
SPORTS FAN THERAPY

10 SESSIONS AND 100 QUESTIONS



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Sports Fan Therapy: 10 Sessions and 100 Questions

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INTRODUCTION

As a lifelong sports fan, I have suffered. I am a Jets, Mets, and Knicks fan. It's been tough. But it was never tougher than after the world was on lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. I had a near-death experience, which led to an existential crisis. So I started therapy for the first time.

My therapist used sports analogies as a means to explain deep therapeutic concepts. I loved it. As I navigated my depression, I explored my consciousness through the lens of being a sports fan. This journey was half the inspiration for this book.

The other half was inspired by Aristos Panagiotakos, a/k/a "Artie from Brooklyn," a name that is very famous among sports radio fans in New York City. He cried when the Jets were blown out on Opening Day in 2019. None of his friends understood. I understood. And that was when I knew a book had to be written that linked sports fandom with therapy.

The book contains 10 imagined sessions between one character, “Artie,” a combination of the real Artie and me, and “Dr. Schwartz,” his imagined sports fan therapist. The questions at the end of every session are there for reflection or can be a conversation starter among friends. I hope this book will be both entertaining and thought-provoking, providing fodder for deep discussions and introspection about our relationship to sports fandom, mental health, and getting the most out of life.

SESSION #1: THE BEGINNING

When Artie walked into Dr. Schwartz's office, he immediately recognized the seat from the Old Yankees stadium. The wall had pictures from all the New York City sports legends. The furniture was decked out with the Knicks and Mets colors, and Dr. Schwartz wore a Giants Jersey over his button-down shirt. The moment Artie sat down, he opened his mouth to blurt out all the pain that had been building up inside of him, and instead started crying uncontrollably.

Dr. Schwartz: You have come to the right place. Tell me everything.

Artie: My life has been a total waste. The Jets haven't won a championship in 50 years, the Knicks haven't won in 45 years, the Rangers win once every 80 years.

Dr. Schwartz: Let's start from the beginning. What's your first memory of being a sports fan?

Artie: I always was very bored at home so every day, I headed to the playground.

Dr. Schwartz: How old were you?

Artie: Six. Some neighborhood kids were playing stick ball and arguing over balls and strikes. The pitcher was lying. I hated him.

Dr. Schwartz: Did it bother you that you couldn't do anything about it?

Artie: I did do something. I heckled him for the next ten years.

Dr. Schwartz: Fantastic! What's your next memory of being a sports fan?

Artie: I went to Shea Stadium with my father and saw my first baseball game. I instantly became a "Mets Lifer."

Dr. Schwartz: He cursed you?

Artie: Yes! Why the Mets? The Yankees won 28 championships and he chose the Mets.

Dr Schwartz: You blame your father?

Artie: Of course!

Dr. Schwartz: You're right, it isn't fair, Artie, I know. Sports are not fair. There is no bigger disappointment in the world. Some fans are born lucky, some are not.

Artie: But it wasn't all bad, Doc. I learned about something that would change my life forever.

Dr. Schwartz: You found God?

Artie: Better—I joined a fantasy league!

Dr. Schwartz: At such a young age! Amazing.

Artie: Exactly. So I'm not complaining. But still, no championships. It's been a tough life.

Dr. Schwartz: So what's bothering you now? What's brought you here? Too much failure?

Artie: Worse than that, Doc. I keep getting this weird feeling like I've been stranded on a lonely planet with no sports.

Dr. Schwartz: A nightmare! When did this feeling start?

Artie: After the COVID lockdown.

Dr. Schwartz: When there were no sports?

Artie: Don't say the words!

Dr. Schwartz: "No sports"?

Artie: Ahhhhh! I have never been so lost in my life. It's worse than death. It's worse than losing to the Yankees in the Subway Series.

Dr. Schwartz: Worse than the Butt Fumble?

Artie: Worse!

Dr. Schwartz: Yeah, this is called “trauma,” Artie. But you have to face it. You won’t get better ignoring the pain. Don’t worry, we can face it together. Let’s start from your earliest memory without sports.

Artie: The blackout of 1977.

Dr. Schwartz: The blackout only lasted for two days, Artie. Go back earlier.

Artie: Like when I was a baby?

Dr. Schwartz: Yes.

Artie: But I didn’t know anything back then. All I did was cry.

Dr. Schwartz: Exactly. You didn’t have sports.

Artie: No!!!!!!!!!!

Dr. Schwartz: And you will never be that helpless again.

Artie: Yes!!!!!!!!!!

Dr. Schwartz: That was fast. Okay, when else have you faced life without sports?

Artie: The lockouts.

Dr. Schwartz: Yes, when the owners took sports away from you. They took away our control. And that's a door that can never be shut.

Artie: But we own the team. Not the owners!

Dr. Schwartz: We can only focus on what we control, not what we can't control. There is hope for you, Artie.

Artie: I admit I feel a little better, but I still feel pain.

Dr. Schwartz: Let's balance out this work with some happy sports memories.

Artie: The Mets in 1986. The Rangers in 1994. My fantasy league championship in 2000. But Doc, these memories just cause me pain.

Dr. Schwartz: The good memories?

Artie: Especially the good memories.

Dr. Schwartz: Why?

Artie: Because it's all going to end! What's the purpose of being a sports fan if it's all gonna end? We are all gonna die. Even if the Jets win the championship, what will it mean if we all die?

Dr. Schwartz: Hmm, it seems you have *sports death anxiety*. We need to practice staying in the present.

Artie: Are we gonna meditate?

Dr. Schwartz: We are gonna meditate using the most powerful technique known to man.

Artie: Breathing? Visualization? A parlay?

Dr. Schwartz: No, we are going to watch sports. We are never more present in our lives than when we are watching the game.

Artie: You get me, Doc!

Dr. Schwartz: It's the road to enlightenment.

And with that, they watched a game on ESPN. Artie hadn't felt so present in years.

QUESTIONS

- What's your earliest memory of being a sports fan?
- How was fandom imprinted in your childhood?
- How do you internalize your teams' successes and failures?
- What is life like when you are without sports?
- How do the decisions of sports owners and players affect your allegiance to your team?
- How does being a sports fan keep you present?

SESSION #2: HOPE

Dr. Schwartz: How are you feeling after our last session?

Artie: A little bit better, but I still can't watch sports like I used to. It wasn't the same when you weren't there.

Dr. Schwartz: When you are alone with your thoughts, that can be the hardest time to remember what's important in life.

Artie: Like forgetting the playoffs?

Dr. Schwartz: Exactly. We lose hope, we lose connection. We even turn off the TV.

Artie: That's what happened to me!

Dr. Schwartz: It's a dark place. In these times, we need to call on a power higher than ourselves.

Artie: Joe Namath?

Dr. Schwartz: Yes.

Artie: Clyde Frazier?

Dr. Schwartz: They are always here to help. They are always with you. You just have to invite them in.

Artie: Prayer?

Dr. Schwartz: No, that doesn't work. You just watch an old video clip. Or hold a picture close to your heart. If it's signed, even better.

Artie: Got it. But sometimes the pain's too much.

Dr. Schwartz: Sports never gives you more than you can handle Artie. You are being challenged to show your true fandom. This is an opportunity to really show your soul.

Artie: So never turn off sports radio.

Dr. Schwartz: Never. And turn up the volume when you need to.

Artie: Thanks, Doc. I am feeling some hope.

Dr. Schwartz: Good. Artie, I want to talk about being a New York City sports fan. You think you should win all the time, right?

Artie: Of course! Championship or bust.

Dr. Schwartz: Do you win all the time?

Artie: No, and it's driving me crazy!

Dr. Schwartz: Artie, our pain is not that we are not winning championships. Our pain is that we think we *should* be winning championships.

Artie: We should! Have you seen our payrolls?

Dr. Schwartz: Payrolls don't determine reality. Our Sports Gods do.

Artie: Are you telling me not to be a fan?

Dr. Schwartz: There is a big difference between wanting your team to do well and thinking your team should do well.

Artie: That makes no sense.

Dr. Schwartz: Exactly. I want you to make no sense. I want you to be more emotional.

Artie: I am pretty emotional, Doc! I cry every opening day, and have for my entire life.

Dr. Schwartz: Yes, Artie. Pure passion. But New Yorkers are not just passionate. They are entitled. They think they are the best at everything.

Artie: But New Yorkers are the best.

Dr. Schwartz: Spoken like a New Yorker. But your thoughts are getting in the way of your feelings. Go for the feelings, Artie.

Artie: Ahhhhhhhhhh! J, E, T, S, JETS, JETS, JETS!!!!

Dr. Schwartz: Yes, Artie, emotions. That's it.

Artie: But Doc, I just don't feel it anymore. After the pandemic, my soul...it's broken, and I don't care any more.

Dr. Schwartz: You had a beautiful sports fan life. But a door was opened with a question and now you can never close it. You asked, "What does it all mean anyway?"

Artie: It's that. I can't stop thinking about it.

Dr. Schwartz: Existential philosophers make terrible sports fans, Artie. You are living a nightmare: separation from the sports.

Artie: I am suffering!

Dr. Schwartz: I am sorry. You can question terrible trades. Question coaches' decisions. And definitely question the refs. But don't ask the big question!

Artie: "Who will get in the Final Four?"

Dr. Schwartz: No, don't ask what it all means. You can ask what it means when your team loses in the playoffs. Or what it means when a player gets hurt. But not the big question.

Artie: Why?

Dr. Schwartz: Because it's an unanswerable question. We keep asking because we think we might get an answer, but we can't know.

Artie: But I need an answer!

Dr. Schwartz: I know. This is called *existential sports anxiety*. It's a medical condition. Good thing we can treat it here and now.

Artie: Are we gonna watch sports again?

Dr. Schwartz: Of course. It's the best medicine.

They finished the second session doing what they were put on earth to do. Artie was beginning to get it, but he was wondering why he was paying a therapist to watch Sportscenter with him.