



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 20, 2012

Handicaps and Handicapped Thinking

Just as mighty contests can rise from trivial things, mighty principles are often slain in their name. And good examples of this are often found in sports.

There's an Olympic runner named Oscar Pistorius who has made headlines for two very unusual reasons. First, he has no legs below the knee. Second, he's not competing in the Special Olympics — but on the grand stage set to commence in London this month.



Pistorius, a South African whose blade-like prosthetics have earned him the nickname “blade runner,” qualified for the Olympic 400-meter event. And he did it by beating able-bodied competitors. This makes his story inspirational to many, an accomplishment one may think should only be applauded. Yet there is another side to it: Some say that Pistorius may have an unfair *advantage*.

This claim was made most recently by American Olympic gold medalist Michael Johnson, who said that while he considers Pistorius a friend, it's ultimately wrong to allow prosthetic-wearing competitors to square off against the able-bodied. Writes the [Telegraph](#):

When asked at a Times event whether he thought Pistorius's inclusion was political correctness gone mad or an inspiring human story, the 44 year-old said: “I think it is both. I know Oscar well, and he knows my position; my position is that because we don't know for sure whether he gets an advantage from the prosthetics that he wears it is unfair to the able-bodied competitors.

To many, this may seem outrageously ridiculous and uncompassionate. Yet Johnson has a point. We think of the handicapped as being disadvantaged in everything, and they certainly do bear a cross. But, as portrayed in the old program *The Six Million Dollar Man* — whose intro [told us](#) that the main character will be “better than he was before...better, stronger, faster” — logic dictates that as technology advances, there will come a point where mechanical body parts actually offer advantages. And many wonder if we've finally crossed that threshold, at least within specific contexts.

Of course, unlike a bionic super-agent enjoying obvious advantages or those obviously disadvantaged, it's impossible to know when near that technology threshold if a mechanical addition amounts to a plus or just a mitigation of a minus. But this is why rules and principles matter. As Johnson himself said, “I consider Oscar a friend of mine, but he knows I am against him running, because this is not about Oscar; it's not about him as an individual, it is about the rules you will make and put in place for the sport which will apply to anyone, and not just Oscar.”

Yet this is a tough argument to win, as it appeals to reason and not heartstrings. And another good example of emotion's triumph is the Casey Martin situation in golf. Suffering a congenital circulatory defect in his lower right leg that is exacerbated by walking, Martin sued the PGA Tour in the late 1990s for the privilege to use a cart in golf tournaments. His case ultimately made it to the U.S. Supreme Court, where he won that privilege under the Americans with Disabilities Act in what truly was a comical proceeding. Testifying for the PGA Tour were, among others, history's greatest golfer, Jack



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Nicklaus; and the game's "King," Arnold Palmer. But this didn't deter black-robed lawyers such as shriveled Ruth Bader Ginsburg from decreeing that they knew better what rules mattered in golf. Hey, isn't it great to have experts in the area of everything to control our lives?

But the liberal justices aren't alone in siding with Martin, who, though basically retired, did compete in this year's U.S. Open. After all, what people see on one side is a nice young man with a terrible disability who only wants to pursue his dreams, on the other an unfeeling governing body aiming to prevent this by enforcing what appears, as the justices put it, an "arbitrary" rule. Isn't what compassion dictates here self-evident?

But it isn't that simple. First, walking four miles in the heat may not rise to Ironman Triathlon territory, but it is exertion. More significantly, however, what about the golfer who claims that a troublesome back or some other ailment is exacerbated by walking? Can such a claim be disproven? How do you determine who "deserves" a break? The reality is that while all rules in sports are arbitrary, they shouldn't be enforced in an arbitrary manner. For this introduces great subjectivity into the system.

So let's now delve a little deeper and see if those first instincts about compassion are correct. What are we actually doing in the Martin situation? We're sacrificing great principles. We're casting the level-playing-field imperative to the winds. We're further trumping freedom of association and reinforcing the notion that the government has a right to tell a private entity what policies it must embrace. We're subordinating the judgment of experts in a field to that of people who know little to nothing about it. And why?

All so that one individual can satisfy a desire to hit a little white dimpled sphere around exactly where and when he wants to.

Is ensuring that a lone man can play a game really more important than preserving the rights and cultural integrity of our civilization for today's and future generations?

Again, though, personal-interest stories are hard to argue against. A hapless person can be seen, heard and touched, is up close and personal and certainly real; principles are abstract and remote and thus can seem unreal. Nonetheless, failing to apply the correct ones can destroy civilization.

Yet personal stories can trump acknowledgment of even obvious physical realities. A good example was the case of South African runner Caster Semenya, whose masculine appearance and mannerisms and dusting of her female competition prompted authorities to conduct medical tests to determine if she was truly female. It was found that she actually had internal testes, and, no, she was no longer allowed to race against women. What was shocking, however, was the reaction of many observers. Just consider the following comments, which were posted either at the [Daily Mail](#) or [Dlisted.com](#):

- "Why is everyone talking about genetics? What about Caster's own mind — if she believes within herself that she's female, then she is."
- "SHE identifies HERself as a female. Done."
- "This is a clear case of gender identity discrimination. What if she is a man who identifies himself as a woman?"

What you're seeing above are the effects of years of relativistic thought in the West. If you believe that Absolute Truth doesn't exist, it follows that there can be nothing morally wrong with denying reality; reality then becomes negotiable and is often subordinated to what is certainly real to you, absolutely convincing and hard to resist: your feelings. This is when behavior that once would have landed you in a



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mental institution — such as believing you're one sex when you're the other — becomes not just accepted, but unacceptable to reject.

This is handicapped thinking, and civilization cannot long survive its prevalence.



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