

Fair Play in sports is a reality

“Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. He is poisoned with hatred, jealousy, disdain for the rules and the sadistic pleasure of violence on the field – in other words, this is a war without shooting”.(George Orwell)

George Orwell drew this conclusion over 60 years ago. Recent sports events and research on several continents support his claim.

In the late 70s and early 80s voices increased, expressing serious concern about the increase in violence and deceit in sports. Protests against sports abuse are heard in all corners of the sports world. The use of illegal drugs causes serious damage to Olympic sports. Testing for these drugs is becoming more difficult. Team sports – soccer in Europe and South America, ice hockey in North America – allows and intensifies brutality. Hooliganism and aggressive actions by fans ruined many games.

An increasingly worrisome conflict between ideal and reality in sport has prompted many countries to campaign to Fair Play, as well as to create international organizations to discuss and advise on the implementation of Fair Play in sports.

The outrageous incident happened on September 27, 1988, when all of Canada was going crazy with terrible disappointment. Three days earlier, Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson blew up the world of sports by winning the 100m world record at the Olympics and putting all the competition to shame. However, the moment of glory was short-lived: soon illicit drugs were found in Johnson’s doping test. The hero instantly turned into a villain, his gold medal was taken away and his world record was taken away. In addition, Johnson was also stripped of victories and records set at the 1987 World Championships. Ben transformed overnight from the most successful and self-reliant athlete in the world into a law-breaking rogue.

Very interesting observations were made by sports psychologists and physical education professor from a study of the relationship between ethics and sports:

- Sport is essentially unreal. The conventions and rules of sport exclude the usual rules of life [Bredemeier et al., 1984, 1986, 1988; Hahn, 1988; McIntosh, 1979, Pooley, 1987]
- There is an increase in aggressiveness in connection with participation in competitive games and sports life [Bredemeier et al., 1988]
- There was a low negative correlation between the duration of sports activities and the moral judgments of 5th grade students about hypothetical dilemmas in sports [Romance, 1986]
- College basketball players expressed significantly lower moral judgments than non-athletes [Bredemeier et al., 1988].

- The types of social interactions encourage by high-contact sports may not stimulate or even hinder moral development [Bredemeier et al., 1988]

In other words, rather than fostering high values of unity, honesty, and “fair play”, sports can promote aggressive attitudes, low-level self-centered moral characteristics. In addition, in sports, athletes are guided by a number of other values than in real life. Bredemeier calls the morality “Game Morality”. “...the game context is often perceived by the participants as freeing them from the need to constantly adhere to moral norms. Sport reduces the athletes’ sense of moral responsibility...” [Bredemeier et al., 1988].

In response to the growing danger that, in practice, sport does not foster developmental integration or better citizens, various initiatives have been taken. Following the 1988 Games, the Council of Europe held a seminar “Education Against Violence: The Potential of Fair Play in Sport”. The importance of education in the development of Fair Play was repeatedly emphasized at the seminar. The workshop was moderated by Peter McIntosh, whose book “Fair Play: Ethics in Sport and Education” (1979) gave impetus to research on the relationship between sport, physical education and moral development.

The material of the seminar and numerous subsequent publication documents, focus attention on a number of phenomena associated with Fair Play in children’s sports:

- violence in high-level competitive programs for children;
- victory syndrome at any cost, with its potentially harmful effects on the emotional development of children and the improvement of their skills;
- spending to children the values and rules of adults that destroy children’s motivation to cooperate in sports;
- the lack of knowledge of many coaches and parents about child development, leading to unrealistic expectations from children;
- refusal to provide safety and pleasure for young competitors;
- propaganda in the media of violence, rough play and envy;
- lack of a sporting spirit seen in many areas of organized children’s sport.

Both scientific research and real practice there by confirm the conclusion that without educational and other strategies for the formation of “fair play” and personal development, sport can contribute to negative development, deception and violence. On the other hand, it has emerged that highly effective sports and physical education No. 936 of 1983 of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe recognizes the paramount importance of education in the fight against violence.

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