

## Expectoration

So I find some amusement in the efforts of athletes who participate in various sporting activities, be they professional or amateur. I have been known to spend hours at my television enjoying all sorts of games and competitions, and I profess some admiration for the athletic prowess therein exhibited.

But I have a question.

Why do some of these athletes, on full display to and around the world, do things during their competitions that they would never dream of doing in polite company. I refer here to the foul practice of hawking up their phlegm and spitting it out for the whole world to witness either in the stadia or the living rooms of the world.

To be sure, not all athletes do that, nor do any of them have to.

I know that there will be those among the readers of this article who will argue that the ejection of spittle is somehow essential to ensure the 100% performance of the athlete immediately thereafter, but that argument doesn't hold water any more than does a badminton net.

The worst offenders, in my view, are baseball players, although hockey and football players come a fairly close second. These latter two seem to restrain themselves mostly until they are in the players' box or on the sidelines, or perhaps their restraint comes from the fact that their helmets provide some restriction to untrammelled spitting. Golfers, basketball players, soccer players and curlers appear quite circumspect in this spitting business, and I have to admit I have never seen anyone resort to it in a game of billiards, table tennis or even darts.

But baseball seems to foster that kind of disgusting behaviour. This may be so because so many baseball players cannot seem to get through a game without chewing on something, --- gum, chewing tobacco, sunflower seeds --- which then necessitates, or at least encourages, the ejection of some spittle.

Batters seem to do it as they prepare to receive a pitch, pitchers do it just before they deliver one, and fielders are inspired to do it in a sort of self-congratulatory manner after completing a play.

To revisit the contention that athletes do this spitting in an attempt to maximize their concentration on the task at hand and to rid their finely-tuned bodies of any unnecessary baggage that may interfere with their competence, I would ask you to join me in imagining how this might work for other professionals --- say, surgeons, or chefs, or ballet dancers, or even news anchors. How about a church minister, either before, during, or after a fire-and-brimstone sermon?

On that note, I'll let you imagination take you where it will, although I am prepared to bet that you will be hard-pressed to watch a baseball game ever again without giving this phenomenon some thought.