

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 58 no. 4 (2010): 449–480

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Rooting for the Underdog Spectatorship and Subalternity in Philippine Basketball

Basketball, “the tall man’s game,” is ironically the Philippines’s most popular sports. The symbolic depiction of “small players” and their epic matches with bigger opponents mirrors the Filipinos’ struggle against larger global forces, particularly amid colonization and underdevelopment. By looking into the celebrated Ginebra team and its throng of fans in the 1990s, this article demonstrates that basketball’s popularity is hinged partly on its appeal as a subaltern spectacle. Basketball spectatorship has turned into a consuming diversion that celebrates the thrills of subversion and the possibilities of emancipation for millions of Filipinos who are burdened by everyday struggles against poverty and marginalization.

KEYWORDS: BASKETBALL · SPORTS FANS · POPULAR CULTURE · SUBALTERNITY · POSTCOLONIALISM

Can you imagine playing in a place with empty seats?

—Robert Jaworski (*Cantor and Barrameda* 2000, 25)

Basketball has come a long way from its origin as a physical education regimen carried out inside closed gymnasiums to its current status as one of the most popular spectator sports in the world. Since the 1970s, basketball has evolved into a huge public spectacle with followers that greatly outnumber those who actually play the game. In the Philippines, a nationwide survey shows that about 73.5 percent of the total population 18 years old and above follows basketball, both as live spectators and television viewers, although only 34 percent mentioned the game as their favorite sport to play (Sandoval and Abad 1997, 1–4). Apparently Filipino basketball followers across the country almost readily come together to witness their favorite pastime. From the glitzy arenas of the top professional league in Metro Manila to the dusty makeshift hoop clearings in far-flung villages, no game seems to be complete without the spectators who come to watch all the action and, in most cases, become part of the spectacle themselves.

Filipinos were introduced to basketball as spectators. The local population, it is said, learned the basics of the game by watching U.S. soldiers put their rifles aside to shoot hoops as a recreational activity during the American colonial period (Naismith 1941). Playing the game was encouraged as the sport was recognized as effective in battling the influence of vices and instilling the values of duty, courage, and patriotism among the American soldiers (Pope 1995). In particular, YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) missionaries who came with the U.S. troops as military chaplains earnestly promoted the new game of basketball, which their organization invented in 1891. In this context, the curious onlookers soon started to cheer for local players as some Filipinos eventually learned to play the game.

In a separate work (Antolihao 2009), I have discussed how the method that was used to control the American soldiers was eventually utilized to deal with Filipinos as colonial subjects. American colonial officials started using sports to establish standards of behavior, relations, and conformity. In short, athletics and sports became an important pedagogical tool, a means of cultivating values and practices that the colonizers deemed necessary for the overall progress of the Filipinos, both as individuals and as a nation.

In 1910 basketball was introduced in schools and after more than a decade it was already a major crowd drawer in intercollegiate tournaments. Eventually

the Philippine national teams started to make a name when they won nine of the ten Far Eastern Games championships held between 1913 and 1934 (Antolihao 2007). Its most important achievement in international competitions was recorded in 1954 when the Philippines placed third in the World Basketball Championships in Rio de Janeiro. This string of victories enabled the new nation to gain international recognition, and the basketball victories also became a strong symbol that bound the Filipino people together. The strong nationalist sentiment that came with each win essentially turned the entire country into a huge cheering squad. By the mid-1970s, the rise of mass media transformed basketball into an important aspect of local popular culture, increasing and spreading its appeal further beyond the arena. Since then, the basketball followers—and its various manifestations as spectators, supporters, viewers, groupies, fans, hecklers, and hooligans—have continuously played an important role in making basketball an integral aspect of Filipino everyday life.

This article aims to provide a view of the historical and social significance of basketball in the Philippines from the perspective of sports fans during the last decade of the twentieth century, a period that is largely considered as the country's golden age of professional basketball. I argue that the popularity of basketball in the Philippines partly hinges on the sport's evolution into a subaltern spectacle in which the struggles of ordinary Filipinos are symbolically played out. This argument follows the proposition of Vandello and others (2007, 1614) who have argued that the “motivation for supporting underdogs might derive less from abstract moral concerns about fairness and more from self-interested, rational calculations of one's own emotion.” Thus by “rooting for the underdog,” local basketball followers are clearly not only cheering for their favorite team but also rooting for themselves, and for the many other real underdogs outside the playing court.

This article focuses on Ginebra, more popularly known in the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) as the “team of the masses” for its strong fan appeal, especially among basketball followers from the lower rung of Philippine society. The discussion is divided into three parts: the first section relates basketball with the practice of cockfighting, a form of entertainment and gambling that was prevalent during the Spanish colonial regime. The “fowl game” is often referred to as the predecessor of basketball since it was the most popular public spectacle in the country before the introduction of modern sports at the turn of the twentieth century. The next two sections center on a textual analysis of a couple of novelty songs that portray the

sentiments of an avid basketball follower. The object of the fans' affection is, of course, Barangay Ginebra. The songs, *Pag Natatalo ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Loses) and *Pag Nananalo ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Wins), came out together as part of one record album during its celebrated championship run in 1997, when both tunes became the "national anthem" of the team's millions of fans. Although the songs are riddled with hyperbolic representations and other lyrical narratives, they nonetheless reflect the devotion and passion that many Filipinos have for their favorite pastime. As texts, these two popular songs can help us unravel the entanglements that bind basketball and culture so closely together. In addition the textual analysis is supplemented by interviews with Ginebra fans from Metro Manila and Davao City, in the southern island of Mindanao. The informants were chosen randomly based on their knowledge of the national and international stages as well as their involvement in local basketball leagues and informal pick-up games.

From Fowl Game to Foul Team

Although basketball came to the Philippines only at the turn of the last century, spectatorship had been around long before the rules of any modern sports were codified. In precolonial times, harvest festivals and other important community events provided opportunities for people to come together to witness and participate in various forms of competitions and other attractions. Many of these practices remained even during the Spanish colonial period, although they were often infused with new meanings that were associated with the hegemonic Roman Catholic religion (Wendt 1998).

A common public spectacle that thrived under the friar-dominated Spanish regime was the popular pastime of cockfighting. Writers dealing with the history of sports in the Philippines before the twentieth century often referred to the cockpit as the site of ubiquitous public spectacle that can now be largely observed in the basketball hard court (Barrows 1914; Ylanan and Ylanan 1965; Reaves 2004; Gems 2006). In view of the determined attempts by American colonial administrators to counter the influence of the traditional fowl game, which they saw as a degenerating vice and a source of other social evils, Public Instruction Director David Barrows (1914, 61) mused at the widespread popularity of U.S. athletics and noted how the "old sport of cockfighting and gaming have failed to interest the rising generation."

Diversion and Defiance in the Colonial Pastime

Apart from being big-time crowd drawers, both the cockpit and the hard court are largely deemed as subaltern spaces where the thrills of subversion and the possibilities of emancipation become a fleeting experience for the subjugated subject. Filomeno Aguilar (1998), in his insightful work on the social significance of cockfighting in the Spanish Philippines, sees in the popular gambling activity the ludic incarnation of the "clash of spirits." He describes this concept as something that pertained to the "overlapping world of the indigenous and the colonial" that often resulted in the "cultural entrapment" of the local people. The latter tried to evade the fatal consequences of their captivity through a calculated two-step strategy of submission and resistance (*ibid.*, 47). In the same way, professional basketball, especially during its heights in the 1990s, was often seen as a microcosm of Philippine society in which the struggles of the people against the prevailing political and economic forces that were corrosively impacting their everyday lives were symbolically played and displayed in the hard court (Eala 2004).

Moreover, aside from their appeal as fleeting spectacles, the cockpit and the hard court have also enticed people with a promise of a more lasting solution to their predicaments. Gambling, although largely deemed as the undesirable underside of sport, allows people to dream and to hope for a better life, which seems impossible to achieve through the usual channels. For instance, despite the wholesome image that basketball, and especially the country's professional league, is trying to cultivate, the game of "ending"—a form of illegal gambling based on the final scores of PBA games—came to prominence in the 1990s.¹ The game of chance was particularly popular in the countryside and among the lower classes despite the strict government prohibition against it. This case reflects the position of cockfighting during the Spanish colonial period when the rationalities held by the people of the game largely ran in conflict with the church-dominated values system. Hence, just as in today's hard court, "[t]he internal message of the cockpit," according to Aguilar (1998, 49) "was counterhegemonic." He explains:

The indigenous red was not the underdog; it could be asserted and bet on as the favorite by the real underdogs outside the cockpit. Red could win, but so could white. Since the outcome was never truly predictable, the native at least had an imaginary fifty-fifty chance. And so

whenever red and white clashed in the arena, the power encounter between the indigenous and the Hispanic realms was reenacted all over again . . . as though the historical outcome was totally unknown.

The general description of the phenomenon of basketball fanaticism pertinently mirrors the subaltern qualities of cockfighting in the colonial Philippines laid out in Aguilar's work. For example, Filipino sports journalist Recah Trinidad (1990) has pointed out how basketball was a "bad match" to Filipinos because of their generally small physique and the game's origin as a winter game, contrary to the country's tropical climate. Furthermore, Trinidad (*ibid.*, 5) has suggested that the Filipinos' insistence to play and follow basketball is, in fact, a reflection of their long-established propensity for "defiance." He adds:

There is deep within the Pinoy [Filipino] cager . . . the heart of a rebel. And nothing could be sweeter, blood-pumping than to see our cager sneaking up and gracefully propelling himself in the air and scoring a basket against a tall, hulking foreign foe. The ritual of defiance started in Cebu. If Lapu-Lapu, shorter and with inferior artillery, was able to topple and kill the imperious Ferdinand Magellan [considered as the Western "discoverer" of the Philippines], why can't our basketballer be allowed to relive and relish memories of the triumph at Mactan on the hardwood? (*ibid.*)

The reference to the Battle of Mactan in 1521 was an attempt to locate basketball in the larger narrative of the country's history of struggle against foreign aggressions. This historic event has remained a popular representation of the possibility of a subaltern victory, although a recent study challenges the commonly held assumption that the native's triumph relied mainly on their courage and unconventional warfare tactics (Angeles 2007). In any event, the defeat of Spanish imperial forces by local warriors led by Lapu-Lapu (a chieftain in Mactan, a small island off Cebu in the central Philippines) was used by Trinidad, in the context of basketball, as an inspiration for the "small" Filipinos in their forays into the "game of the giants."

In contemporary basketball competitions, however, the dichotomy has moved from a distinguishable native-foreign or colony-empire binary into a haze of interchangeable identifications. With the absence of an immediately

identifiable antagonist, the red-white distinction that characterized the colonial cockfight has become a blurred montage of symbols and representations. Often, identifying which team is the underdog varies according to different factors, such as the composition of players, the venue of the game, or the team's image as determined by the overall ethos of its sponsoring company.

Aside from these factors, the general socioeconomic background of its followers has also played an important role in determining the position of a particular team in the underdog-superior binary. This trend follows the larger shift in Philippine society where the foreign-native dichotomy during the colonial period has been replaced by the current division between the two major social classes: the elites and the masses. The PBA, the premier cockpit of the most popular spectator event in the country in the past three decades, becomes the sight of this contemporary "clash of spirits." Although all the teams have supporters from both sides of the social divide, each club tends to appeal more to certain groups of fans because of several factors, such as the consumer product they represent (PBA teams are named after their sponsors); the social background of its prominent players; and, most importantly, the club's winning record and the type of basketball techniques they play.

The Team of the Masses

From 1975 to the early 1980s, the elite-masses binary was evident in the historic rivalry of the PBA's two most popular teams: Toyota and Crispa. The Toyota Super Corollas generally appealed largely to the middle and upper classes, primarily because their prominent players were mestizos (Spanish-Filipino or Filipino-American), who usually belonged to or identified with those in the top crust of Philippine society. In addition, the products of the car company that sponsored the team were beyond the reach of many poor Filipinos. In contrast, the Crispa Redmanizers were perceived as the team of the masses because of the working-class or provincial origins of its players. The company that supported the team also manufactured cheap, mass-produced clothing that was marketed mainly to lower-class consumers (*cf.* Bartholomew 2010, 300–301).

Sito Tabay, a company driver who lived near the Crispa factory in Pasig, Metro Manila, recalled how the Toyota players were mostly *tisoy* (the colloquial word for mestizo), *makinis* (smooth-complexioned) and *parang mga artista* (like film stars). Expectedly he explained that these qualities were due to the Toyota players' lack of exposure to sunshine (*di naiimitan*). Interestingly,

he referred to himself instead of the Crispa players in making a comparison with the Toyota players. He said, “Di kagaya ng trabaho ko sa delivery, lagi akong nasa labas, naaarawan, at na-aalikabukan kaya medyo nognog ako” (Unlike my job as a delivery truck driver, I always stay constantly exposed to the sun and dust, that is why I am rather burnt). By describing the Toyota players in these terms, he was implicitly contrasting them with the Crispa players, with whom he identified. Sito’s explanation shows an instance of ascription to a particular social class category fusing the bond between a fan and his favorite team.

Despite their immense popularity, both the Crispa and Toyota basketball teams disbanded during the economic turmoil that engulfed the country in the mid-1980s. Apart from the financial crisis that affected the sponsoring companies, many believed that their downfall was due to the strong connection of their owners to the ousted Marcos regime. Among the number of teams that emerged to take their place, the Ginebra franchise² garnered the most ardent followers. Although the club had been in the PBA since 1979, it was only during the mid-1980s when Ginebra also came to prominence as the overwhelming crowd favorite. Unlike Crispa and Toyota, however, the team’s popularity was not built on a remarkable winning record or the exceptional talent of its players. For instance, after spending less than ten years in the PBA, Crispa amassed a total of thirteen championships while Toyota ran away with nine.³ For its part, Ginebra has won the top prize eight times only in a span of thirty years. Ginebra’s limited success can be attributed directly to the overall talents of its players. Compared with its legendary predecessor teams that were virtually composed of basketball superstars, the Ginebra team was basically a rag-tag squad of marginal stars and role players. In fact, almost half of the twenty-five all-time best players chosen for the PBA’s 25th anniversary in 1999 were from Crispa and Toyota (Cantor and Barrameda 2000). Only Jaworski can be identified with Ginebra, although three other players in the list joined the club briefly at some points in their careers.

How then did Ginebra become the most popular team in the PBA given its unremarkable winning record? The answer lies in the type of basketball they played. The team was well known for its tightly fought games and come-from-behind victories that were anchored on run-and-gun plays and bruising defense. Both game tactics were proven to be tremendously appealing to the fans. Despite having only marginal players during most of the seasons in the 1990s, they more than made up for it with their toughness and audacity. The

team’s overall “fight it out till the end” approach and their propensity to win (or lose) close games gained for the club numerous loyal supporters. Just like Crispa, most of Ginebra’s avid fans belonged to the lower rung of Philippine society who could relate to their hardworking and brutish style of play.

Even though they exuded a blue-collar image, the team’s official red color was a reminder of the scarlet fighting cock that represented the natives, the social underdog in Spanish colonial society. The color also meant “life” and “robustness,” if not magical endowments (Aguilar 1998), which apparently enabled Ginebra to carve out victory even if its players were badly mismatched against their opponents. Because of their overall never-say-die style of play, which enabled them to attract a huge number of followers despite their mediocre winning record, Ginebra came to be known in the PBA as “the perennial underdog team” and, consequently, “the team of the masses.”

Play Basketball and Be a Senator

A discussion of the Ginebra team will not be complete if the name of Robert Jaworski is not mentioned. Widely considered as the most popular Filipino basketball player ever, the highly charismatic Jaworski joined the team in 1984. Ironically, he came from the disbanded Toyota, the team that was largely identified with the elites. The predominantly working-class fans of Ginebra who used to despise him for his mestizo swagger were now admiring him for the aggressive and rough ways that defined the team’s blue-collar impression. However, despite his mestizo looks, which Jaworski got from his Polish-American father, he came from a humble beginning. His modest upbringing apparently enabled him to relate well with the majority of Ginebra fans.

Unfortunately, Jaworski was already 38 years old, feebly looking to the twilight of his playing career when he transferred to the Ginebra team. Moreover, he was also never considered to be an exceptionally talented athlete even when he was at the peak of his career. “As a player,” according to a fellow PBA star, “Sonny [Jaworski’s nickname] is ordinary, *walang* specialty [he has no special basketball skills]. It’s his heart, his spirit that matters” (Cantor and Barrameda 2000, 101). He brought to the team the toughness and fighting spirit he was known for during his heyday playing for the famed Toyota franchise. For instance, Ginebra’s unrelenting style of play first caught the attention of Filipino fans in a game in 1985 when Jaworski had to be rushed to a hospital because of an injury. Instead of just calling it a day, he decided

to return to the arena after getting treatment. With their opponent enjoying a sizeable lead late in the game, Jaworski's decision to return to the game despite the injury he sustained inspired his team and they rallied to a dramatic victory that resulted in a wild celebration among the spectators. Just as the Battle of Mactan is to Philippine nationalism, this event became the watershed of Ginebra's status as one of the most celebrated teams in the history of Philippine basketball.

In 1986, team management recognized Jaworski's good leadership qualities and appointed him as their playing-coach. He remained in that position until he left the league in 1998 after his election as a senator, a position he held until 2004.⁴ However, even as a coach, Jaworski was not really known for his basketball acumen. A fellow PBA coach noted that he was really "not technical and scientific" but "knew how to draw the most from his players"; he added, "[t]he one thing you knew about Sonny Jaworski's teams is that they came out and played hard every night" (ibid., 178). Eventually, in 1998, he was able to lead his squad to win the league's All-Filipino championship. The team's achievement became one of the main stories of the 1988 PBA annual yearbook, which recognized Jaworski for "steering an Añejo [Ginebra used this name that year] squad that had no full-fledged superstar . . . With only a big fighting heart as high-octane fuel Añejo rode on the sheer madness of crowd support to beat the highly-favored Purefoods [team]" in the finals (Mendoza 1989, 10). His remarkable career spanned more than two decades, from 1975 until his final game when he was already 51 years old. This achievement is viewed as an exceptional display of longevity that is almost impossible to replicate in the grueling world of professional basketball. "The Living Legend," as Jaworski was fondly called, reluctantly left the PBA in 1998 after his successful foray into national politics.

It should be noted that Jaworski followed the footsteps of Ambrosio Padilla and Freddie Webb, former national basketball players who later served as senators of the Republic of the Philippines. Padilla, who was captain of the 1936 Philippine team that placed fifth in the Berlin Olympics, was elected to the senate in 1957. Webb, who was part of the 1972 national team that participated in the Munich Olympics, was elected a senator in 1992. Apparently Jaworski was able to parley his popularity as a basketball celebrity to amass almost 9 million votes, enough for him to place ninth in the twelve-slot senatorial contest. Unfortunately, his career was largely unremarkable and he gained a reputation as one of the senate's less eloquent members

for shying away from legislative debates and publicly airing his opinion on national issues. He eventually lost his reelection bid in 2004, getting around 3.5 million less votes than the last placed elected senator (COMELEC 2009). His failed reelection bid was taken by antipopulist groups as a sign of the Filipinos' "political maturity," when voters started to choose candidates based on political platform and record in public service rather than popularity as media personalities. Bobby Tan, a call center employee, recalls how irked he was by the insistence of his father, a die-hard Ginebra fan, that he should also vote for the reelection of Jaworski. He thinks that the former senator is *bobo* (unintelligent) who does not deserve a seat among the highly esteemed members of the legislative body; his father, a fan, thought otherwise.

The Team of Fouls

Despite its relative success in the PBA, Ginebra also received its fair share of criticisms. In particular, their rough defensive style had been denounced repeatedly for bordering into something outright dirty and unsportsmanlike. The analysis of the Ginebra's defense at the end of the 1989 PBA season begins with this line: the team likes "to make you feel their defense. They play it rugged and physical. [The team] intimidates, threatens, scares but gets the job done" (Henson 1989, 48). One of their well-known players, Rudy Distrito, was nicknamed "The Destroyer" for his feared defensive tactics that had a couple of opposing players ending up with major injuries. Hence, the "people's team" was also known as the "team of fouls" for its proclivity to commit excessive physical contact with and against their opponents. Furthermore, that Ginebra, the team's name, was also the brand name of the best-selling gin in the country was proven to be both a boon and a bane to the team. While the popularity of the alcoholic drink across the country enabled them to connect with ordinary Filipino fans, the association with the intoxicating spirit also highlighted the team's tendency for violence and rowdiness. This negative image was easily taken as a reflection of the socially disruptive behavior of the "uncivilized" masses with whom Ginebra was mainly associated as the PBA's "perennial underdog team."

When Ginebra Loses: The Subaltern Struggle as Spectacle

Just like taking a few shots of the popular Ginebra gin, trying to understand the phenomenal popularity of the team, and more generally the profound

influence of basketball on the everyday life of most Filipinos, has also proven to be quite intoxicating. Alexander Wolff (2002), a well-known American basketball writer, described the widespread practice and following of basketball in the Philippines simply as “madness.” Indeed, the term “fans”—used here interchangeably with spectators, supporters, and followers—refers to the “emotionally committed ‘consumer’ of sport events” (Guttman 1986, 6) that is generally viewed as “an obsessed individual: someone who has an intense interest in a certain team” or celebrity (Crawford 2004, 19). Nevertheless, despite the apparent irrationality of their actions, the study of fandom reveals a perceptive view not only about the contours of basketball as a “hegemonic sporting culture” (Markovits and Hellerman 2001) but also of the larger cultural landscape of the society where it is situated.

Particularly because of Ginebra’s widespread popularity as the “team of the masses,” an examination of the experience and rationalities of its loyal fans can reveal certain points that can help us understand the phenomenological popularity of basketball in the Philippines. Because “spectators not only watch games but also identify with the team themselves” (Mandelbaum 2004, 31), they can provide something that historian Reynaldo Iletto (1979, 11) refers to as an “opportunity to study the workings of the popular mind.” With these assumptions, we shall look into two novelty songs, which were written as Ginebra’s “fan anthem” in the wake of its celebrated championship run in 1997. These songs are sources of valuable insights into the mentality and the worldview of basketball’s most avid followers. Essentially, they provide a basis for a phenomenological analysis of the historical and social significance of this sport in the Philippines.

The first song, *Pag Natatalo Ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Loses), was written and recorded by Gary Granada (1997b), a multiawarded local folk singer who is a self-confessed Ginebra fan. The song generally reflects the sentiment of a male follower who demonstrates a strong attachment to his favorite team. It relates his experience of watching one of the usual jam-packed venues that was a common sight in every Ginebra game. The song was written in Filipino but the author’s English translation is written beside the text for reference. Its melodic and lyric structure follows that of a professional basketball game, with the verses written to follow a chronological categorization; from the opening quarters, to the second half, with the momentum gradually building up to the last few minutes of play.

Sinusundan ko ang bawat laro	I follow every game
Ng koponan kong naghihingalo	Of my struggling team
Sa bawat bolang binibitaw	For every ball they try to shoot
Di mapigilang mapapasigaw	I can't help but shout
Kahit hindi relihiyoso	Even if I'm not religious
Naaalala ko ang mga santo	I remember the saints
O San Miguel, Santa Lucia	Oh, Saint Michael; Oh, Saint Lucy
Sana manalo ang Ginebra	I pray that Ginebra wins

Here the fan relates how he tries to *religiously* attend every match that Ginebra plays. He is like a faithful follower who was enchantingly attracted to the rituals of the game, the veneration of athlete-heroes, and the celebration of one’s identity as part of a larger congregation. Allen Guttman (1986, 178), in his seminal work, *Sports Spectators*, notes how fans “experience something akin to worship.” In fact, the general tendency of equating sport followership to religion has been a common opinion that reflects the tremendous influence of sports on many people in the contemporary world. The same was true with basketball in the Philippines in the 1990s, and for sure even now. According to Recah Trinidad (1990, 4–5), “Today’s Filipino is basically a man of two religions. He is a god-fearing Christian and an irrepressible basketball devotee.” He added, “[w]hile he makes it a point to attend Sunday Mass, at times rather reluctantly, he willingly worships through most of the week in the national basketball temple or at his very home before the TV.” In the song, the faithfulness of the fan to his favorite team was shown in how he continued to attend their games even if they were already struggling to win.

Apparently, there is a sense of imbalance in this Christian-basketball fan dualism that Trinidad argued as part of Filipino religiosity. The character in the songs readily admits that he is not really *relihiyoso* (religious) but nonetheless calls on the saints—San Miguel and Santa Lucia—to intercede so Ginebra would win the game. Wittily, San Miguel and Santa Lucia refer not only to the venerated Catholic figures but are also names of other clubs playing in the PBA. The San Miguel team is owned by San Miguel Corporation, the Philippines’s largest conglomerate whose flagship enterprise

manufactures beer; while the Santa Lucia team is named after its sponsor, one of the biggest real estate developers in the country. This comical play of words reflects the ubiquitous presence of religious symbols and the prominent location of the Catholic Church in Philippine society.

On the whole, religion, either literally as Catholicism or metaphorically as basketball, is a refuge from the challenges and vagaries of everyday life. The coliseum, just like the church, provides the basketball fan a sense of community and belonging, inspired by rituals that celebrate suffering and sacrifice, and a promise that underdogs will have a chance to redeem themselves in the end. In addition, the coliseum and the church are just some of the few places in this knowledge-driven age where science or even rational thinking is not necessary in order to make sense of the world.

Sa Coliseum at Astrodome	In the Coliseum and Astrodome, they're
Nakikisiksikan hanggang bubong	filled to the rafters but I still squeeze in
Nang-aalaska at nanggugulo Pag nagifree throw ang katalo	Taunting and trying to disrupt An opposing player's free throw shot
Ang barangay ay nagdiriwang Halftime ay kinse ang lamang	The barangay is celebrating At halftime we are ahead by 15
Cameraman, huwag mo lang kukunan	But cameraman, just don't take the shots
Si senador at congressman	Of senator and congressman

If basketball is indeed a religion, its games are far from mere solemn rituals. On the contrary, they resemble a major fiesta (feast-day celebration) where the crowd, the revelry, and the overall atmosphere of gaiety prevail. In fact, the cheering and taunting border and occasionally spill over to raucous celebration and hostility toward the opposing players and fans. However, the confrontations rarely result in violence, which is peculiar among football fans in Europe. One of the main reasons for the absence of hooliganism lies in the nature of fandom in the PBA. Since the teams are not rooted in a particular city or province, the connection among their fans is held together by

their *symbolic* interest in a particular team and not by a *real* bond that results from a common ethnic background, geographical identification, or simply from the interlocking experience of neighbors.

For instance, the word “barangay” mentioned in the fifth line of the stanza refers to the smallest political unit in the Philippines, often a cluster of small villages believed to have had a tradition of strong communitarianism. However, this term has also been used since the 1990s to refer to the throng of loyal fans that comes to support the Ginebra team in its every match. The characterization became very popular such that the team officially changed its name to Barangay Ginebra in 1999. The barangay in the context of fandom in the PBA, therefore, is utterly an “imagined community” whose temporal and geographic coordinates transcend the confines of a locality (Anderson 1991; cf. Nash 2000). This absence of geographical rootedness has spared the league’s fans of the inherent animosity between localities that is brought about by a history of conflicts and other forms of rivalry, both real and imagined. More often, the taunting and the disruptive behaviors mentioned in the song are not meant to invite a fight with the rival fans but to provoke aggression and a more physical contest between the opposing players. Hence, just like the colonial cockfight, violence remains mostly as a spectacle that rarely spills out of the arena.

Moreover, a number of studies have underscored how modern sports offer a sense of belonging that is increasingly fading in other aspects of contemporary life (Delaney 2001; Stone 2007). In his seminal work, *Consuming Sport*, Crawford (2004, 52) observes that as “‘traditional’ sources of community have begun to decline, such as those based upon family and local networks, the sense of community offered by contemporary sport becomes increasingly important.” Along the same proposition, Sean Brown (2007, 17) suggests that one’s affiliation with a sports team is a way of dealing with “the incongruencies of a world seeking more freedom whilst lamenting the loss of a secure world.” Among the Ginebra followers, however, being a fan is seen mainly not as a replacement to a lost sense of community but as a site for the continual expression and celebration of communitarian values and relations. Andy Chua, a fan, saw his frequent attendance of Ginebra games as an opportunity to unwind with officemates who turned into some of his closest friends after working with them in the past seven years.

Apart from basketball, following the spectacle surrounding electoral politics has long been a favorite pastime in the Philippines (Paras 1997).

The PBA, as the last part of the stanza suggests, enables these two attractions to converge. In the 1990s, the widespread popularity of the country's premier league caught the attention of the nation's political leaders who eventually became regular fixtures in its games. One of the most notable attendees was former Pres. Joseph Estrada who, during that decade, made a remarkable ascent from senator to vice-president before making it all the way to Malacañang largely by presenting himself as "the hero of the masses."

Just like Estrada whose family owned a professional basketball team for a time, many of the politicians who made conspicuous visits during the matches were true basketball fans. However, it was quite apparent that, despite their interest in the sport, they came to the coliseum primarily for public exposure to attract the attention of live spectators and television audiences who constituted a large chunk of the voting population. As expected, the league officials openly welcomed these VIPs because their presence helped to raise and legitimize the PBA's status as one of the country's top sport attractions. Most of the fans, however, thought that their limelight-grabbing presence desecrated their hallowed coliseum with excessive politicking, which was associated with corruption and the overall moral decay dragging the country into a deep social crisis. Thus, the stanza ends with the fan pleading to the cameraman not to take a shot of the senator and the congressman who came to see the game.

Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Paminsan-minsan lang ito	It's only once in a while
Gumaang ang nabibigatang puso	To lighten my burdened heart
Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Sa munting hilig kong ito	This small pastime that I love
Kung hindi baka mag-away pa tayo	Or, we might just end up in a fight

The refrain shows the main character's awareness of the eccentricity of his preoccupation with the Ginebra team. This is why he pleads to others not to mind his actions. Ironically, his appeal for consideration and sympathy

reflects the fan's marginal position despite the overall popularity of basketball in the Philippines. A second look, however, reveals that the protagonist no longer sees himself as a great fan in this part of the song. Rather, he now speaks as an ordinary individual who considers his passion in watching Ginebra games as a simple pastime, a diversion that temporarily takes him away from the everyday grind of life and the worries of an unforeseeable future.

The above stanza also brings to mind the story of Boy Ramon, a plantation worker from Davao City whose obsession in following Ginebra games in their lone family television set is tolerated by other members of his household who are not basketball fans. In most evenings, his wife and three daughters would religiously follow their favorite soap operas while he retreats to his workshop. Inside the small room he often finds his hands full repairing electrical appliances, a "sideline" (second job) that he keeps for extra income. However, once or twice a week when there is a Ginebra game, his wife voluntarily retreats to the kitchen while his daughters chat or do their homeworks so their father can indulge in his occasional time for leisure (*panagsa nga lingaw-lingaw*). Toward the end of our conversation, Boy proudly shared how his wife and daughters now join him from time to time in watching Ginebra games on TV. He showed great satisfaction for his family's sympathy even if, he added with a smile, *tuyon gyud nila nga modapig sa kalaban* (they mischievously cheer for whichever team) that plays against Ginebra.

Nang 2nd half ay nag-umpisa	When the 2nd half started
Puro palpak ang tira nila	All their shots were sloppy misses
Offensive foul si Noli Locsin	Noli Locsin was called for an offensive foul
At si Gayoso na-traveling	And Gayoso for illegal traveling
Sa kakaibang shorts ni Jaworski	In his old-fashioned jersey, Jaworski
Ay ipinasok ang sarili	Put himself in the game
Kalagitnaan ng 4th quarter	In the middle of 4th quarter
Tabla ang score 88-all	The score is tied, 88-all

Drive ni Pido ay nasupalpal	Pido's driving shot was blocked
Defense nila na-technical	They were called for a defensive violation
Parang gumuho ang aking daigdig	My world seemed to have crumbled
Nang maagawan si Bal David	When the ball was stolen from Bal David
Nang bumusina ng last 2 minutes	Just before the last 2-minute horn blew
3 points ni Hizon ay nagmintis	Hizon missed his 3-point shot
Kunsumisyon ay nagpatong-patong	My exasperation started to pile up
Graduate si Marlou at si Ong	When Marlou and Ong got fouled out

These parts of the song illustrate the actions happening in the second half of a basketball game when the contest is supposed to intensify and become more exciting for the spectators. The fan's account features some of the most prominent Ginebra players from their celebrated 1997 PBA Commissioner's Cup championship team. However, instead of doing heroic maneuvers to give their team the victory, they altogether fumbled their plays, started to miss their shots, had their ball passes intercepted, and committed all sorts of game violations. Apart from being a basketballesque dramatization of a subaltern struggle, the verses also portray how the fans identify with the difficulties their basketball heroes were suffering. Thus the lyrics describe how the protagonist's world came "crumbling down" after the ball was stolen from Bal David, the team's most skillful dribbler, or how his "exasperation started to pile up" when Marlou Aquino and Wilmer Ong, their best defenders, were disqualified from playing during the rest of the game after reaching the given foul limit of six.

Just as in the cockfight, the basketball game turns into what Aguilar (1998, 49) calls as a "liminal period": a moment of disjuncture when "history and social structure can be momentarily suspended and phenomenologically forgotten as the players . . . make for pure fantastic entertainment." Sporting spectacles such as basketball are diversions not necessarily because

they make their spectators momentarily forget their troubles. Rather, they take their fans away from the anger, joy, and grief of everyday life by making them feel that their burdens are shared, albeit symbolically, by the heroes of the hard court. A Ginebra game, therefore, is commonly held as a *spectacle of subaltern struggle* where the hardships of an underdog team courageously fighting it out against a more formidable opponent becomes an exciting public attraction.

Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Paminsan-minsan lang ito	It's only once in a while
Gumaang ang nabibigatang puso	To lighten my burdened heart
Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Kahit na kahit paano	Regardless, in whatever way
Sumaya ng bahagya itong mundo	My world may be a little brighter

The changes in the refrain's last two lines alter the song's overall tone from confrontational to the imploring of sympathy. The mood swing reflects the fluctuation of the spectator's emotional balance as he goes along with the exciting flow of the game. As a "fanatic," engaged in some kind of "madness," the avid basketball follower experiences some lucid moments that allow him to come to his senses. Just like the downbeat tone of the refrain, a fast-paced basketball game is also interspersed with timely breaks set for the quarterly huddles, halftime shows, and momentum-altering timeouts that give both players and fans opportunities to put all the actions in perspective.

24 seconds, lamang ng lima	With 24 seconds left, a five-point lead
Ang kalaban, bola pa nila	Our foes have, and they possess the ball
Dumidilim ang aking paningin	My vision is dimming in anger
Ang tenga ko nagpapanting	My ears are ringing with rage
Bumabalik sa aking isip	In my mind I begin to recall

Ang nakaaway ko noong Grade 6	The boy I fought with in Grade 6
Parang gusto ko nang magkagiyera	I feel like there should be war
Pag natatalo ang Ginebra	Whenever Ginebra loses

From a brief period of calmness, the mood of the spectator swings back to that of an aggressive and belligerent fan. Fuming at the sight of his team that is already on the verge of losing, his anger even brings back memories of a boy with whom he had a fight in elementary school. This nostalgic reconstruction of his frustration with his beloved team's pending defeat points to the deeper meaning of what is hitherto an unremarkable experience. In a larger context, this episode resonates with Trinidad's (1990) argument about the primordial link of Philippine basketball to the sixteenth-century Battle of Mactan as a symbol of "defiance" against external aggression. With a simple act of remembering, an ordinary incident becomes an intrinsic aspect of one's biography just as an isolated event is readily made part of a nation's history. The fan's sentiment reflects how the subaltern struggle is often driven by repressed emotions and subconscious desires that are occasionally awakened under extreme circumstances.

Galit ako sa mga pasista	The fascists I hate
Galit ako sa mga imperyalista	The imperialists I hate
Feel na feel kong maging aktibista	My passion is to be an activist
Pag natatalo ang Ginebra	Whenever Ginebra loses

The coda presents a more contemporary form of defiance that is turning into a common occurrence, especially with the growing public displeasure over the dysfunctional state of governance in the country. For instance, the first two lines mirror the usual content of protest placards or mass demonstration speeches. However, these slogans do not only call for reforms in the Philippine government but more deliberately express the objection of many Filipinos to the long-standing alliance of the country with the United

States, which they believe is exploitative and, as the lines suggest, is fascistic and imperialistic. In this instance, basketball, which is largely considered a symbol and concrete manifestation of American imperialism, ironically becomes a venue for its subversion.

When Ginebra Wins: Sport Victory as Symbolic Emancipation

The second piece, *Pag Nananalo Ang Ginebra* (When Ginebra Wins), was also written by Gary Granada (1997a) but sung by Bayang Barrios, a well-acclaimed female folk singer. Her performance shows how sports fandom, a practice long associated with masculinity, has crossed the gender divide and increasingly captures the interest of many female basketball fans. Evidently the song was composed as the more optimistic rendering of the first one; the introduction and refrain in the earlier song were retained and the rest of the lyrics provided the other side of the story as narrated in Granada's version.

Sinusundan ko ang bawat laro	I follow every game
Ng koponan kong naghihingalo	Of my struggling team
Sa bawat bolang binibitaw	For every ball they try to shoot
Di mapigilang mapapasigaw	I can't help but shout
Kahit hindi relihiyoso	Even if I'm not religious
Naaalala ko ang mga santo	I remember the saints
O San Miguel, Santa Lucia	Oh, Saint Michael; Oh, Saint Lucy
Sana manalo ang Ginebra	I pray that Ginebra wins

As explained earlier, these lines use religion as a metaphor to explain the "devotion" of Ginebra fans to their favorite team. However, apart from finding "spiritual refuge" in the coliseum, there are also other more perceptible reasons that attract people to the Ginebra team in particular as well as to basketball fandom in general. The absence of affiliation of the PBA clubs with a particular locality has left them with no immediate support base that is peculiar in professional basketball leagues around the world. Instead, teams largely gather their core of loyal supporters from the employees of their

sponsoring companies. It demonstrates the origin of the PBA as an amateur industrial league, which was organized to promote physical fitness among factory workers as well as to provide entertainment to offset the drudgery of working in the assembly lines. For instance, employees of San Miguel Corp. (SMC), the Philippines's largest conglomerate that owns the Ginebra franchise, have access to free or discounted tickets that allow them to attend games. Regularly the company even provides uniforms, banners, and other cheering materials that distinguish them from the other supporters during Ginebra matches. Aside from the tickets and other freebies, however, many workers consider cheering for their company's team as an expression of pride and loyalty to their employers. Andy Chua, an SMC employee, relates how going to its games makes him feel the honor of being part of a prestigious company. This revelation reflects Wolff's (2002, 305) observation in Japan "where workers at Nippon Express [company that owns a baseball club] . . . dutifully filled the stands and sang the company anthem" during home games.

Apart from having a more direct affiliation with the team, the employee-fans also form an actual community forged by the shared experiences of its members as fellow workers, or as long-term supporters who occupy the same spot in the rafters. They serve as the core residents of the barangay, the imaginary village that refers to the large number of followers who flock to watch Ginebra's every game. The energy of the cheering crowd often emanates from the core group and reverberates around the coliseum throughout most of the contest. With the incomparable support from the barangay, the team in effect enjoys a "home-court advantage" in each of their matches. Thus, the reference to the other teams/companies (i.e., San Miguel and Santa Lucia) portrays how boundaries are defined and identities are marked out in a league that lacks the usual categories of differentiation, such as community or regional affiliation.

Ngunit ang aga nilang nagkalat	But they started to fumble early on
Bawat diskarte nasisilat	For every move they're out-maneuvered
Nagkakasundo kaming magkakampi	My fellow spectators and I agree

Na ang labo kasi ng refereee	That the referees are cheating us
Ang barangay parang napeste	The barangay looks pestilence-stricken
Natambakan agad kami ng bente	We're behind by 20 points so soon
Parang bansa'y nagkaleche- leche	The nation seems mired in disasters
At nareelect ang presidente	And the president has been reelected

This stanza shows how the spirit of the barangay travels from the anxious fans to the fumbling team before it bounces far enough to represent the different social problems that are perceived as essential obstacles to strengthening the nation. The first two lines are common depictions of a subaltern struggle, which serves as the launching point to introduce the characters and the storyline of a soap opera. It lays down the baseline condition of poverty, affliction, and suffering from where heroes would rise to liberate themselves and their respective communities from a long period of suffering and oppression. The song reflexively appropriates the initial bad plays that beset the team to symbolize the deepening crisis that falls upon the nation. To add more drama, the subsequent lines even suggest how the referees conspire to make the situation more difficult for the team. The referees, who are tasked to uphold the rules of the game, end up deliberately committing mistakes that further confound the predicament of the downtrodden team. In the context of the nation, the ultimate referee is the president who is responsible for the welfare and protection of the people. The failure of the Philippine government to promote a better life for its citizens and its inability to shield them from various social ills has been understood largely as a betrayal of the people's trust given to the highest elected official of the land. Hence, the stanza ends with a portrayal of the reelection of the president as a national disaster (Ramos, at that time, was heavily criticized for expressing a desire to extend his term despite a constitutional prohibition).

These early trials, however, are viewed as a temporary condition that merely sets the stage for the rise of the underdog. The Philippines, for instance, is often seen as a young nation (with full independence obtained

only in 1946) or as a society that recently emerged from the “dark age” of the Marcos dictatorship and is currently enduring an aftermath crisis before finally emerging as a politically stable and economically developed country in the future. The golden age of professional basketball in the 1990s, for instance, was also a time of great national optimism when the country was dubbed as the new “tiger cub”⁵ for its remarkable progress. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm was dampened by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and a worsening political crisis after Joseph Estrada was forced to step down from the presidency by the second EDSA revolution in 2001 because of charges of massive corruption.

As in the Ginebra team’s case, the big bad guys initially beat up the underdogs before the latter are able to gather all their remaining energy, fight back, and dramatically prevail over their more advantaged opponents. When asked about their tendency to win (or lose) in exciting, closely contested games, Jaworski answered: “I’ve noticed that when we’re the underdogs, that’s when we win the game. *Pag kami naman ang lumamang ng mga* [If we are ahead by let’s say] 19 points, that’s when I feel uneasy. *Kasi nawawala ang* [Because we lose the essential] vitamins F and S. You know, Fighting and Spirit [*sic*]” (Cantor and Barrameda 2000, 101).

Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Paminsan-minsan lang ito	It’s only once in a while
Gumaang ang nabibigatang puso	To lighten my burdened heart
Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Sa munting hilig kong ito	This small pastime that I love
Kung hindi baka mag-away pa tayo	Or, we might just end up in a fight

The refrain, as in the previous song, allows the fan to refocus the story from its larger social implications back to her personal sentiments. It presents Ginebra fandom as a pastime that can be consuming, even addictive, making it incomprehensible for other people who are not sports followers. Hence, the main character, in the last two lines, implores others not to mind what she is doing or they might just clash. This part sounds like a threat of a personal fight if she is not tolerated, but the way it is combined with the rest

of the stanza makes this line more of an appeal for consideration to avoid conflict rather than a form of intimidation to force her will. Hence, it is a request to allow for her self-withdrawal than a warning to leave her alone. This situation shows that, despite its nature as a public leisure interest, sports fandom is also a highly personal pursuit, like a spiritual retreat that enables a person to find solitude. Sports psychologist Daniel Wann and colleagues (2001, 39; cf. Wann 1997) suggest that fandom is a way of escaping and its practice can be “particularly prevalent during personally difficult and/or stressful times. He notes that historically, many individuals have used sport spectating as a diversion during wartime.” Hence, rather than just a fleeting pastime, sports fandom can be a symbolic emancipation, a coping mechanism that enables a person to conquer an overly distressing social condition such as prolonged armed conflicts and abject poverty.

Nang 2nd half ay nag-umpisa	When the second half got going
Nag-umpisa ang ratsada nila	They started to speed away
Ipit na pukol ni Noli Locsin	One difficult shot of Noli Locsin
Kahit finoul, pasok pa rin	Though he was fouled, the ball went in
Ang double-team nila’y walang epekto	Their double-teaming defense had no effect
Sa alley hoop at alahoy ni Marlou	On Marlou’s alley hoop and tricky shots
Sunod-sunod sa magkabilang kanto	Consecutive scores from different corners
3 points ni Hizon at Jarencio	3-point shots of Hizon and Jarencio
Opensa ay nagsaling-saling	The players took turns in their offense
Sa hustle ni Macky at Benny Cheng	With the hustle of Macky and Benny Cheng
Halos ang bola ay di makatawid	The ball hardly crossed the half-court line

Sa mga nakaw ni Flash David	With the interceptions of Flash David
Ang execution ay swabeng-swabe	So smooth was their execution
Sa mga plays ni Coach Jaworski	Under Coach Jaworski's direction
Biglang umugong ang buong palibot	Suddenly loud cheers filled the arena
Mukhang maglalaro na rin si Dudut	Dudut, it seems, will finally play

The song's lens now refocuses on the hard court action as the game moves to the last half of the competition. By this time, the underdog starts to experience a reversal of fortune as the team, finally, is able to make good plays and tries to cut back the lead of its opponent. Apart from sheer luck, this comeback rally is, of course, achieved through self-sacrifice, teamwork, and unity. In short, the team once again has become the idealized barangay, a small community that faces calamities or other adversities as one cohesive unit of hardworking, unselfish, and dedicated individuals. "The difficult shot of Noli Locsin," "Marlou's alley hoop," "3-point shots of Hizon and Jarencio," "the hustle of Macky and Benny Cheng," "the interceptions of Flash David," and "Coach Jaworski's direction": these portrayals present the different members of the Ginebra team who make use of their individual basketball skills to contribute to the team's success.

Aside from their cohesiveness, the team also achieves recognition for its resilience. Ginebra is well known for not getting discouraged by its opponent's big lead; they have become legendary for fighting it out until the game's last buzzer sounded. In the team, no one embodies the word resilience more than Jaworski himself. Among the pioneers who played when the PBA was established in 1975, he was the last one to retire. Three years before he finally hung his jersey in 1998, Ginebra picked his son Robert Jr. in the second round of the PBA Draft, thereby making an international record for the first father-son tandem in professional sports. Unfortunately, the two were not able to play at the same time in a game since Robert Sr. was already at the tail end of his career and had largely concentrated on coaching. For his part, Robert Jr. also did not get a lot of playing time as he still needed more training and exposure to improve on his play. Many

believed then that Robert Jr. was not really good enough to enter the professional league but was drafted, nonetheless, so the father and son tandem could provide more attraction for the league. Thus, the song highlights in the last line of the stanza the wild cheers that erupt from the stands when Robert Jr. (more popularly known as Dudut) is seen to be moving to check into the game.

Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Paminsan-minsan lang ito	It's only once in a while
Gumaang ang nabibigatang puso	To lighten my burdened heart
Pagbigyan nyo na ako	Just let me do this
Kahit na kahit paano	Regardless, in whatever way
Sumaya ng bahagya itong mundo	My world may be a little brighter

Just as a last minute timeout, the repetition of the refrain here enables the narrator to take a breather before the crunch time. It is also a reminder that the great deal of passion and energy that radiates from a sporting spectacle emanates from the people themselves, making them an integral aspect of the attraction.

Tatlong minuto pa ang natitira	Three minutes are left in the game
Nang kami ay nakahabol na Sa isang iglap nagpalit ng score	When our team finally caught up In a flash the score changed
Lamang na kami 99-94	We are ahead, 99-94
Bumabalik sa aking isip	In my mind I begin to recall
Ang manliligaw ko nuong Grade 6	My suitor when I was in Grade 6
Napapatawad ko na ang Alaska	I can already forgive Alaska
Pag nananalo ang Ginebra	Whenever Ginebra wins

This part of the song shows the moment when the underdog catches up with the stronger adversary during the last few minutes of the game. Inside the arena, this is a moment of wild frenzy, a climactic period when loud cheers echo from the live spectators to the millions of TV viewers who watch the game from their homes, in pubs, and in many other places. Quoting from José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Aguilar (1998, 49) describes a cockfighting scene during the Spanish colonial period where "an underdog red's victory became even more emotionally charged and imbued with patriotic fervor: 'a wild shouting greets the *sentencia* (the winner's proclamation), a shouting that is heard from all over town, prolonged, uniform, and lasting for some time,' so that everyone, including women and children, would know and share in the rejoicing that the underdog had won over the dominant power." Just like the raucous cheering that comes with the victory of the underdog cock, the chanting of *Ginebra! Ginebra! Ginebra!* allows for "social catharsis at least in the fictive world of gaming" (ibid., 49). Leo Prieto, a former league commissioner, sums up the importance of the PBA as a form of popular entertainment. He said: "What else is there for the people besides the PBA? Going to the movies. The games are exciting and people can stay for hours. You get identified with the teams and you are free to insult the referees and call them all kinds of names, get all that pent-up feeling out of your system, which you cannot do in the movie house" (Cantor and Barrameda 2000, 16). Thus, the "hoops hysteria" that comes with the triumphant win of the underdog team becomes a symbolic emancipation shared by the many other underdogs outside the basketball court.

O kay ganda ng aking umaga	Oh, how lovely is my morning
Feeling ko wala akong asawa	I feel like I don't have a husband
At ang dati kong boyfriend ay hiwalay na	And my ex-boyfriend has split up
Pag nananalo ang Ginebra	Whenever Ginebra wins

The coda is a humorous description of the fan's feelings whenever Ginebra wins. The team's victory gives her a profound sense of freedom; she herself feels liberated from the everyday troubles of keeping a marital relationship in contrast to the lighthearted relationship that she had with

her Grade 6 suitor. Her joy makes her feel as though she has no husband or has just broken up with her boyfriend. All in all, for many of the people, being a basketball follower is not just a fleeting experience that disappears as one leaves the arena or turns off the TV after a game. It lingers on, in their imagination, in their conversations, in their relationships, and in their everyday lives.

Apart from winning the 1997 Commissioner's Cup crown in a very exciting fashion, which became the inspiration for these two songs, Ginebra also had a couple of celebrated championship runs in 1986 and 1988, as well as a successful come-from-behind victory in the Open Conference Finals in 1991. After the turn of the millennium, the new-look team, which was anchored by some of the league's best players, won four championships between 2004 and 2008. This is a remarkable feat that took the twentieth-century Ginebra teams eleven years to achieve.

However, despite having superior talents and a vastly improved winning record, the recent team cannot compare with the immense popularity of the Ginebra squads of the late 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps most of its loyal fans have also retired since the departure of Jaworski, their beloved hero. Surely, the team has also been affected by the overall decline of the PBA as the premier sporting spectacle in the country, after the emergence of other sports such as boxing and billiards, the increasing popularity of American professional basketball that can be watched live through cable television, and the rise of local collegiate basketball leagues. More importantly, by having bonafide superstars and dominant performances, Ginebra has become too good to be a "perennial underdog squad" and, consequently, has gradually lost its image as the "team of the masses." Moreover, the waning popularity of Ginebra is also reflective of the overall decline of the PBA, which came as part of the overall social upheaval that was brought about by the advent of globalization at the turn of the millennium.

Conclusion

In sum, part of the appeal of Ginebra, and of Philippine basketball in general, lies in its representation as a "game of the masses" that embodies the ideals and sentiments of the millions of poor and marginalized Filipinos. This was a major divergence from its early years during the American colonial period when basketball was regarded as the "bourgeois sport" because

of its strong following from the educated, middle-class sector of society. This process of “popularization” is not unique to Philippine basketball since it is seen in almost every major sport around the world. For instance, cricket and soccer have undergone this crucial shift, which has served as the foundation of their widespread appeal. Beyond this important turn of events, however, this article has demonstrated how the popularity of basketball in the Philippines partly hinges on the sport’s evolution into a subaltern spectacle, an important site where the struggles of ordinary people are symbolically played out in the basketball arena. Generally, while “rooting for the underdog” on the game floor (or in front of the television), Filipino basketball followers are clearly not only cheering for their favorite teams but also for themselves, and for the many other real underdogs outside the playing court.

Notes

I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments and suggestions, and Jun Aguilar for his encouragement as I finalized this article amid my family and other responsibilities.

- 1 “Ending” is a two-digit lottery where the result is taken by combining the last digits (hence the name) of a PBA game’s final score. For instance, if the final score between two teams is 105–97, the winning number will be 57.
- 2 Gilbey’s Gin, St. George Whiskies, Añejo Rum 65s, Gordon’s Gin Boars, and Barangay Ginebra Gin Kings.
- 3 From 1975 to 2003, a single PBA season was comprised of three conferences (in 1993 these three conferences were named All-Filipino, Commissioner’s, and Governors Cups). Thus there were three champions in each of the conference in one year instead of the usual one annual champion.
- 4 Jaworski, however, left the PBA without formally announcing his retirement. There is a constant rumor that he will resume his professional basketball career.
- 5 This term was coined to refer to the countries that had shown promise to follow the industrial growth of the Asian Tigers (South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore) during the Asian Miracle years (1980s–1990s). The Ramos administration even popularly used the slogan “Philippines 2000!” to mark the turn of the millennium as the year when the country would have achieved the status of a Newly-Industrialized Country (NIC). Unfortunately, the Asian financial crisis shattered this optimism (Ramos 1994).

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