

ARTICLE



## The interplay between resentment, motivation, and performance

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### ABSTRACT

While anger in sports has been explored in philosophy, the phenomenon known as having a ‘chipped shoulder’ (or CSP) has not. In this paper I explore the nature, causes, and effects of playing with a ‘chip on your shoulder’ in order to highlight the interplay between resentment, motivation, and performance. CSP, on my account, involves a lasting grudge, controlled anger, and desire for non-moral payback at being overlooked, slighted, or underestimated in sports presently or at one point in one’s career. I argue that CSP can motivate and thus enhance athletic performance. I also show how athletes can and should have a chipped shoulder forever.

**KEYWORDS** Resentment; motivation; anger; performance; chip on the shoulder; adversity

### Introduction

In a snarky yet nonfictional article for the *Wall Street Journal* entitled ‘A WSJ Investigation: Chips on Shoulders Dominate NFL Draft’, journalists David Benoit and Andrew Beaton report on what they call an epidemic of chipped shoulders at the 2018 NFL draft. Chipped shoulders, on their view, refers to having resentment at being slighted or underestimated in sports. They recognized that more than 18 of the 32 top draft picks in the first round out of seven—who are believed to be the best players in the draft and expected to make millions—had chips on their shoulders. Some of their chips were self-identified as ‘boulders’ and ‘perennial’. Other chips were—according to players—growing bigger (Josh Rosen: Arizona Cardinals), on both shoulders (Lamar Jackson: Baltimore Ravens), and remaining the same throughout their NFL career (Josh Allen: Buffalo Bills). Benoit and Beaton claim that players are driven by these chips and ‘generally NFL teams believe a good chip speeds up a player’s motor’.

The journalists also write, ‘the exact mechanics of the chip remain unclear’. Rather than investigate the phenomenon more deeply by

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interviewing players or consulting the historic record to find a correlation between past self-reporting and statistical success, they reduce chipped shoulders to ‘trying to one up themselves about how slighted they feel’. I think more is going on than what they describe and ultimately dismiss. Analyzing the exact mechanics of the chip is a worthy philosophical endeavor that deserves our attention and examination—for in doing so, we can get a glimpse of the interplay between resentment, motivation, and performance, or so I will argue.

Surprisingly, psychologists and philosophers of sport have not given proper attention to the *chip on the shoulder phenomenon* (CSP). Psychologists have studied the relationship between aggression and anger in sports (Bushman 2002; Sofia and Cruz 2017; Denson 2013) and anger’s impact on sports performance (Ruiz and Hanin 2011; Beedie, Terry, and Lane 2000; Robazza and Bortoli 2007). Philosophers have looked at the nature of sports-specific anger (Tuncel 2018) and the ethical implications of feigned anger in athletes (Fry 2003). But CSP specifically—although commonplace in sports—has been neglected as a subject of intellectual inquiry. Its analysis is needed for what it can illuminate about the human condition, reveal to us about anger, and teach us about disapproval, motivation, and emotions.

In this paper I explore the nature, causes, and effects of playing with a ‘chip on your shoulder’ in order to highlight the interplay between resentment, motivation, and performance. The nineteenth century English idiom’s meaning has changed over the years. Outside of sports it is often used to describe people who are bitter, resentful, easily offended, or ready to fight. But in sports, the idiom takes on a different meaning. CSP, on my account, involves a lasting grudge, controlled anger, and desire for non-moral payback at being overlooked, slighted, or underestimated in sports presently or at one point in one’s career. CSP can also motivate and thus enhance athletic performance. I conclude by arguing that the self-reporting in experiencing CSP and the public’s moral acceptance of it reveals a general understanding of not only its non-threatening moral nature, but more importantly, the motivational import of attributing low-perceptual outlooks of ourselves to others (even when we do not view ourselves in the same way). For this reason, while pain-passing and payback anger can be satisfied (e.g. when an injustice has been rectified or a person punished), I show how athletes can and should have a chipped shoulder forever.

### **The nature of CSP**

CSP involves the belief that an athlete did not get her due presently or at one point in her career because of the actions and decisions of others. The athlete might think that she should have been selected higher in the draft or should not have been traded, benched, or discounted by fans or the

media. The slight makes her feel disrespected and brings about long lasting resentment. Since the appraisals and beliefs involved in anger are 'eudaimonistic', – registering the agent's concerns and values – CSP is typically experienced by athletes who have an affection for the sport and who care about their role and place in it (Nussbaum 2016, 16).

While it is possible to experience anger that leads one to form a negative conception of oneself that also has a negative effect on performance, this is not always the case. It is highly likely that a person with CSP—who also has a particular personality—will, instead of brooding over the slight and remaining passive, be motivated to show or prove to the object of the chip (through athletic performance) that the belief that informed the slight was mistaken. CSP is therefore motivating and is believed to give athletes a motivational edge over an opponent. This is because it assumes that opponents lacking in experiences of CSP, may be comfortable and content because of constant praise; lazy because of success; or, at best; only partially motivated to succeed. Athletes with a chip on their shoulders, on the other hand, are *extremely* motivated to succeed and this manifests itself in training and in contest.

Worries of trying too hard are tenable. Anything that is uncontrollable may negatively impact performance and one might think that CSP is such a thing. However, I do not think that this is a worry about the motivational feature of CSP but rather the techniques and plan of action that may be taken by an individual athlete. An athlete can be extremely motivated but *unwise* in how she implements her plan of action to succeed. She may practice for 10 hours a day and injure her body in the process. Or an athlete can be extremely motivated and *wise* in how she implements her plan of action to succeed. She may be motivated to practice for 10 hours a day but also feed and treat her body in a way that allows it to recover. Whether an athlete's level of motivation is a good thing depends on other factors. Here I am only claiming that the level of motivation in CSP has the potential to positively impact performance in ways that lack of and limited motivation do not. Since performance is key to the phenomenon, we expect that athletes will no longer have a need for the chip once their athletic careers are over. Thus, when I raise the issue of having a 'chip forever' in the next sections, I do not mean 'forever' in the sense of time eternal but time related to their career clock.

Having a chip on your shoulder is not the same as having a grudge or being resentful. While CSP involves these emotions and attitudes it cannot be reduced to them. As illustrated above and will be shown further, CSP is a much more complex phenomenon than being offended or holding something over someone else. CSP is also distinct from anger in sports *simpliciter*. An athlete typically feels anger in sports as a result of not liking a team, losing a game, getting fouled, making a careless mistake, or receiving a poor

call from the referee. These causes fit into the categories of enemy play, unfair play, undesired outcomes of play, and physical harms. Given the causes, it is not surprising that the action tendency of this anger is aggression and violence and that it has been shown to be detrimental to sports performance (Ruiz and Hanin 2011). On the other hand, CSP comes about due to other causes. This is not to say that CSP might not lead to aggression. If it does, then this provides an example of the potential negative aspects of CSP— aspects it is not immune from. I am arguing instead that CSP has a different cause and aim than anger *simpliciter* and this aim is likely to lead the athlete to engage in productive activities in order to achieve her goal rather than aggression.

CSP is also much more complex than anger. Athletes have a chip on their shoulder from getting traded, being overlooked in the draft, having to walk onto a team, not being selected to the All-Star game, losing a starting position, or falling far in the draft. These causes fit into the categories of disapproval, discount, and disrespect and they come about by decisions made by team executives and coaches, and members of the media. While causes of anger *simpliciter* could be done with ill intent (as when a player fouls another player intentionally) or with little thinking at all (as when a referee makes a bad call), CSP causes are often made for ‘best interests of the team’ reasons such as: in order to secure a better player, to save money, or to change the style of play or culture of the team. These are not necessarily moral wrongs.<sup>1</sup> This is the nature of sports. In sports, some players are chosen while other players are not. Players win spots and players lose spots. It is part of the game. However, the moral/non-moral and justified/unjustified evaluation of the reason does not determine the aptness of CSP. It is the fact of the matter (i.e. that the cause happened and it happened to *them*) that makes CSP fitting. CSP is fitting for an athlete whether that person ‘deserved’ to be picked or not, for example. And what happened to them has an impact on how they are motivated to respond to it.

Stopping at this point would be too quick if I did not say more about this *them*—for the athlete with a disposition to engage in CSP is a particular kind of person. An athlete disposed to CSP is a person with a certain kind and level of self-belief, confidence, and more importantly, self-conception of themselves that is less fragile to external criticism and rejection. They need not be arrogant or delusional. Rather, they have a greater belief in themselves than decision makers around them. This belief is not just about their present ability but also their potential. An athlete who feels that she has been discounted can believe that others did not believe in her in the same way that she believes in herself. Even if they based their decision on her lack of present production, because she has a certain belief about her potential she will be resentful of their inability to see the same.

Since CSP has a motivational component and a person with CSP has a strong self-conception, the athlete would also have a special relationship with adversity. Different people react differently to approval and disapproval. Some people thrive on adversity, while others are inhibited by it. Some people are easily discouraged, while others find encouragement in the roughest of places. An athlete with a chip on their shoulder is disposed to thrive (although not exclusively) off of naysayers, rejection, and disapproval. In addition to self-belief and drive, other personality traits include tough-mindedness, patience, enjoyment of competition, tenacity, self-control, sensitivity, focus, and hard-work ethic.<sup>2</sup>

In having a chip, athletes are likely to self-report that they have one. This self-reporting can occur to one's self or teammates. But depending on the athlete's and her sport's popularity, she is likely to make this self-reporting available to the public. An athlete is not displaying what Benoit and Beaton describe as one-upmanship when she does so. Instead, the self-reporting is an important piece of the protest dimension of CSP. It communicates that one has judged that she has been slighted. It also sends out a message (and warning) that the athlete will use her resentment as fuel for athletic dominance, victory, success, and excellence in going forward. In this way, CSP has both a protest and a payback component.

CSP is a species of payback anger that occurs in wider communal and commercial relations. Payback anger is a type of anger in which the agent intends to cause pain (i.e. physical, mental, or status harm)—by their own or others' hands—to the wrongdoer because she has experienced pain herself (Flanagan 2018, xvi). However, what makes CSP different from payback anger that occurs in the broader moral domain, is that it does not aim at harm although some kind of harm may follow (e.g. embarrassment or defeat). And the reason for the anger is not simply to cause pain because the athlete has also experienced pain. The aim is to show and prove and not necessarily to inflict pain as payback. The showing and proving is the payback. The action tendency is not violent retaliation but athletic feats. Violent retaliation does not aid them in their goal of proving others wrong. However, future performance does. One might think that violent retaliation may work in certain sports in which physical contact is part of the sport and proving that one is physically dominant is important. However, I take this contact to fall in the category of athletic feats rather than physical retaliation in the general sense.

As a type of payback anger, CSP is backward and forward-looking. It looks back to the original slight, calling attention to the ways in which the athlete was slighted. It is also forward-looking since it is associated with future action tendencies tied to training, performance, and success. Payback anger has been accused of being irrational since it presupposes that future acts of payback can remove or address the injury of the victim. It has also

been accused of making too much sense but only because the values involved (e.g. status) are distorted. Values of status should not be so important to us (Nussbaum 2016, 15).

However, CSP as a type of payback anger escapes these criticisms. First, it aims not to remove the injury that an athlete has experienced due to the slight. It aims to show, through hard work, that the beliefs that informed the slighting actions (e.g. the athlete was not worth keeping on the team or was not talented enough) were mistaken. This is not irrational. Second, while values that focus on the self, and concerns about our honor and our standing vis-à-vis others should not be all that important to us morally, standing in sports do matter. Sports are domains of competition in which contests determine who is 'better' athletically. A concern for this standing is fitting. In order to settle this worry, it is best to view CSP as a type of payback anger. While it does aim for revenge, it is non-injurious revenge. Success, for the athlete with a chip, is the best revenge.

### **Proper targets of protest and payback**

In section two, I pointed to the causes of CSP such as being traded or being undrafted. I claimed that these actions are often carried out by decision makers such as executives and coaches. They are the targets of payback anger, at least initially. However, this is painting too simplistic of a picture. In what follows I will say more about the formal target of CSP. I will also show how the formal target of CSP not only represents the sports team for whose behalf it makes decisions, but transfers 'the target on his back' to the whole team (including players, fans, etc.)—making the whole team and its fans a proper target of the athlete's chip, both its protest and payback components. This will also help us make sense in section four of why a chipped shoulder can have an enduring nature.

Let's attempt to make sense of this with a basketball example. A President of Basketball Operations does not act on behalf of himself but the team. He is believed to not only represent the team's interests but also the team. When we talk about executive decisions made within sports organizations, we typically attribute agency to the team not just the individual. For example, we do not report that a general manager drafted a player. We say that the Los Angeles Lakers drafted Magic Johnson. This is not to imply that moral responsibility is necessarily transferred from one actor to the collective in all instances. Rather, it speaks to the representational nature of sport team members. More specifically, it shows how instances of individual representation can often bleed into larger group agency.

When an athlete experiences CSP at being traded, for example, that chip's original protest target is the decision maker who facilitated the trade. However, since the decision maker represents the team, the target of the chip can often

become the team as a result. It is not just the case that ‘the president did not want him’ but ‘the team did not want him’. We see this target transference in the case of NBA player Isaiah Thomas and the Boston Celtics. After averaging 28.9 points, finishing fifth in Most Valuable Player (MVP) award voting, taking his team to the 2017 Eastern conference finals, and playing in the playoffs with a hip injury and through the death of his sister, Thomas felt that he deserved a max contract. He did not receive it. Instead, Thomas was traded to the Cleveland Cavaliers for point guard Kyrie Irving the very next season. In response to the trade Thomas—clearly expressing CSP—said,

I might not ever talk to *Danny* [*Ainge, President of Basketball Operations*] again... I’ll talk to everybody else. But what he did, knowing everything I went through, you don’t do that, bro. That’s not right. I’m not saying eff you. But every *team* in this situation comes out a year or two later and says, ‘We made a mistake.’ That’s what *they’ll* say, too.

Talking to *ESPN* in January 2018 Thomas admitted, ‘I was hurt. I was very hurt. I gave *them* everything I had. Like I gave *them* too much when I should of just sat out’. Note how the target of his chip (at least the protest part) is at first an individual—Danny Ainge. But then it explicitly becomes the team and the plural pronouns ‘them’ and ‘they’ are employed to illustrate this. Why is this so? As I note above, an executive’s action is not just an individual act but a team action. Thus, the team becomes the protest target and properly so. The team did in fact trade him. Remember that the action tendency of CSP is not physical violence so we do not expect the athlete to enact injurious revenge on the executive. We expect the athlete to engage in non-injurious revenge on the court. In this way, the team also becomes a target of the payback component of the chip.

An interlocutor might ask: Isn’t this just pain-passing and thus irrational? Aren’t the athletes with chips passing pain that the executives caused them onto players and fans? I do not think so. Pain-passing anger is a type of anger in which the agent intends to cause pain to another because they are in pain themselves and not because the other person caused or deserves the pain (Flanagan 2018, xvi). It is a form of psychological projection. It is also morally problematic. However, what makes CSP different from pain-passing can be explained by emphasizing the action tendency of CSP and highlighting the nature of sports.

The athlete with a chip must enact payback by way of sports performance. But this cannot happen in isolation. Remember, the goal is to show or prove. Given the nature of team sports, the performance will play out in competition against other players and coaches. It will also play out in front of passionate fans who might want a different outcome than what the athlete intends. This is what sports competition is about. Competition is the central stage in which athletic excellence is placed on display.<sup>3</sup>

Opposing players do not have to cause the pain of the athlete with a chip in order to be targets of their revenge. The nature of sports as well as the goal of CSP determines this.

On the other hand, pain-passing would occur if the athlete with a chip caused pain to athletes outside of his sport. He could also pass pain by discounting other athletes in the media as a way to make them feel what other executives and coaches made him once feel. But CSP does not conceptually involve pain-passing. This is not to say that someone with CSP will not pass pain in this way. This example would show that CSP has a productive and unproductive dimension. When kept in sports and reserved for payback, it is productive. When it goes beyond sports and focuses on pain passing, it is unproductive. The team concept has determined that more than one individual will become targets of CSP protest. And the nature of sports has determined that players, fans, and others will also be targets of the athlete's non-injurious revenge.

### **A chip on the shoulder for life?**

Since we now have the proper targets of CSP clarified, let's address duration. In 2018 LeBron James, Isaiah Thomas' teammate after his trade from Boston, recognized Thomas's chip and attributed to it a time component. 'What I like most about him is he has a chip on his shoulder for life', James said. 'That's just who he is. When a guy's got a chip on his shoulder for life ... he's never going to not work hard'. Is James right? Can we have a chip for life? To put it more normatively, what justifies any duration of CSP, on the one hand, and eternal chips, on the other? Before we answer these specific questions, it will help to look at how scholars have answered similar questions about anger more broadly.

What would make it the case that a person no longer has reasons to be angry forever? If anger's object is change, as Audre Lorde (1984) claims about anger at racism, then once a society has been transformed and is no longer racist then the anger might cease. It no longer has a reason to stay. If Mafaz is angry that Omar stole ideas from her, Mafaz's anger may be satisfied if he is reprimanded by the academic community. Her anger might cease if he apologized and also gave her credit. In the Lorde case, satisfying anger is based on the aims the anger hopes to achieve. In the Mafaz case, it is based on the problem she wants to solve or state of affairs she wants to reverse. But both examples presuppose that it is possible to satisfy anger eventually, thereby producing a subtle claim that denies the enduring nature of anger at racism and interpersonal wrongs. However, Agnes Callard (2018) introduces us to an interesting puzzle. According to what she describes as the 'the eternal anger argument', if intellectual theft is what gives Mafaz reason to be angry at Omar, then the fact of the thievery

will not change. If he stole her idea at T1 it would also be true that he stole her idea at T2. His apology and retraction do not change this fact. Therefore, 'If [she] did have a reason [to be angry] [not considering pragmatic considerations], [She'll] have it forever' (2018, 124). Anger, on this account, is a way of concerning ourselves with the unchangeable fact that we were wronged.<sup>4</sup>

This gives us several options regarding the duration of the chip. Is CSP an anger that should be satisfied when the athlete's goal has been achieved? Should the chip go away once non-injurious revenge has been enacted or when the targets apologize for their mistreatment of the athlete? Or should a chip last forever? Given the nature of CSP that I describe in section two, CSP can have a fitting, enduring nature for three reasons.

Although Callard does not agree with the eternal anger argument, it is instructive. Note that for proponents of the argument, the wrongdoing provides a reason for the anger. Given that time does not change the fact that the wrongdoing occurred, a person will always have a reason to be angry since the fact of the wrongdoing will always exist. What are the facts in the case of CSP? It is a fact that the athlete got traded, benched, was not recruited, or was picked far in the draft. But these are secondary considerations. They are informed by certain beliefs and attitudes about the athlete. Remember that the causes of CSP fall into the categories of discount, disapproval, and disrespect. The team did not recruit him because they believed there were better players out there. The team traded their point guard because they no longer believed in his potential. The team did not draft her because they did not think that she could make it in the WNBA. These are facts that will not change. However, it is not simply because the facts are unchanging that justifies the enduring nature of CSP.

Athletes with chips on their shoulders aim to give *overwhelming* reasons—through their performance—for why these beliefs and thoughts were and are mistaken. To do so requires time. It requires time spent training, winning championships, and making All-star teams. The overwhelming reasons point is important here. An athlete is never quite sure what reason or amount of reasons are sufficient. It is this uncertainty that creates the high standard. It is in the athlete's best interests to continue to work hard in order to provide these reasons. And it is likely to require his whole career to do so.

What if a GM admits his mistaken belief? What if a coach acknowledges that she was wrong in discounting the player? Does this provide a decisive reason to let go of the chip? The answer would be Yes if the athlete's aim is to change the mind of the target. And in this way we might say that the target of the chip was a person. If the person changes his mind, he is not the same person, and thus, no longer a proper target of CSP. But that is not always the aim of CSP for some athletes. Targets can change their minds. But what could remain, in the mind of the athlete, is the fact that they

thought it in the first place. It is the discounting and disrespectful thoughts and beliefs that must be countered with continual reasons. So when I say that athletes with a chip aim to show or prove, this activity should not be reduced to attempts at changing people's minds. Instead, we should view it as the athlete using her athletic success as premises to show and prove the irrationality of a previous claim—even if the articulator of that claim no longer endorses it. In this way, the target is not merely a person but the discounting action. While people can change, actions cannot, thus, providing a reason for why a person can have a chip forever.

Can CSP endure for a particular team if certain targets leave the organization? Imagine if the front office, as well as the owner leaves a sports organization. Is it justifiable to still have CSP directed at the team if the chip was initially directed at a person and not an action? To answer this question, I will attempt to provide a very minimal theory of sports team personal identity.<sup>5</sup>

What makes the Boston Celtics, the Boston Celtics? We could say that if the players, front office, or owners left then the Celtics are no longer the Celtics. However, that would be odd since Larry Bird and Bill Russell no longer play for the Celtics and yet we still believe that the basketball team who dons green jerseys and plays at the TD Garden are the Boston Celtics. I take it that we identify them as such because the present team embraces and intentionally exists as a continuation of the historical Boston Celtics. It is not unreasonable to say that I hate the Boston Celtics in 2019 as I hated the Boston Celtics of the 1980's without providing new reasons for my attitude. It is because the Boston Celtics of 2019 is the same organization I hated in the 1980's. On this identity account, an athlete with a chip—caused by the decisions of targets of a previous generation or organizational structure—will continue to have the chip towards the team since the team is still the same team. The changing of the guard does not change the fact that the team that exists today is also the team who traded the player a few years ago.<sup>6</sup>

A final reason why CSP has an enduring quality is because of the ever-present existence of the media and fans. Although these groups are not members of teams, they are a part of sports culture and are consistent critics of athletes. They do not have the power to trade or draft a player but they can affect the public imaginary concerning them. While teams can discount, disrespect, and disapprove of players through their executive decisions, the media and fans can do the same through verbal actions. And while teams often discount or disapprove of players through one-time actions such as trades, the media and fans often do it continually via the press and online outlets. The persistent discounting and disapproval from these groups, give athletes reasons to have a chip forever—for their chip's duration will match the duration of the criticism or beyond since its still the case that the criticism was made.

When a player loses his or her starting position on a team, this decision and the beliefs that informed it, could be echoed by others online. We might hear the following: 'Just trade him' or 'He is not a winner'. Opposing fans might send online messages to the player agreeing with the slight. A fan's tweet that expresses disbelief in the player's potential could go viral. Sport analysts might sit around a studio desk discussing all the reasons why the player is overrated and should never have been chosen as high in the draft as he was. They may even concoct out-of-this-world trade scenarios. They and their actions are not random byproducts of the sports world. Their participation is vital for the sports industry.

The athlete is likely to already have a chip on his shoulder due to the team slight. Upon hearing these words, however, the slight is rubbed in his face—which makes him feel the psychic pain of the original slight more intensely. This rubbing it in can create an additional slight, although different in degree from the benching incident. While the original target of the chip was the coach, the destructive criticisms from people outside of the team create additional targets of CSP. Where the player felt like the team was against him before, he now feels that the world is against him now. The athlete is accumulating slights as well as CSP targets. These factors will necessarily impact the duration of CSP. If the media slights continue, the CSP is likely to also. But the athlete would also have more targets to show and prove that they were wrong. This puts a burden on him to provide more overwhelming reasons—reasons that require time. For these reasons, discounting and disapproval from the media and fans can give reasons for the athlete to have a chip on his shoulder forever.

### **Disapproval and the human condition**

The reader may point out that I have not focused a lot on the phenomenology of CSP, coming only close to doing it briefly in the last section. I have neglected any analysis of feel not because I hold a social constructivist view of emotions and thus conclude that anger has no distinct fingerprint including a unique feel (although I am partially persuaded by the argument). Rather, I have neglected an analysis because I think it requires much more space than this article can provide. However, it is fair to claim at this juncture—and uncontroversially so—that holding a grudge, feeling resentment, having a sensitivity to other people's decisions and criticisms of you, and doing it for an extended period of time cannot always feel good. If an athlete was a stoic player,<sup>7</sup> instead, she would be free from the power of externals, and she would not sacrifice her character for approval or focus on mistaken beliefs (Stephens and Feezell 2004). It would probably feel better too. Why get mad when you can get virtue?

I think the decision of some slighted athletes to choose the former has to do with the deep well of motivation it provides—a motivation that helps athletes, not hinders them. In this way CSP *may* be what Lisa Tessman (2005) calls a ‘burdened virtue’ (or for our purposes, a ‘burdened sports virtue’). It is a virtue because it contributes to the human flourishing of the athlete although it may distract from their well-being in other ways.

A person might object by claiming that motivation does not have one source. We can be motivated by a variety of internal and external rewards, as well as self-signaling (Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2018). And if this is true, we do not need resentment to be motivated. I agree, in the abstract. However, this obscures the fact that there are limitations to some sources and that certain factors can block us from gaining access to these sources. While we typically view the external reward of approval as a source of motivation, in excess—for some—it can inhibit the motivation to succeed. When we have gained a certain level of success, intrinsic motivation can run low. If you are too comfortable and if everyone thinks you are amazing, it’s harder to work to your full potential, particularly when you are accomplished (Kingston, Horrocks, and Hanton 2006).<sup>8</sup> Although we do need a certain level of approval as humans, too much of it limits us. Although we may start off with intrinsic motivation, it is hard to maintain the more successful we get. I think athletes are aware of this and they are able to find a solution to it by playing with a chip on their shoulders.

Professional athletes are not experiencing an epidemic of CSP. They have discovered a gold mine. Disapproval is a nice balance to the limiting effects of approval *and* it can provide the necessary fuel we need to strive for excellence when we are already at the top of our game. In certain arenas of competition and levels of success, praise just won’t do for some people with certain personality traits. We *need* to hear that others are discounting us. We need to know (or at least believe) that there are people who do not believe in us or recognize our potential. This knowledge provides the extra energy to keep on excelling. This explains not only why recently drafted or traded players have chips on their shoulders, but why successful NFL veterans such as Tom Brady does, and why retired NBA champion and G.O.A.T. contender, Michael Jordan,<sup>9</sup> has admitted to once having one.

### **Permissibility and blazing new trails**

While anger has already been shown to be motivational since when angry the approach motivational parts of our brain are activated, CSP gives us an extra dose as well as a more focused plan of action. And it does so at the right time—when we have reasons to be comfortable and content.

In some contexts, we might find it permissible and productive to bring out this chip in others. For example, a coach knowing the personality of his team,

might remind his team before a game of how much of an under-dog they are believed to be or how no matter their current success, people still believe they are not any good. This is different from going around intentionally discounting others in order to bring out the best in them. The extent to which disapproval works will vary based on personalities types. The coach must know the personality of his team. If they are not a team that responds in a productive way to criticism, bringing out CSP is not permissible. In addition, the extent to which disapproval works will also be based on sporting conditions. A basketball coach might attempt to bring out CSP in his players before a game but would not do it to his player who is about to take game-on-the-line free throw attempts. In this situation, extra energy and tenacity will not help get the win. Rather, focus and calmness will. So bringing out CSP in this instance is not permissible, although it may be permissible before the game.

Overall, through an examination of the mechanics of the chip we are able to see additional instrumental uses for anger (uses that do not have the risks of other kinds) as well as the role that disapproval can play in human flourishing. Resentment and disapproval do not necessarily get in our way, but can give us the motivation to continue to blaze new paths.

## Notes

1. This is not to say that executive decisions are never made in morally problematic ways or for reasons unrelated to sports such as race, gender, or politics. This would be to ignore, for example, the historical fact that there was a time in American professional sports when only whites could participate. It also ignores the ways in which some athletes today are discounted on the basis of their race such as Asian-Americans or gender such as trans athletes, and punished based on their political stance such as athletic activists.
2. These traits are not just within a select group of athletes but also entrepreneurs, academics, and artists.
3. I am aware that some sports such as free climbing does not depend on competition but completion.
4. I am simply stating the puzzle here. For solutions to it, see more of Callard (2018) and Radzik (2009).
5. And when I say minimal, I really mean it. I will not be giving a full-blown account that philosophers like David Papineau (2017) do.
6. There are exceptions, although rare. This history can be disrupted as when the Seattle Supersonics moves to another city, changes their name and becomes the Oklahoma City Thunder. It will not hold that a chip for the Supersonics will transfer to the Thunder.
7. I imagine NBA player Khawi Leonard to be, if not a stoic player, as close to one as it gets.
8. Research that examines the relationship between motivation and athletic scholarships are consistent in showing that athletes with scholarships have

less internal motivation than athletes with no scholarships. This shows that achieving external rewards can lower intrinsic motivation.

9. To witness this in full display, watch Michael Jordan's NBA Hall of Fame speech. G.O.A.T is an acronym for 'greatest of all time'.

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