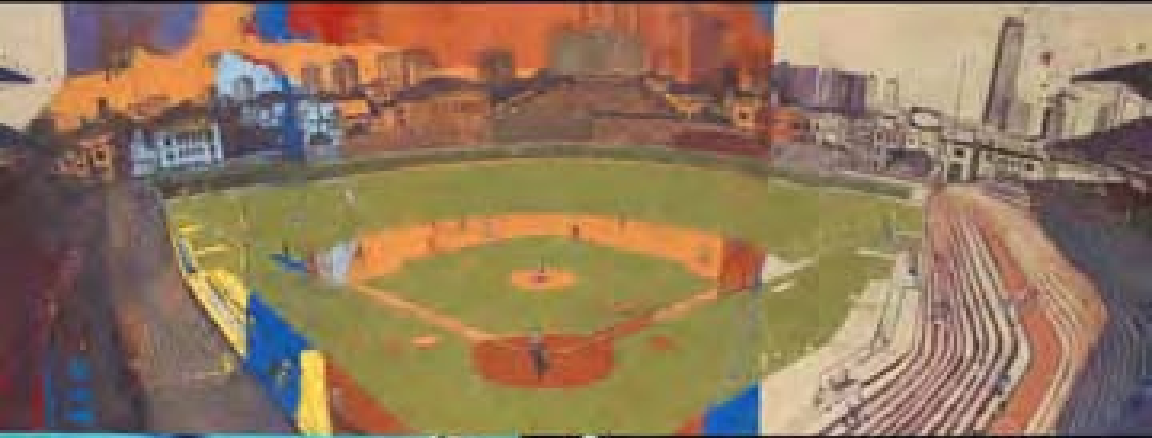




SPORT JOYS *and*
GIFTS OF PLAY



PAUL T. OWENS
PAINTINGS BY STANLEY SILVER

Sport Joys
and
Gifts of Play

By
Paul T. Owens

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What People Are Saying About *Sport Joys and Gifts of Play*

“... a prism through which one can glimpse the marrow of an athlete’s soul.”

—*Harold Connolly, 1956 Olympic Gold Medalist,
Four-time Olympian*

“A most moving experience. A chance to look at and feel the competition, excitement, and pain of athletic endeavor from the very special perspective of poetry.”

—*Merlin Olsen, Pro Football Hall of Fame,
All-Pro Defensive Lineman, Los Angeles Rams*

“With his poetic expertise and sensitive insights, Paul T. Owens has captured the elusive answers and descriptions sought by those of us who for so many years have attempted to define our existence as athletes and explain our participation in competitive sports.”

—*Kate Schmidt, 1972 and 1976 Olympic Bronze
Medalist, World Record Holder Women’s Javelin,
Three-time Olympian*

About Paul T. Owens

As a sports writer, Paul T. Owens has written for the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. He was coaching staff writer for the Dallas Cowboys with Tom Landry, and Senior Staff Writer with the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Committee for Peter V. Ueberroth. He also served as Public Service Coordinator for the United States Olympic Committee.

Paul wrote biographies of National Football League officials and coaches, and for the Victor Awards, one of the longest running sports awards television shows.

He is the author of several other books, which appear on his website: www.PaulTOwens.com.

Mr. Owens received his bachelors and masters degree in business from the University of Southern California, and attended Columbia University Writer's Program.

Stanley Silver, Fine Artist

Stanley Silver earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Arizona in 1991, and continued his education at the Art Center in Pasadena. A master of the unforgiving medium of watercolor, as well as a highly developed oil painter, Silver uses both mediums to create a dramatic and timeless feel in all of his work. His art has been shown at some of the most prominent galleries and museums in the United States. His work has also been named the "official art" for many of sports' most prestigious events including the World Series, NHL All-Star Game, and New York Marathon.

Dedication

This book is written for people who find fun at play, those who must have games and teams to follow, and those who believe that athletic motion is what keeps the earth moving through space.



*Joe Di Maggio and author Paul T. Owens, 1991 Victor Awards
Honoring the 50th Anniversary of Joe Di Maggio's 1941
56-game hitting streak.*

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*Mitch Gaylord
Olympic Champion—1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games
Gymnastics*

I am the Olympic Games—the poetic grandeur of play.

I define myself in the context of how I move, which way I go,
and how each movement is an element of beauty—
for I am a participant in beauty, offering you a vision of my
reach
to design grace in an effortless and constant way,
and it is not I who moves, but beauty who has found a way
of unfolding itself through me. I am only here to be taken.

I am the Olympic Games—
I reach out for the space in the distances where all thoughts
to excel
join together and fly with the strength of the labors of
Hercules,
declaring infinitely across the universe
that this my body is.

I am the Olympic Games,
gathered from all lands
to celebrate the gifts of struggle of
each man and woman
to expand the physical possibilities of themselves.
I come to excite the imagination,
to make harmony of the extreme natures of man
and prove that the earth moves only
according to the quality of life at play.

Final Report—1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games
Paul T. Owens

If you saw him or her gliding right out in the air
between two buildings,
you would think it's just where they belong—
natural that the air could hold them so easily.
They move not just for a gymnastic showcase
in an auditorium
with high electric lights
and wild enthusiastic crowds,
but to show us rhythms we can walk in
when we take ourselves from one place
to another.





*Olga Korbut
Three-Time Gold Medalist
1972 Munich Olympic Games
Gymnastics*

And who was the greatest athlete,
who had the most talent,
and whose accomplishments
had been appreciated the most.

All the athletes,
all of them—
those who were just learning games
of play
and those who had long dominated games of sport—
all of them gathered to
decide

and they found
after speaking of the greatest
athletic courage,
magic
and surprise
that the only greatness
all of them could claim
was how well they kept themselves
within the first and most
basic instinct—the need to move.



The extreme natures of man
can be brought together
through the discipline of athletics—
that middle sense of life
that touches the slow, evolving, common ground
of growing gentleness.





*Joan Benoit, Gold Medalist
1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games
Women's Marathon*

You said you would win,
that there wasn't much of a chance for me
if you were in the race,

And I said nothing;
I just listened.

And then you said how you would win,
how everyone else would follow,

And I said nothing;
I just listened.

I was impressed,
though, with your confidence.
I had never met anyone
who was so sure.
I did not realize how strong
your words and ideas were

Until I passed you during the race,
and all of your energies,
your intentions and ideas,
poured out of you and into me.



*Francie Larrieu,
Olympian*

I am running
and want to go faster
and tell myself, “Yes! Now!”
and it happens ...

And soon I am deep into the sound
of my body fading away,
unaware of where my body ends
and the rest of the world begins.
My memory seeps back into time
to where I first believed
that no one could catch me ...

And my face spreads in a smile,
for I have found
what I thought I had forgotten—
I want to run
forever.





*Steve Prefontaine
Olympian*

They warned him not to run so often,
that he was not ready for the fast terms
and long-winded runs he was going through.

He told them he had to continue going,
the urge to run hidden so deeply
and surfacing so suddenly he could not stop

that all of his life he had spent on words, thoughts,
ideas, and a total over-intellectualization of life
and now he had to let his body and mind act as one
and do exactly as he wanted

which was to run
from one race to another
connecting all runners
keeping himself further and further
away from the last fraction of a second
that refuses to happen.



The veins in my arms—
those rivers on my skin—
the flowing strength of my body
winding the world around.
I am earth.
I breathe, and mountains rise.
My wrist turns, and a dance comes
out of the wind.
My hands open and close.
A flower I grow.
I am earth.
I spin in an orbit from the spirit
flowing through me, and the
stars move, so I know I cannot stop.
I am trees that fold in abstract
directions.
Progress! Forward!
My arms design the sky.
My legs run to balance where
I came to go again, and
I carry the world bouncing
galaxies off each other.
I find nowhere I go
where I am not already.
Up and out, I take a giving message
that reaches out to make me everyone!



You can't have both
you can't splash through the water
and expect to find your footprints
when the water has slipped away.

You can't outrun a wave
for each has no end in time
but you can always be the pace
the hard wet sand is passed
beneath you to those who
follow.





*1984 Olympics
Women's Marathon*

The furthest image is how far you see yourself
going on long after the race is finished,
long after someone
has told you how fast you ran,
how many people were ahead or
behind you.

Long after you have rested,
your mind is still not convinced of your
body's conclusion
and goes on
to find your distance
at the end of the running earth,

for you, the long-distance runner,
move on at the speed of a dream that will appear
millions of years from now when the echo of your
feet pounding the earth
is heard again
as it was when you ran on this path
before as a deer, a gazelle
and a lion ...





Dwight Stones
Three-time Olympian
Ten-time World Record holder

You've got to be able to see yourself
going over the bar
before you can really do it.

You've got to envision yourself going over
before you can feel the bird in you
want to lift you over.

Your strength is your speed
and the explosion when you leave
the ground
is the greatest joy
in being a jumper—
more so than knowing,

"Can anyone else go as high?"

and

"How high can I really go?"



And as you ready to jump higher
than anyone else in recorded history,
with all the confidence you have
and all the enthusiasm the world
feels for your success,
you want to hear a voice,
an idea
or word of doubt
that you may have heard
when you first jumped,
someone saying,
"No, you can't make it."

A sound to challenge
the positive silence
you have made with the bar
so that your jump now
will be just as your first
jump
when you had no idea if you
would make it.



The discus thrower—
the lover of the wind,
breathes in the cheering energy of life on earth,
listens for the strength of the winds that carry well,
then turns to the sky to the gods
who have enlarged the world forever,
and sends the word to the power of all infinities.



Within a weightless ounce of time, shot putter,
you have measured space;
and in your spinning circle of thrust
reach out for a wider opening of the universe.



*John Naber
Four-Time Olympic Gold Medalist, One-Time Silver Medalist
1976 Montreal Olympic Games*

I want to swim far enough
to hear
the ends of the universe
tell where
the next oceans
will spill out of the sky
and design
the final moving infinitive
to swim in.

I want to swim fast enough
to marvel at how each
wave
holds one more stroke
to make my last
seem so much farther
and farther away,

and I want to know
what is as pure as a truth
so constant
its straightness
is absolute,
as sure as
one stroke
keeps giving itself
to another.





Beach Volleyball

Seeing the prayer-shaped angles
she makes of her arms
as she taps the volleyball up

to heights that vary
like the sun
reaching across the ocean,

the constant beginnings
of her feet on dry sand
on days given for jumping:

we know
she will always be
part of the promise
to keep the sky and earth
moving together.





Climbing out of a twist
abandoned upward
cosmic hands reach down
to guide me
to where
I will be one of the lights
that has danced out of its own
image
and one step closer to the final question,
How high can I reach?





Icarus! Son of Daedalus,
who wore wings made of feathers
to escape into the sky!
You, Icarus—
lover of the happiness of soaring heights—
have given dreams
to vaulters and jumpers of today,
dreams of leaping from mountains,
dreams of falling out of mystical clouds.
You, Icarus—
glider of time—
would be with us today,
had not the sun
melted the wax
that held your wings aloft.

And Icarus had a sister,
Lydeon,
who early in life
climbed upon the rays of the sun
and chose to live among
the stars and planets
in constant fluid motion.





*Victory Ceremony
1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games*

If there must be one purpose
for why I play,
let it be that
I am given the chance
to be part of a concept that is bigger
than myself—
something that works according
to the trust
each human element has in the other—
an idea that is going after what
will make of the whole bigger parts ...







Basketball is the dance of floating rhythm
to the music
of a bouncing chord,
and the rhythm of millions
of bouncing basketballs
has given the earth its pulse,
and is now ready
to challenge the planets
for the perfection
of all moving spheres.

*Eulogy for Basketball Coach Cale Newcomer
Skyline College, San Francisco, California*

The two young sisters stood on top of a hill near their home and wondered about the sun and the moon.

The oldest said, “Did you know that the moon was once a very small ball and when no one wanted to play with it, it made itself bigger and went away. And did you know that the sun once was very small also, and when everyone played with it so much it got so hot that it had to fly away?”

“And now they are all by themselves?” her sister asked.

“Yes, they are; but they throw darkness and light to each other every day.”

*Daughters of Sim and Cale Newcomer,
Tora and Molly*

I am jumping and shooting outside
on the stones and dirt,
and someone hears me and comes out to play.
And when others come, there isn't enough room,
so we go to a bigger place and begin playing more,
and become good.
Then others come to watch us,
so we move inside,
where there are polished wooden floors to play on
and lots of people
watching.

*Of Jerry West
University of West Virginia
Los Angeles Lakers*



The player who played against me
was really working with me.
He caused me to make moves
I had never made before,
and any magic that came
from the surprise of what I did
came because he guarded me so well.

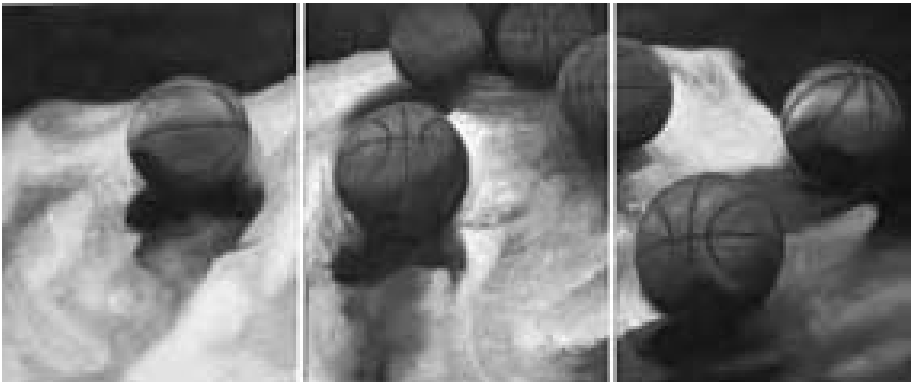
The two of us
were just working together,
creating a new form
to get to the same place.

*Of Gail Goodrich, UCLA
Teammate Jerry West
Los Angeles Lakers*



Backboards hang down from the sky,
their circles an iron-rimmed eye,
all open to the stuffing in
of every kind of leaping grin.

And working out in our squeaking shoes,
we design more joy for the jumping news.
As all cheering voices do resound,
we sky for beauty, and as a beast rebound.



*Of Bill Russell,
Boston Celtics
Wilt Chamberlain,
Los Angeles Lakers*

He went to those who had won and won often
and asked them what it was that had made them do so well

and they answered

and he followed everything they said but could
not win and returned to them to ask why

and they told him he should listen more to his
own instincts than trying to play like someone else

and he wanted to know how they listened so well

and they told him by not going to others and asking them
how to win, to stop putting so much importance on winning
and just try to have a good time

and he asked them when the good time for them began
and they said, "When we started to win and win often."



Paul T. Owens

**Senior Staff Writer, Los Angeles Olympic
Organizing Committee for Peter V. Ueberroth**

Dallas Cowboys Coaching Staff Writer for Tom Landry

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