

Review: The (Reduced) History of the games we love



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[San Jose Theater Arts Examiner](#)
June 27, 2011 3:35 pm PT

It's not too often when you can go to a see play and have the preshow music include "Gonna Fly Now," mixed in with Howard Cosell's legendary call "Down Goes Frazier!"

But that's just what happened at San Jose Repertory Theatre. And seriously, how cool is that! **"The Complete World of Sports (abridged)"**, produced by the Reduced Shakespeare Company as part of the Rep's summer season, brought with them a fun sense of play along with plenty of irreverent humor as they explored every sport in the history of the world. From cheese rolling to chess boxing to hurling, and everything in between, the show is 100 minutes of action put on by three guys that run the gamut of everything we know and love about sport.

Does one have to be a sports fan to enjoy the show? Not really, but it certainly helps. As someone who will personally watch the game itself, the wrap-up of the game, and then the wrap-up of the wrap-up, you certainly get used to coach and athlete speak. "One game at a time," or "There's a lot of baseball still to play."

The talented cast of Reed Martin, Austin Tichenor (who also combined to write the show) and Matt Rippy did plenty to make sure that every sport was covered, including some real doozies, such as hurling (never heard of it), cheese rolling (looks terribly fun) and chess boxing (two of my favorite sports which can end with a knockout or a checkmate - ahh yeah!). And while there were plenty of sports and games that were presented in very clever ways such as poetry and song, there were also plenty of beloved sports that were ripe for lampooning.

Such as baseball, which was met with a Pavlovian crashing to the floor in full sleep mode just at the mere mentioning of the game. And curling, with it's underrated dexterity with the broom handles.

While there may have been some irreverent jokes that may have felt flat, there was also a heavy dose of very hilarious improvising that kept the audience on their toes. Walking through the audience looking for celebrities, with an absolutely gut-busting discovery of Martina Navratilova in the front row kept the action fast-paced and fresh. Or a quick gathering of audience members towards the end of the show to participate in the Olympic games with multiple nations being represented. Very funny stuff.

As much as the trio puts off a kind of regular guy vibe, they do things that really show off their talents in a huge way. It was fabulous to see these guys pull off some excellent crooning with a spoof on fight songs.

What makes the show work so well is that it is kind of a potpourri of styles. Harmonies, improvisation, satire, slick and witty puns and some astute observations on how sports and our lives intersect make the show quite the hit. And as a huge sports and baseball fan myself, I'm always down for a good, clean hit up the middle of the theatre.

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