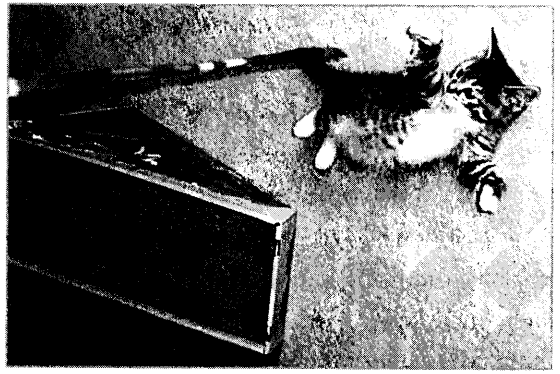
tion of play. He describes it as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy."

This parallels the definition I use in many ways, although I don't think the "rules" have to be fixed, or that there even have to be rules at all. I do agree that play often promotes social interaction and that it fosters new terminologies and customs that set a group apart, but it doesn't have to promote secrecy. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of play is that *anyone* can do it.

In the end, for me, all of these definitions fall short. I can create a thousand PowerPoint slides chock-full of diagrams, charts, and definitions, but there is no way to really understand play without also remembering the feeling of play. If we leave the emotion of play



out of the science, it's like throwing a dinner party and serving pictures of food. The guests can understand all they care to about how the food looks and hear descriptions of how the food tastes, but until they put actual food in their mouths they won't really appreciate what the meal is all about.

I've sometimes found that just a few slides of kids playing hopscotch, or a cat playing with string, or dogs playing fetch, creates more recognition and understanding than all the statistical analysis in the world.

why do we play?

Hudson seemed to be a very dead dog. That's what musher Brian La Doone thought as he watched a twelve-hundred-pound polar bear quickstep across the snowfield, straight toward the sled dogs that were staked away from his camp. That November, the polar bears in the Canadian far north were hungry. The sea had not yet frozen, denying the bears access to the seals that they hunted from the ice. La Doone spent much of his life in the polar bear's territory, and judging from the appearance of this particular bear he knew it had not eaten in months. With a skull-crushing bite or a swipe of its massive claws, the bear could easily rip open one of his dogs within seconds.

But Hudson had other things on his mind. Hudson was a six-year-old Canadian Eskimo sled dog; one of La Doone's more rambunctious pack members. As the polar bear closed in, Hudson didn't bark or flee. Instead, he wagged his tail and bowed, a classic play signal.