**Soccer (and other) Mis-Adventures**

When I was growing up, soccer in the USA was not available commonly. I finally played in my first pick-up game when I was 30 years old at a park in Manhattan Beach with some work friends at TRW. I had speed but no ball skills. The amount of running required was too much for my feet and condition. When the children were growing up, soccer became the preferred sport. At one point, all four children were on American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO, founded 1964) teams. Eventually, I became recruited to be an assistant coach for a 12 year old boy’s team. I showed up at practice and was the designated goalie. At least, I could use my hands. The kids had a good time trying to get the ball past me. I watched some professional games and read a few books about coaching soccer. Our team eventually won the league that year due to some talented players and also by making good use of the lesser players. The interesting thing about AYSO soccer was that it was for everyone. All team members had to play at least half the game. I noticed that after the season, the kids remembered that they had a good time; only the parents remembered who won or lost. The criteria for a successful coach should be how many of the players returned for the next season.

Thirty years later there was weekly soccer after work near Azusa where I was working. This game had men and women and a huge difference in talent. I attempted to get to the ball and kick it somewhere ahead of me or even to a place where a teammate was located. Since I was very right-footed, I found it best to play on the right side and try to get the ball back into the middle of the field. If I kept the ball, someone would always take it away from me. On defense, I just tried to stay in some space and hope the ball did NOT come to me. Once a ball came about 5 meters from me and there was nobody else around. By the time I got to the ball, a MUCH faster player had arrived from nowhere to take the ball and continue. I could not be that SLOW, could I? That meant that my presence was not useful.

The most popular participation sport in the USA is BOWLING! I have done this with friends. My best effort is required to break the magical 100 score. I just try to throw the ball down the middle and hope something good happens. The enemy is the infamous “gutter ball”. Your friends are the rarely achieved “strike” and the “spare”. It is exhilarating to get one of these and frustrating to miss getting one by the smallest of misses. I have not participated in any organized league and avoided bowling for years when smoking was allowed at the bowling alleys. It still seems to be an alcohol drinking sport.

Then there are the various types of “pool/billiards”. Every basement should have a pool table! Many regions have a specific set of rules for what constitutes a pool game. I never abide by the rule that says “call your ball in pocket”. I insist that any ball in any pocket is good. Sometimes, it is the opponent’s ball. That means that I can keep shooting. I am happy if the cue ball stays on table. The accomplished pool players refuse to play with me, since I do not play by their rules. That is fine for me.

I still play volleyball at the beach and the occasional grass volleyball game. Other sporting activities are table tennis, badminton, Frisbee, basketball, bicycling, shuffleboard, bocce ball, horseshoes, croquet, and others. I am not competitive at these because the good people are either better coordinated and/or have been playing that sport since they were children. I also dislike activities that I do by myself; I need the pressure of teammates/opponents to even try to get anything done. My favorite is TRAC-BALL where a 10 cm ball goes from one person to another using a pseudo-cesta similar to the much larger ones in Jai-Alai. Receiving it is easier since the cesta extends reach. The ball can go in a curve, high, straight, or bounce. Other trajectories are always a possibility.

There are many other sports that I have attempted over the years without any real success. However, I am generally willing to engage in any team activity just for the fun of doing something where people have an interaction with each other. The object is to learn a new skill, to make the best use of the time, and to adapt to the abilities of the other participants. The kids have it right, it is not the winning or losing, just the joy of playing.