

OUTLOOK

Wrestling with conflict between sports, faith



David Brooks says as a Christian, Jeremy Lin admits he struggles in trying to manage the ethos of the NBA and his religious beliefs.

Jeremy Lin is anomalous in all sorts of ways. He's a Harvard grad in the NBA, an Asian-American man in professional sports. But we shouldn't neglect the biggest anomaly. He's a religious person in professional sports.

We've become accustomed to the faith-driven athlete and coach, from Billy Sunday to Tim Tebow. But we shouldn't forget how problematic this is. The moral ethos of sport is in tension with the moral ethos of faith, whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim.

The moral universe of modern sport is oriented around victory and supremacy. The sports hero tries to perform great deeds in order to win glory and fame. It doesn't really matter whether he has good intentions. His job is to beat his opponents and avoid the oblivion that goes with defeat.

The modern sports hero is competitive and ambitious. (Let's say he's a man, though these traits apply to female athletes as well). He is theatrical. He puts himself on display. He is assertive, proud and intimidating. He makes himself the center of attention when the game is on the line. His identity is built around his prowess. His achievement is measured by how much he can elicit the admiration of other people — the roar of the crowd and the respect of ESPN. His primary virtue is courage — the ability to withstand pain, remain calm under pressure and rise from nowhere to topple the greats. This is what we go to sporting events to see. This sporting ethos pervades modern life and shapes how we think about business, academic and political competition.

But there's no use denying — though many do deny it — that this ethos violates the religious ethos on many levels. The religious ethos is about redemption, self-abnegation and surrender to God.

Ascent in the sports universe is a straight shot. You set your goal, and you climb toward greatness. But ascent in the religious universe often proceeds by a series of inversions: You have to be willing to lose yourself in order to find yourself; to gain everything you have to be willing to give up everything; the last shall be first; it's not about you.

For many religious teachers, humility is the primary virtue. You achieve loftiness of spirit by performing the most menial services. (That's why shepherds are perpetually becoming kings in the Bible.) You achieve your identity through self-effacement. You achieve strength by acknowledging your weaknesses.

You lead most boldly when you consider yourself an instrument of a larger cause.

The most perceptive athletes have always tried to wrestle with this conflict. Sports history is littered with odd quotations from people who try to reconcile their love of sport with their religious creed — and fail.

Jeremy Lin has wrestled with this tension quite openly. In a 2010 interview with the website Patheos, Lin recalled, "I wanted to do well for myself and my team. How can I possibly give that up and play selflessly for God?"

Lin says in that interview that he has learned not to obsess about stats and championships. He continues, "I'm not working hard and practicing day in and day out so that I can please other people. My audience is God. ... The right way to play is not for others and not for myself, but for God. I still don't fully understand what that means; I struggle with these things every game, every day. I'm still learning to be selfless and submit myself to God and give up my game to Him."

The odds are that Lin will never figure it out because the two moral universes are not reconcilable. Our best teacher on these matters is Joseph Soloveitchik, the great Jewish theologian. In *The Lonely Man of Faith and Majesty and Humility*, he argues that people have two natures. First, there is "Adam the First," the part of us that creates, discovers, competes and is involved in building the world. Then, there is "Adam the Second," the spiritual individual who is awed and humbled by the universe as a spectator and a worshipper.

Soloveitchik plays off the text that humans are products of God's breath and the dust of the Earth, and these two natures have different moral qualities, which he calls the morality of majesty and the morality of humility. They exist in creative tension with each other and the religious person shuttles between them, feeling lonely and slightly out of place in both experiences.

Jeremy Lin is now living this creative contradiction. Much of the anger that arises when religion mixes with sport or with politics comes from people who want to deny that this contradiction exists and who want to live in a world in which there is only one morality, one set of qualities and where everything is easy, untragic and clean. Life and religion is more complicated than that.

Brooks is a columnist for The New York Times.



Say no to drug testing for jobless insurance

Costly program would be unfair to U.S. workers

By F. Scott McCown

As part of legislation to extend federal unemployment insurance benefits through 2012, Congress is considering a very bad policy idea: encouraging states to drug test every applicant for unemployment insurance and deny compensation to any who fail. It's such a bad idea that it has twice failed to make it through the Texas House of Representatives, as conservative a legislative body as they come.

The whole thing is really a ploy. The proponents of drug testing are trying to undermine public support for UI by associating UI applicants with drug users. They want the public to think about UI like it does welfare, blaming the unemployed — rather than the economy — for their plight.

Unemployment insurance is not welfare. By definition, people who qualify lost their job through no fault of their own.

They are typically men and women who have worked steadily, often for years or even decades, and have largely covered the cost of their employer's UI tax indirectly through reduced wages.

Congress should not subject these American workers to the indignity of drug testing. In the first place, research shows that American workers are very unlikely to use illegal drugs.

And federal courts have squarely held that mandatory drug testing in situations of this sort violates the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable search and seizures. The courts have held that the Constitution is violated in these cases because there is no individualized suspicion of wrongdoing or special need that outweigh a person's right to keep the government off his back and out of his business.

The personal invasion goes beyond having to pee in a cup. The workers would also have to disclose to the government all the medications they are taking to explain any false positive. And there will be many false positives, subjecting people to searching government inquires in their effort to clear their

name.

Not only is drug testing unnecessary and intrusive, it is expensive.

States would have to create an entire new bureaucracy and pay significant lab costs to drug test every UI applicant in America. New claims for unemployment insurance average about 400,000 a week.

Weeding out false positives can be particularly costly. At a time when states are struggling to fund vital services such as public education, Congress should not encourage them to waste money on such drug testing.

Drug issues should be dealt with in the criminal justice or social services systems, not the UI system. Of course, as I already said, this debate isn't really about drug policy; it's about undermining public support for UI.

But let's talk drug policy.

UI is designed to pay for a family's food, clothing and shelter while the breadwinner finds a new job. What if your brother-in-law foolishly smokes pot, but also works steadily to support your sister and their children? If he loses his job because of the economy, do you really think it's smart to deny his family unemployment benefits, forcing them onto welfare or worse yet, leaving them destitute?

To automatically deny these benefits when an unemployed worker fails a drug test is like imposing a massive, mandatory fine for drug use without any of the discretion or treatment provided by our criminal justice and social services systems.

Such a penalty is both too harsh and counterproductive.

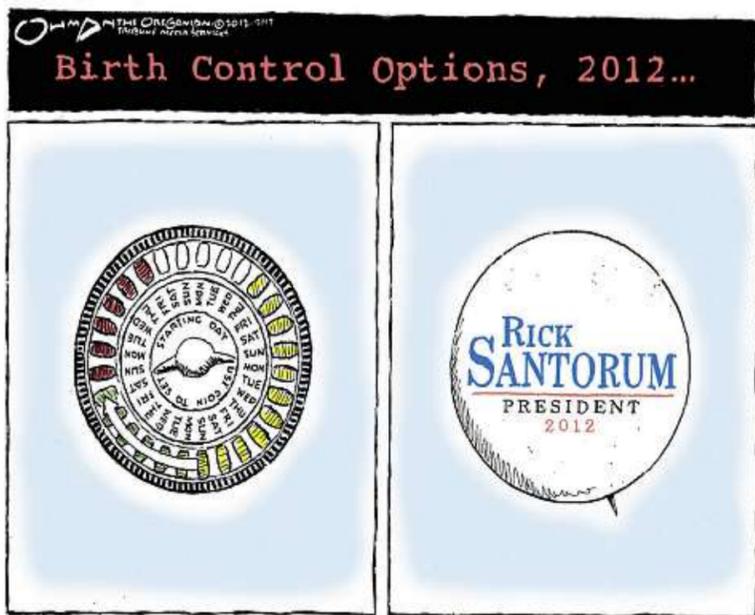
Admittedly, Congress is merely considering giving states an option to drug test applicants. But this is the beautiful part of the ploy.

Congress would take none of the responsibility, while igniting debates in the 50 states. In the face of such a congressional endorsement, it would be hard for states to just say no.

Frankly, how Congress ultimately comes down on this issue is sort of a test itself. Congress says its top priority is the American worker.

But if Congress encourages states to subject American workers to unnecessary, intrusive, expensive and ill-advised drug tests, it is proof positive that for Congress, the American worker really doesn't count for much.

McCown is executive director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities.



Closer union needed to avert the collapse of the eurozone

A Greek default could shift focus to next weak link

By Ted Temzelides

Hardly a day passes without more news about the desperate economic situation in Greece. The country has been circling the abyss for some time now and, for many, default from its crushing public debt appears inevitable. Wouldn't that be the preferred option for everyone involved after all? A Greek default would imply that the country would have to leave the eurozone, and the Greek budget problems would no longer be the eurozone's problems. Greece would be able to write off its debt and adopt a new currency with a lower value that would make its exports more competitive. Finally, those who invested in Greek debt would be able to cut their

losses. A Greek default would mean that the global economy could move on, as it did after the Argentinian default 10 years ago. Sounds like the preferable scenario for everyone. Looking back, analysts and politicians alike agree that Greece should never have entered the eurozone. Hence, many assume that the initial mistake will be corrected if Greece exits.

Not so fast. Unlike Argentina, Greece does not have a sizable export sector that would readily benefit from a weaker currency. The Greek banking system would collapse after a euro exit and any new currency adopted by Greece would likely be heavily devalued, leading to imported goods being unaffordable for most of the population. In addition, it is likely that inflation would creep up and erode the value of the new currency. An underground economy would likely emerge, where the euro or U.S. dollar would dominate important transactions. And what would the European Monetary Union look like after a Greek exit?

Speculators would simply concentrate on betting against the next weak link exiting the common currency. After all, if one country has left the eurozone, surely it could happen again. Portugal, Spain and even Italy could be next. And where would it all end? This is the worst-case scenario for Europe. Hence the efforts to avoid setting a precedent by letting Greece default.

Perhaps we can offer Europe some lessons. What keeps the United States' monetary union strong is not our common language nor the uniformity of economic conditions across member states, but rather our meaningful fiscal union. The transfers across states as part of the federal U.S. budget are far larger than current cross-country transfers in the European Union.

If the European Monetary Union is to survive, Germany will have to dramatically increase its transfers to the periphery countries. At the same time, for these transfers to become fruitful, periphery

countries, including Greece, will need to embrace oversight and structural reforms in order to restore competitiveness and accept that many of their national policies will need to be decided centrally.

Unfortunately, so far, Greece has not delivered on its promises toward privatization and major reform and there are signs that its partners are losing patience. Many ordinary Greeks resent that there is very little to show after two years of sacrifice. But reform does not even have a chance unless Greece remains part of the eurozone. A closer federal union might be the only way for Europe to emerge united out of this crisis. The question is whether such a union is politically attainable in the current climate.

Temzelides is a professor of economics at Rice University and a Baker Institute Rice scholar. His research focuses on the intersection of macroeconomics and energy.