Edward Hopper - *People in the Sun*, 1960 - Smithsonian American Art Museum

So hard to be loyal when you're not sure who to be loyal to. From the Wooster, Ohio, Daily Record :

Cleveland traded Mo Williams and Jamario Moon to the LA Clippers for Baron Davis and a 2011 first-round draft pick. The Cavs also acquired two rookie big men from the Celtics -- Notre Dame product Luke Harangody and 7-footer Semih Erden from Turkey -- in exchange for a second-round pick in 2013.

I know it's a business. I know the idea is to win games. But where does that leave the fans? Loyal to a team? A city? A player? If your favorite Cav was Mo Williams and you have an aching need to see the Mo-flo on a regular basis, are you now a Clippers fan? Are your loyalties divided? If you take a step back from individual players and root for a team, does it take some of the intensity and joy out of the game?

For answers, I turn to Leonard Koppett's *The Essence of the Game is Deception*, Chapter 14 - "Fans." Before subdividing basketball fans into four categories, Mr. Koppett described what unites us:

It has been demonstrated conclusively throughout the world over the past one hundred years and more that many people . . . enjoy riding a roller coaster. The sudden swerves, precipitous drops and long, slow climbs, with the rider knowing that the plunge will follow, while all the time secure in the feeling that it's only a ride and there's no real danger, appeal to some human craving for excitement . . .

Don't fail me now, Leonard. What does this have to do with the topic?

Those who enjoy the mental and emotional equivalent, without the physical experience itself, are basketball fans.

Immediate thought - all sports have ups and downs. Mr. Koppett?

This one thing all basketball fans have in common: the capacity of enjoy going through this sort of emotional wringer. Other sports build their tensions on a much longer, and therefore different scale. Hockey and soccer games in which the flow of play can reverse itself even faster than in basketball, create a different tempo because actual scores are so few.

As it pertains to sports fans, Leonard Koppett identifies four basic food groups:

Rooters

. . . the basic fan of all sports . . . overshadowing everything else, is that the team he roots for wins, and that the player he roots for does well . . . only the results matter.

We become rooters in America, during childhood, and usually under obvious social pressure or in a social context. Rooting is a form of patriotism, attached to a smaller entity than native land, but rooted in the same complex of emotions.

Bettors

. . . the identity of the team they root for is determined by the bet, and may be different in each

game, instead of steady loyalty to one school or town.

Analyst

. . . He immerses himself in the event much in the way a listener to music or a theater-goer does - it's the event itself, not the consequence of it, that matters . . . He savors the result without precommitment to one side. He really does want "the better man" to win.

Thrill-seeker

. . . enjoys the game for its sheet physical beauty, its excitement, its colorful setting, its removal from daily life. He is responsive to the whole scene . . . a one-sided game quickly becomes dull.

There's a lot of overlap here. Different degrees of thrills and rooting all mixed up in a single person, who is all mixed up with a giant crowd. But, according to Leonard, there is a single unifying factor:

...the fans - all kinds of fans, everywhere - are more a part of a basketball game than in any other sport. They suffer more from the game's built-in problems . . . [Editor's note: Here Mr. Koppett refers to Chapter 14 - "Referees."]
. . . but they reap delights in greater quantity from its evident goodies.

Which is why I will learn to love Baron Davis and Luke Harangody and Semih Erden and even the baby draft picks yet to be hatched. Because I love Cleveland. I root for the Cavs. I bet the new guys are going to be wonderful. And it's a thrill to be part of it all.

I just hope this rooter/thrill-seeker/analyst/possible bettor learns to love Mo and Jamario as much as he loved Baron Davis:

alt=""
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