

# THE PROS

by John Cairns

Sport, even at the professional level, must remain continually aware of certain basic concepts. The most fundamental of these are offense and defense. Both these elements are required in most games, and are of concern to all competitors. Contests can be played in only two ways — offensively or defensively. Either one is on offense or he is on defense. So you see, the two themes are of never-ending importance in all kinds of sports in all kinds of places.

Like other disciplines, sport allows for various points of view. Many a general manager and coach stress powerful offenses, but an equal number concentrate on stingy defenses. It all leads to the same old questions. Can a good offense overwhelm a good defense? Can a strong defense wear down an equally strong offense? Opinions vary and so does the evidence, but the controversy rages everywhere.

In baseball the Montreal Expos are a case in point. With players like Tony Perez, Dave Cash, Andre Daws, and Ellis Valentine the starting line-up rings with a sense of power. Yet the team remains a dismal fifth in the National League East. The reason is poor pitching. The defense simply can't support the offense.

The Cincinnati Reds had a similar experience last season. Featuring Joe Morgan, Pete Rose, and George Foster, they too were strong on hitting. Neither the starting pitchers, nor the relievers, however, performed consistently. Even the fielding was strangely erratic. The Reds consequently had what for them was a dismal year. Besides losing their world championship, they failed to even win their division.

The Expos and Reds may now make defense their top priority, but that doesn't always work either. The New York Mets are proof of that. With Tom Seaver, John Matlack, and Tug McGraw, they had pitching as good as that anywhere. Without hitting

behind them, however, the hurlers were helpless. Runs, after all, are the things that go onto the scoreboard, and without them the Mets have been more often dismal than spectacular.

Similar instances occur in hockey. Let's consider Atlanta and Chicago. Dan Bouchard of the Flames and Tony Esposito of the Hawks are both excellent goaltenders. That they are probably the best players on their teams and that none of their teammates are big scorers indicate a defensive orientation.

Where though, has such a set-up got the two teams? Nowhere! Neither one of them have been contenders. Both lack some much-needed offensive punch.

On the other side of the slate are the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Buffalo Sabres. Both handle themselves well

in the other team's zone. Led by Pete Mahovlich in Pittsburgh and Gilbert Perreault in Buffalo, the goals come fairly easily. What doesn't come as easily, however, are victories. Neither team has really adequate goaltending or defensive units. Thus while the Penguin and Sabre forwards can fill the net at one end of the ice, the enemy often does it even faster at the other end. Pittsburgh as a result, loses as often as it wins, and the Sabres can never quite reach the top.

The evidence, as you can see, favors a good defense as much as it does a good offense. We can't make a conclusive decision as to which is better. What we can safely decide though, is that both are crucial to success. A team with only one of them is seriously flawed. Its chances of winning a championship are small indeed.

The secret of great

teams is an ideal blend of both offense and defense. Everyone searches for the correct combination, but only the few who find it can be true champions.

The New York Yankees had the hitting of Reggie Jackson, Thurman Munson and Mickey Rivers, but they also had the pitching

of Mike Torrez and Sparky Lyle. Roger Staubach and Tony Dorsett led the Dallas Cowboy offense, but Harvey Martin and Too Tall Jones were there on defense. On the Montreal Canadiens, Dryden, Robinson, Savard and Lapointe keep pucks out of the net while Shutt and Lafleur pop them in. These teams have all become champions. Getting there required as many fine defensive plays as fine offensive ones. Only when you can make both does everything fall into place.

Only then do you have the ingredients for a dynasty.

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