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Dance has always been celebrated as an art form, but the debate over whether it qualifies as a sport has continued for years. Dancers, like athletes in traditional sports such as football and basketball, devote countless hours to perfecting their craft, pushing their physical and mental limits. Although, the recognition of dance as a sport remains conflicted.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "Sport" as "An activity involving physical exertion and skill, esp. one regulated by set rules or customs in which an individual or team competes against another or others." By this definition, competitive dance qualifies. It involves physical strength, precision, teamwork, and competitive elements. Competitive dance professionals have athleticism comparable to that of gymnasts, sprinters, and tennis players. What distinguishes them is the integration of artistry and physical mastery.

Take the intricately detailed Irish dance for example. Jenn Morson, a writer for ESPN and the mother of a daughter who participates in Irish dancing, described the discipline as a physically demanding sport. "These dancers train their muscles to propel them across the dance floor," Morson said. "They extend their legs much like ballet dancers… their feet move so rapidly that they blur." This is an example of the athletic intensity of dance. Research from a study done by students for the American Journal of Undergraduate Research further supports this, finding that collegiate level dancers' flexibility surpassed those of volleyball and softball players in the sit and reach test by their higher average of 63.06 cm, vs. 51.70 cm.

Competitive dancers practice upwards of 10-25 hours per week, similar to the training schedules ?of athletes in sports like baseball or football depending on level and personal dedication to the sport. According to a study published in the National Library of Medicine, some studies report that overuse injuries like anterior knee pain, is common in both competitive ballet and sports and is linked to decompensating mechanisms that strain natural turn-out.

Others may argue that dance, despite its physical demands, should not be classified as a sport because it lies more in artistic expression. Gia Kourlas, in her "New York Times" article "The Surprise of the Olympics: Breakers' Delight," shows the inherent artistry and subjectivity of dance, especially in break dancing. She explains that while it made its Olympic debut, it was clear that "dance isn't really a sport. It's too nuanced, its vocabulary too vast." She also says that in dance, there is no universal "best in the world." She points out that breaking, rooted in marginalized communities, emphasizes cultural significance, which goes beyond competitive systems. Kourlas also mentioned artistry in sports, noting how moments of athleticism, like when basketball player Jalen Brunson contorts his body to weave through defenders and drive to the

rim, can resemble a dance. "Athletic improvisation," Kourlas said, "becomes its own form of choreography." This perspective challenges the notion of dance as being "totally" a sport, advocating for its recognition as an evolving, creative practice.

While the debate over whether dance is a sport may never be fully settled, recognizing it as one could present new opportunities for dance such as more inclusion in events such as the Olympics, and medicine research.

523 words.

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