATED RESEARCH PREOCCUPATIONS: THE METAPHYSICS OF PLAY, GAMES, SPORT, AND COMPETITION

Much of the early work in the philosophy of sport attempted to understand the concept of sport and how it links to and differs from other related practices, especially play, games, and competition. Kretchmar delved into this metaphysical inquiry, which constitutes the first of the four core sets of interrelated research preoccupations, and developed a rich conceptualization of this essential conceptual quartet. In this respect, he has provided accounts of how two counterpoints, opposition by cut and opposition by degree, inform sport and competition. A test, Kretchmar has argued, is based on the first kind of opposition and denotes “an ambiguous phenomenon which is seen as both impregnable and vulnerable” (1975, p. 24) that determines success or failure in solving its riddles. As such, tests reside at the heart of games, which he agrees are artificial obstacles created by rules, and sports, which he concurs are games of physical skills, critically embracing the work of Bernard Suits (1967), an influential philosopher of sport. On the other hand, Kretchmar has maintained that “the test provides a basis for contests” (1975, p. 27), which, as shared tests, are based on the second kind of opposition. For him, the change from singularity to plurality is one step in transforming tests into contests; the other step requires a commitment from the contestants to improve each other’s performances. As an example, running 1500 meters to find out if one can cover the distance in a limited amount of time is a test; doing so while confronting an opponent to find out who can do it faster is a contest. Kretchmar’s vision of competition precedes but significantly overlaps with the mutualist approach later articulated by Robert L. Simon, another authoritative philosopher of sport (Simon *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, Kretchmar has explored how sport connects to play and has also intervened in the debate over whether some sports are “refereed games” and others “judged performances.” For the former, he explained early on that sport and play were “wholly compatible but not coextensive” (1972, p. 113). Notably, Kretchmar’s understanding of play over the years shows significant continuity despite using different vocabularies that reflect alternative philosophical sources. At the beginning of his career, he identified play with a plenitude that humans spontaneously testify to “*regardless* of the extenuating circumstances in a particular life situation” that “is not a curtailed thrust toward specific ends” (1972, p. 118). Later on, he described play as an



autotelic experience that is inherently relational because it is encountered, contrasting it to other approaches to living that humans more typically relate to productivity and efficiency (2007). As for the debate over whether some sports are “refereed games” and others “judged performances,” Kretchmar believes that both kinds of sports are games and accepts that the latter emphasize the rules of aesthetics that the athlete “must be embraced if he [or she] is to respond to a call (or calling) to create art or its approximation” (1989, p. 42). For this reason, he brands these sports “beautiful games” (1989). In relation to the nature of games, he has also analyzed how they are designed and what features make some lusory structures more attractive than others. An example of his work on this topic is his explication that games are regulated by event (e.g., baseball and golf), time (e.g., basketball and soccer), or achievement (e.g., mountain climbing and checkers). Additionally, Kretchmar has analyzed the evolutionary history of these different kinds of games, identified their flaws and charms, and drawn attention to the structural options available to gamewrights and participants (2015a). In short, this abbreviated list of topics covering different aspects of these phenomena indicates that Kretchmar has provided a theory not only of play, games, sport, and competition, but also of good play, games, sport, and competition (Kretchmar, 1975, 2005a).

Connected to the latter, Kretchmar has speculated on the value of play, games, sport, and competition for good living, not only conceptualizing these phenomena, but also paying close attention to the way humans experience them. He has argued that creating and engaging in games and sport are intimately connected with the emergence of unique forms of human intelligence and proposed that, while deeply rooted in human evolution, these activities have common evolutionary roots with fictional storytelling. A related thesis proposes that play, games, and sport have myth-making power and the power to create deep and long-lasting meaning (Kretchmar, 2017a, 2017b). More about Kretchmar’s musings on some of these issues will be said in the exposition of the last core set of interrelated research preoccupations.

### 3.2 SECOND CORE SET OF INTERRELATED RESEARCH PREOCCUPATIONS: THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Kretchmar’s second core set of research preoccupations revolves around physical education and its role in higher education. He has been a staunch supporter of physical education in the schooling system. Nevertheless, in contrast to a curriculum that has been increasingly centered on the utility of this subject matter, which extols the extrinsic benefits connected with physical activity and an active lifestyle, Kretchmar has advanced what he calls a “joy-oriented physical education” (Kretchmar, 2008a). The logic of the latter is found in the imperatives of play, meaning, self-motivation, and identity as opposed to health, longevity, productivity, and duty. For Kretchmar, one of the greatest qualities of “physical activity and play is that they make our lives go better, not just longer” and that “health alone does not guarantee a meaningful existence” (2006, p. 6). In other words, he believes that meaning supersedes health and that “When movement is experienced as joy, it adorns our lives, makes our days go better, and gives us something to look forward to” (2008a, p. 162). Thus, Kretchmar

proposes that physical education be reoriented toward maximizing the teaching of the joy and possibilities of physical activity. In this intrinsically driven version of physical education, physical educators “invite their students into meaningful, challenging, and exciting playgrounds” (2008a, p. 163). One apt strategy is to introduce students to movement subcultures, or meaning-intensive places, such as sport and dance, for them to start writing significant life stories or identities through these movement subcultures (Kretchmar, 2000). Rather than decrying the extrinsic benefits connected with physical activity, Kretchmar avers that they should be seen as saluted resultants of a joy-oriented physical education.

The case that Kretchmar has mounted on behalf of physical education extends beyond the schooling system and reaches into higher education. In his quest to seek a more central place for physical education in the latter, he has defended the idea that physical education should be construed as part of the liberal arts. Traditionally, leaders in higher education have emphasized the arts and sciences that “liberate” humans and possess intrinsic value. Building on the notion that physical skills constitute a type of knowledge in its own right with inherent worth, Kretchmar affirms that “wisdom and skills are two sides of the coin of human freedom. As we gain skills, we enjoy greater access to wisdom” (Kretchmar, 2005b, p. 242). Indeed, for him, five basic freedoms are associated with the development and perfection of physical skills: the freedoms to communicate, express, explore, invent, and create. Under this liberal framework, physical educators should reinterpret their contributions in higher education and perceive themselves not as fosterers of health and healthful practices, but rather as promoters of skills that, by enabling communication, expression, exploration, invention, and creativity, empower people to live meaningful lives. In his words, physical education in higher education furthers “the very fundamental development of people in terms of helping them to know and knowingly do” (1988, p. 53). In making his case that physical education is part and parcel of a liberal education, he has been unrelenting about the need to employ holistic understandings of humankind and unapologetic on the significance of play, games, sport, and competition in both higher education and the schooling system.

An associated issue Kretchmar has devoted attention to is the status of physical activity as an object of research in higher education and, more specifically, in kinesiology. He has noted (1994, 2007, 2008b) that the silos of disciplinary specialization and the bunkers of utility and generic movement provide legitimacy for an object of research that is often dismissed as inconsequential and assist in the acceptance of kinesiology. Yet, Kretchmar also has observed that these silos and bunkers are compartmental, communicate poorly, and disrespect each other. In addition, their research paradigm features disciplinary independence and isolation. Moreover, because of its stress on usefulness, this research paradigm “produce[s] a profile that is unduly health fixated, sober, and serious” (2008b, p. 3). To remedy these problems and to represent the study of physical activity more adequately, Kretchmar recommends a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, one in which the walls of disciplinary silos and bunkers are at least lower and more permeable. He speculates that if kinesiology relies less on its silos and bunkers, there would be more disciplinary

collaboration, interdependency, and mutual respect. Another relevant implication would be the message to higher education and beyond that kinesiology cares about both the extrinsic benefits connected to and the intrinsic strengths of physical activity. In a sense, Kretchmar's proposed research paradigm reconceptualizes and revalues kinesiology so that all its professionals and practitioners are more comfortable with and proud of their research and teaching.

### 3.3 THIRD CORE SET OF INTERRELATED RESEARCH PREOCCUPATIONS: THE ETHICS OF SPORT

The third core set of Kretchmar's research preoccupation has been the philosophy of sport and its branches, especially the ethics of sport. Those interested in the history of the discipline identify his 1997 historical chronicle recounting North American scholars' use of philosophical tools to reflect on sport as the *locus classicus*. Kretchmar's chronology comprises four periods: eclectic (1875-1950), system-based (1950-1965), disciplinary (1965-1990s), and post-disciplinary (1990s-present). When explaining how the philosophy of sport emerged out of physical education in the first two phases to become a discipline in its own right in the third phase, he explicates that the most significant development was that "the content of human movement was regarded as [a] legitimate and interesting subject matter for serious philosophic inquiry" (1997, p. 195). In later works, he detailed how philosophers of sport, seeking to alter the perception of their subject matter, overemphasized the uniqueness of games and sport, ignoring their commonalities with other human enterprises, and avoided applied topics while prioritizing theoretical considerations (Kretchmar, 2010; Kretchmar; Torres, 2021). Thus, despite being effective, this focus on the distinct traits of games and sport has marginalized philosophers of sport "as philosophers of the inconsequential" (Kretchmar, 2010, p. 2) and "increased [their] inability to communicate with ... other kinesiologists" (Kretchmar; Torres, 2021, p. 284). In his disciplinary chronology, Kretchmar already warned his peers about these problems but remained optimistic concerning the future because the philosophy of sport was increasingly becoming "more interdisciplinary, more flexible, more interested in sport and other forms of human movement" (Kretchmar, 1997, p. 198).

Kretchmar's optimism partly results from philosophers of sport's increasing interest in ethical issues. Despite embracing the shift toward ethical problems, Kretchmar has emphasized the importance of building upon the solid philosophical conceptualizations of sport developed in the disciplinary era, helping the philosophy of sport to evolve more cohesively. During the maturing of sport ethics, Kretchmar (1983) accused "sport moralists" of neglecting crucial metaphysical questions, specifically inquiries into decisive aspects of games and sport, and encouraged sport ethicists who are not metaphysicians to "stand on the shoulders of others who are" because, for him, "Metaphysical understanding must precede ethical prescription" (1983, p. 22). Kretchmar praises the efforts of Fraleigh (1984), one of his mentors, to bridge the gap between metaphysics and ethics. Simultaneously, he worries that the overemphasis on sport's unique values could downplay the connections between sport and other values – an error he attributed to Fraleigh, who identified the "knowledge



of the relative ability to move mass in space and time” as the primary source of value in sport (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 41). Kretchmar finds the “claim that knowledge is the *only* inherent value” of sport “puzzling” (1986, p. 83, emphasis in original). Instead, he asserts that ethical analyses of sport should consider several inherent values, including confronting challenges and experiencing uncertainty of outcome. Kretchmar’s elucidations of practical problems like the intentional walk in baseball (2004) and flopping in basketball and soccer (2017c), to name just a few, illustrate his use of a plurality of values to guide and sustain ethical evaluation. His contention concerning the multiplicity of values in sport anticipated his pluralistic internalist theory of sport, which he formulated three decades later (Kretchmar, 2015b).

Amid the intense debate on determining the most suitable theory of sport, Kretchmar has presented an alternative to the two most prominent theories: broad internalism (also known as interpretivism) and conventionalism. The former understands sport, regardless of context, as mainly aimed at pursuing excellence. The latter questions the possibility of identifying a transcontextual nature of sport, seeking to understand it as the result of social conventions. Adopting a middle-ground position, Kretchmar has aligned his proposal with the commitment to excellence of the former and with the emphasis on the sociocultural embeddedness of the latter, building pluralistic internalism upon an element notably absent in the debate: human nature.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, interpretivists’ emphasis on excellence unjustifiably favors one set of human needs and interests – those at the core of today’s work ethic (Kretchmar, 2016, 2018b). However, for Kretchmar, engagement in sport can result from any of six clusters of human needs and interests: physical achievement, spiritual fulfillment, knowledge acquisition, aesthetic enjoyment, authentic growth, and communitarian development. On the other hand, sport shares basic transcontextual commonalities arising from the fact that individuals are “born into an essentially identical world, living from essentially the same kind of body with the same kinds of endowments, and having to solve essentially the same kinds of problems” (Kretchmar, 2015b, p. 85).

### 3.4 FOURTH CORE SET OF INTERRELATED RESEARCH PREOCCUPATIONS: THE MEANING-MAKING AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF SPORT

During the last decade, Kretchmar’s longtime interest in human nature has led him to fully develop both an anthropology and a theology of play, games, and sport to elucidate, paraphrasing Metheny, “how humans mean” them (Kretchmar, 2013a). Drawing on evolutionary biology and anthropology, Kretchmar has further explored linkages among these activities, human nature, and value, tracing the source of the human passion for and enjoyment of them back to prehistoric times, particularly to selection pressures that threatened humans in the Middle and Upper Paleolithic. Upon increasing their instrumental efficiency in overcoming work-a-day challenges, such as collecting food, prehistoric humans regularly found themselves without

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, from his distinctive anti-dualist standpoint, he further speculates that differences between the two dominant theories “are often exaggerated by our tendencies to think in dichotomous terms and push slight practical differences to their principled logical extremes,” suggesting that “there may be less disagreement between the realist (interpretivist) and relativist (conventionalist) camps than first meets the eye” (Kretchmar, 2015b, p. 95).

interesting, challenging, and meaningful things to do. Then, experiences of boredom and depression became increasingly prevalent, raising threats of biological atrophy and psychological dystrophy (Kretchmar, 2018a). Kretchmar (2017a) proposes that humans relied on their metaphorical imagination to address these threats. Using metaphors, they created conventions to construct artificial worlds where physical objects or states of affairs mean different things to individuals and social groups, including games that permitted the emergence of rudimentary artificial obstacles. For instance, they would transform the physical activity of moving faster from point A to point B using one's body into a game, bestowing participants with selection advantages such as improved physical fitness and increased mating opportunities: "meaning-seeking homo sapiens who could create a second world of meaning-full, challenging activities would do better than those who had to passively cope with and suffer through periods of empty time" (2018a, p. 60). However, Kretchmar explains that the ability to serve as cultural artifacts for finding problem-solving opportunities is hardly unique to games. Relying on Jonathan Gottschall, Kretchmar (2017a) finds their emphasis on challenges in other valuable human activities, such as storytelling and fiction. Gamewrights and storytellers pursue the same goal: bring about problems worth confronting. Thus, countering philosophers of sport's tendency to separate sport from other enterprises, Kretchmar (2017b) posits "that sport is valuable because it is embedded in other activities and virtues that have unimpeachable value" (p. 13).

Furthering his effort to link sport to inherently valuable activities and virtues, Kretchmar has sought inspiration primarily from Christian theology, following Johan Huizinga's, Michael Novak's, and Gilbert Keith Chesterton's footsteps (Kretchmar; White, 2018).<sup>5</sup> By reflecting upon religious worldviews, Kretchmar (2011) seeks to unveil the spiritual nature of games and sport. In his view, Christian theologians have underestimated the meaning-making potential of games because they have examined the value of these activities through the lenses of the dualistic play-work framework. Play, typically identified with existence in the Garden of Eden before the fall, has received support as an intrinsically valuable experience that, paraphrasing Novak, brings humans into the Kingdom of Ends. Work, in contrast, characterizes humans' post-fall existence and is perceived as the archetypical salvation-granting activity because of its productive, beneficial implications. Games and sport, in this dualistic framework, fall out of grace. They involve the toil of work but lack its salvatory implications. Similarly, they incorporate the triviality of play but fail to be engaged in as an intrinsically valuable activity. However, for Kretchmar, this view of games and sport misses the fact that, at their best, they combine the autotelicity of play and the significance of work by incorporating the intrigue of the former and the attraction of "just-right" challenge of the latter. Moreover, building upon his anthropology of games, Kretchmar asserts that games can be identified as gifts of God, for they serve humans to satisfy their needs and interest in solving problems and in achieving other kinds of valuable experiences. Some of these experiences connect to the cultivation of a cardinal religious virtue: humility. In particular, sport fosters the development of what

<sup>5</sup> He also draws on insights from Islam and Buddhism, two other major world spiritual traditions (see Kretchmar, 2013b).

Kretchmar calls “Humility of Apprenticeship” and “Humility of Gratitude.” Whereas the former involves the admission of dependency to the standards of excellence of specific activities and traditions besides the authority figures who best embody them, the latter has to do with “recognizing the gifted nature of an accomplishment, an unusual experience, a special relationship” (Kretchmar, 2013b, p. 276). With these analyses, Kretchmar asks whether athletic confidence and excellence are compatible with spiritual humility, advancing “what might be called a Christian ethics of athletic stewardship” (Kretchmar; Watson, 2018, p. 76). Given the interests presented in this section, it is unsurprising that since retiring in 2019, Kretchmar, who minored in religion at Oberlin College, has been serving as a Presbyterian-certified lay pastor.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Cogitating on the arc of his academic career, or as he puts it “contriv[ing] my own fable and plead[ing] my own case,” renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz enunciates: “I am as comfortable as could be expected after fifty years struggling to establish [my professional identity]” (2000, p. 20 and p. X). Kretchmar, whose academic career has been even lengthier, would probably enunciate something similar in relation to his own professional identity. He would proudly say: “I am philosopher of sport (or more precisely play, games, and sport) from beginning to end and as comfortable as could be with it.” Perhaps he would differ with Geertz in that he would contend that, for long stretches, he played rather than struggled at establishing his professional identity. Whatever the case, playing or struggling or both, Kretchmar, through his brilliant scholarship, teaching, and service, has significantly established, defined, and grown the philosophy of sport. Although he has ascended to the rank of the emeriti, he continues to be one of the discipline’s greatest and brightest stars and as playful a human as ever.

#### REFERENCES

- FRALEIGH, Warren P. **Right actions in sport:** ethics for contestants. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1984.
- GEERTZ, Clifford. **Available light:** anthropological reflections on philosophical topics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- HARDMAN, Alun R. Practical philosophy of sport and physical activity, 2nd ed. By R. Scott Kretchmar. Published 2005 by Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 34, n. 1, p. 97–99, 2007. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2007.9714713>
- KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. **A phenomenological analysis of the Other in sport.** 1971. Dissertation (Master in Philosophy) – University of Southern California, 1971.
- KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Ontological possibilities: sport as play. **Philosophic Exchange**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 113–122, 1972. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/233573485.pdf>. Accessed on: Sept. 4, 2024.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. From test to contest: an analysis of two kinds of counterpoint in sport. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 2, n. 1, p. 23–30, 1975. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1975.10654094>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Ethics and sport: An overview. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 10, n. 1, p. 21–32, 1983. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1983.9714398>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. The strange supremacy of knowledge in sport from the moral point of view: a response to Fraleigh. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 13, n. 1, p. 79–88, 1986. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1986.9714443>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Toward a stronger position for physical education in higher education: three recommendations. **Quest**, v. 40, n. 1, p. 47–55, 1988. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.1988.10483886>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. On beautiful games. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 16, n. 1, p. 34–43, 1989. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1989.9714467>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. **Practical philosophy of sport and physical activity**. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1994.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Philosophy of sport. In: MASSENGALE, John; SWANSON, Richard (ed.). **The history of exercise and sport science**. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1997. p. 181–202.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Movement subcultures: sites for meaning. **Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance**, v. 71, n. 5, p. 19–25, 2000. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2000.10605140>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Walking Barry Bonds: The ethics of the intentional walk. In: GREENE, E. Richard; VERNEZZE, Peter (ed.). **Baseball and philosophy: thinking outside the batter's box**. Chicago: Open Court, 2004. p. 261–272.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Game flaws. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 1, p. 36–48, 2005a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2005.9714669>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. **Practical philosophy of sport and physical activity**. 2. ed. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2005b.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Ten more reasons for quality physical education. **Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance**, v. 77, n. 9, p. 6–9, 2006. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2006.10597932>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. What to do with meaning? A research conundrum for the 21st century. **Quest**, v. 59, n. 4, p. 373–383, 2007. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2007.10483559>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. The increasing utility of elementary school physical education: a mixed blessing and unique challenge. **The Elementary School Journal**, v. 108, n. 3, p. 161–170, 2008a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/529099>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. The utility of silos and bunkers in the evolution of kinesiology. **Quest**, v. 60, n. 1, p. 3–12, 2008b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2008.10483564>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Should philosophy of sport matter more? **Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research**, v. 49, n. 1, p. 5–12, 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10141-010-0013-1>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Why dichotomies make it difficult to see games as gifts of God. In: PARRY, Jim; NESTI, Mark; WATSON, Nick J. (ed.). **Theology, ethics and transcendence in sports**. Londres: Routledge, 2011. p. 185–200.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. C. H. McCloy Lecture: symbols, conventions, games, Eleanor Metheny, and the evolution of human intelligence. **Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport**, v. 84, n. 2, p. 131–138, 2013a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2013.787345>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Hard-won sporting achievements and spiritual humility: Are they compatible? In: WATSON, Nick J.; PARKER, Andrew (ed.). **Sports and Christianity: Historical and contemporary perspectives**. Londres: Routledge, 2013b. p. 269–286.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. “A Games” and their relationship to T and E games. **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 47–57, 2015a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2015.1020853>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Pluralistic internalism. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 42, n. 1, p. 83–100, 2015b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2014.911101>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Simon on realism, fallibilism, and the power of reason. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 43, n. 1, p. 41–49, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2015.1112237>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Games and fiction: partners in the evolution of culture. **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**, v. 11, n. 1, p. 12–25, 2017a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1294554>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Sport, fiction, and the stories they tell. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 44, n. 1, p. 55–71, 2017b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2016.1277949>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. The ethics of flopping. In: LUMPKIN, Angela (ed.). **Modern sport ethics: a reference handbook**. 2. ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017c. p. 145–148.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Gateways to culture: Play, games, metaphors, and institutions. **Journal of Cognition and Culture**, v. 18, n. 1–2, p. 47–65, 2018a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685373-12340023>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Homo forte: A philosophical tribute to muscle. **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**, v. 12, n. 4, p. 375–385, 2018b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2018.1493529>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Human evolution, movement, and intelligence: why playing games counts as smart. **Quest**, v. 70, n. 1, p. 1–11, 2018c. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2017.1359636>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Amazement, gratitude and humility. **National Academy of Kinesiology**, v. 43, n. 2, p. 30–32, 2021a.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott. Large questions, small questions, and leaky ones too. **Kinesiology Review**, v. 10, n. 2, p. 111–118, 2021b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2020-0060>.

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott.; TORRES, Cesar R. Challenges, achievements, and uncertainties: the philosophy of sport since the 1980s. **Kinesiology Review**, v. 10, n. 3, p. 283–291, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2021-0012>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott; WHITE, John. A special issue on sport and spirituality. **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**, v. 12, n. 1, p. 1–3, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1414869>

KRETCHMAR, R. Scott.; WATSON, Nick J. Chesterton on play, work, paradox, and Christian orthodoxy. **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**, v. 12, n. 1, p. 70–80, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2017.1291713>

METHENY, Eleanor. How does a movement mean? **Quest**, v. 8, n. 1, p. 1–6, 1967. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.1967.10519630>



METHENY, Eleanor. **Movement and meaning**. Nova Iorque: McGraw-Hill, 1968.

OSTERHOUDT, Robert G. Introduction. **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 1, p. 1–15, 1974.

SIMON, Robert L.; TORRES, Cesar R.; HAGER, Peter F. **Fair play: the ethics of sport**. Boulder: Westview, 2014.

SUITS, Bernard. What is a game? **Philosophy of Science**, v. 34, n. 2, p. 148–156, 1967.

TORRES, Cesar R. Introduction. In: TORRES, Cesar R. (ed.). **Bloomsbury companion to the philosophy of sport**. Londres: Bloomsbury, 2014. p. 1–14.

TORRES, Cesar R. R. Scott Kretchmar. In: **Sport Studies**. Routledge Resources Online. Routledge. (*In press*).

VAN DE MARS, H.; TORRES, Cesar R.; WIGGINS, D. K. Letter from Hans Van de Mars, Cesar R. Torres and David K. Wiggins to Lynda Ransdell. **Cesar R. Torres Archives**, 2021.

ZEIGLER, Earle F. **History and status of American physical education and educational sport**. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2005.

**Resumo:** Scott Kretchmar é uma figura fundamental na filosofia do esporte. Seu influente trabalho começou com seu primeiro artigo revisado por pares em 1972, e suas contribuições acadêmicas permanecem significativas, mesmo após sua aposentadoria. Em 1989, ele se tornou um dos primeiros filósofos do esporte a ser indicado para a Academia Nacional de Cinesiologia dos Estados Unidos, e sua carreira atingiu o ápice profissional com o Prêmio Clark W. Hetherington em 2021. Neste artigo, primeiro traçamos sua trajetória acadêmica e profissional. Em seguida, fazemos uma visão geral de suas principais contribuições acadêmicas, categorizando-as em quatro conjuntos centrais de preocupações inter-relacionadas de pesquisa: (a) a metafísica do jogar, os jogos, o esporte e a competição; (b) o papel da educação física; (c) a ética do esporte; e (d) a construção de significado e os aspectos espirituais do esporte. Embora não exaustiva, nossa análise destaca o papel fundamental de Kretchmar no estabelecimento e expansão da filosofia do esporte, sublinhando seu impacto duradouro.

**Palavras-chave:** Esporte. Ética. Filosofia do Esporte. Jogo.

**Resumen:** Scott Kretchmar es una figura fundamental de la filosofía del deporte. Su influencia comenzó con su primer artículo revisado por pares en 1972, y sus contribuciones siguen siendo significativas tras su jubilación. En 1989, se convirtió en uno de los primeros filósofos del deporte en ingresar a la National Academy of Kinesiology de los Estados Unidos, alcanzando la cúspide profesional con el Premio Clark W. Hetherington en 2021. Este artículo traza su trayectoria académica y profesional, y repasa sus principales contribuciones académicas, categorizándolas en cuatro núcleos básicos de preocupaciones de investigación interrelacionadas: (a) la metafísica del jugar, los juegos, el deporte y la competición; (b) el papel de la educación física; (c) la ética del deporte; y (d) la creación de significado y los aspectos espirituales del deporte. Sin ser exhaustivo, este artículo destaca la labor de Kretchmar en establecer y expandir la filosofía del deporte, subrayando su impacto perdurable.

**Palabras clave:** Deporte. Ética. Filosofía del Deporte. Juego.

**USE LICENSE**

This article is published as Open Access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, which allows its use, distribution and reproduction in any medium as long as the original work is properly cited. More information at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that this work involves no conflict of interest.

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Cesar R. Torres. Foundation, Conceptualization, Literature Review and Writing (revision and editing).

Francisco J. López Frías. Foundation, Conceptualization, Literature Review and Writing (revision and editing).

**FUNDING**

This study was not supported by funding sources.

**HOW TO CITE**

TORRES, Cesar R.; LÓPEZ FRÍAS, Francisco J. The philosophical journey of Scott Kretchmar: exploring how sport and physical activity mean. *Movimento*, . 30, p. e30052. Jan./Dec. 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.143363>

**EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Alberto Reinaldo Reppold Filho\*, Alex Branco Fraga\*, Elisandro Schultz Wittizorecki\*, Irena Martínková\*\*, Jim Parry\*\*, Mauro Myskiw\*, Raquel da Silveira\*

\*Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Escola de Educação Física, Fisioterapia e Dança, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

\*\*Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University. Prague, Czech Republic.