

Does cheating and gamesmanship to be reconsidered regarding fair-play in grassroots sports?

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¿TIENEN QUE SER RECONSIDERADOS EL ENGAÑO Y LA ASTUCIA RESPECTO AL JUEGO LIMPIO EN LOS DEPORTES DE BASE?

KEYWORDS: Fair play, cheating, gamesmanship, grassroots sports.

ABSTRACT: The aim of this study was to analyze the attitudes towards fair play, playing foul/hard, and the acceptability of teams' antisocial behaviour, such as cheating and gamesmanship, in the context of grassroots sports teams. The sample included 48 teams of basket, football, handball, volleyball and rugby, including 1333 adolescents (1013 boys and 320 girls) with a mean age of 12.50 years (Range: 10-15; $SD = 2.09$ years). In order to study these psychological variables, the athletes answered the *Predisposition to Cheating in Sports* and the *Fair play Attitudes Scale*. Results showed the importance of the enjoyment in all sports studied, and an amount of acceptance to gamesmanship and cheating mostly in the masculine players. There are significant differences regarding the sport practiced and the players' sex. Considering overall these results, gamesmanship is somehow accepted by team players while the cheating is not generally accepted but refused. Therefore, it will have to consider the gamesmanship correctly regarding the players' perception of the concept of fair play.

The sport has been considered as an appropriate instrument to transfer its practical values of personal and social development, such as: improvement, integration, respect for people and their different capacities, tolerance, cooperation and fair play.

The moral concept of fair play is easily translated into observable behaviors, such as throwing the ball away when an opponent is injured, not exploiting a disadvantaged opponent, recognizing one's own failure to comply with the rules, and truthfully indicating whether the ball has passed out of bounds, for example. In fact, the social environment in which an athlete operates can have deep effects on the development of moral functioning (Kavussanu, Roberts and Ntoumanis, 2002). Prosocial behaviors tend to produce a positive effect on opponents, and in the context of sports, the concepts of fair play

and sportsmanship are considered forms of prosocial behavior (Cruz, Boixadós, Valiente and Torregrosa, 2001).

It is also known that the athlete's ego orientation is a negative predictor of prosocial behavior (Duda and Balaguer, 2007) and a positive predictor of moral indifference toward the anti-social behavior of peers (Traclet, Romand, Moret, and Kavussanu, 2011).

At the same time, sport is a situation in which anti-social conduct, such as doping, foul play, aggression (instrumental or not), cheating and gamesmanship behaviour is widely present (Kavussanu, Stamp, Slade and Ring, 2009). These last ones behaviors can be defined as the intention to intimidate or attack the opponent through physical contact, or the intention to deceive and put the opponent at a disadvantage through the use of gamesmanship, including faking injury, wasting time, or

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trying to unnerve the opponent. All these behaviors result in negative consequences for the opponent, and reflect an absence or diminution of fair play (Sage, Kavussanu and Duda, 2006).

The role of team leaders in enabling the acceptance of antisocial behavior must also be outlined (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke and Bosselut, 2011). This influence can be assessed in terms of the achievement theory (Ames, 1992), in order to determine whether the motivational climate perceived by athletes can influence antisocial behaviors. Recently, we have found that the gamesmanship is accepted by a 58.7% of one sample formed by young soccer players, whilst a lesser amount of them (32.1%) accept cheating during games (Ponseti et al., 2016). It is real that is easier to accept cheating than gamesmanship, perhaps influenced by the social pressure or the overvaluation of the “clever” players by coaches and team members. These findings are consistent with previous research, although such research focused primarily on analyzing the presence of fair play (Ntoumanis, Taylor and Thøgersen-Ntoumanis, 2012; Palou et al., 2013).

Therefore, and taking in consideration all the argumentation abovementioned, the main objective of this study is to analyze in a large sample of competition team players –from different sports- the relationships between the players’ attitudes towards fair play and their attitudes over accepting team mates anti-fairplay behaviors, such as the gamesmanship and cheating.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 1333 participants (1013 boys, 320 girls; M age = 12.54; SD = 2.09; range 10–15), coming from teams belonging to official competitions of their respective sports in the Balearic Islands (Spain): basketball, football, rugby, volleyball and handball.

Instruments

Predisposition to cheating. The questionnaire entitled *Predisposition to Cheating in Sports* (CDED, Ponseti, et al., 2012) was based on the *Attitudes to Moral Derived Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire* (AMDYSQ–1, from Lee, Whitehead and Ntoumanis, 2007). It consists of six items and was reported to have two factors: Predisposition to acceptance of cheating, and Predisposition to acceptance of gamesmanship.

Attitudes towards Fair-play. We used the *Fair-play Attitudes Scale* (EAF, from Boixadós, 1998). It consists of 22

items, which evaluates the players’ attitudes to various match situations. It is formed by three factors: Victory, Fun and Play hard.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from coaches and parents for their children to participate (voluntarily and informed) in the study. The researcher met with each coach at the end of a training session, participants completed the questionnaires took 15 to 20 minutes.

Data analysis

The average score was calculated for each participant based on the tabulated answers. Subsequently, an analysis of the descriptive statistics of the items of the questionnaire was carried out, along with the significant differences between them, ANOVA and a correlational analysis was carried out with the SPSS 21.0.

Results

In Table 1, we can see as the sample show the mean differences among the subscales of the questionnaires administrated.

The athletes in our study are far more willing to accept the use of gamesmanship and cheating in football and rugby. We may observe too that Fun is important in all sports, while the Play hard and Victory are more important in football and rugby, than the other sports. Furthermore, shows that the young athletes in our study had a positive perception in relation to their acceptance of gamesmanship.

In addition, we can also observe in Table 2 that is a positive significant correlation between the values of the player’s acceptance of gamesmanship, cheating, Play hard and Victory, and a negative correlation between the anti-fairplay attitudes and the fair play subscale of Fun.

Discussion

The results obtained in this research clearly show that the grassroots team players in this sample accepted anti fair play behaviours such the gamesmanship more than cheating. Indeed, the gamesmanship behaviors seems to be also accepted and permitted by peers and coaches and, unlike those associated with the use of physical violence, are occasionally reinforced by

coaches and teammates, who want to have “smart” players on their teams (Ponseti et al., 2012).

Athletes will express greater willingness to engage in gamesmanship than in cheating, not differing significantly what should be the sport they practiced, contrasting with previous studies who showed differences among the different sports studied (Palou et al., 2013).

Actually is quite common to watch antisocial behaviors on the pitch. As commented, these behaviors are often reinforced by the various psychosocial factors surrounding the young athletes, including parents, coaches, and peers (Lee et al., 2007). But is obvious that the gamesmanship, although do not violate the rules of any specific sport, clearly affects the spirit of the game, and may even use the rules to gain an incorrect advantage.

There are a lot of examples of gamesmanship behaviors addressed to produce a gain for their own team: during a match, the players’ of this specific team try to destabilize the opponent team players. Should his/her team be ahead on the scoreboard, the players constantly lose time, delaying the throws, exaggerate the pain, but when the game continues they recover without a sanction from the referee. (Sage et al., 2006). All this will happen without any comment from the coach. It seems that -in one hand- gamesmanship means some kind of fair play reduction (Olmedilla et al., 2011), but in other hand this very specific behavior (and its associated attitude) has become a special kind of pro social behavior within the sport team culture.

Also, we can consider that the existence and acceptance of gamesmanship allows the players to accept the use of this type of behavior by showing a degree of indifference and moral

detachment concerning others’ antisocial behaviors (Traclet et al., 2011), in the same way the team players accepts the existence of a role of “executor” (a player who plays really hard) and perceive his/her behavior as beneficial for the team outcome (Cope et al., 2011).

But the results show that this acceptance is not costless, since while it has been possible to see a powerful correlation between these two attitudes and the looking for Victory and Hard play, the relation with the subscale of Fun in the game is clearly negative. That is, the acceptance of anti fairplay behaviors, which existed in a very relevant degree, collided with young athletes’ perception of having fun in the game, even if they are playing in competitive teams.

It is evident that the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1962) can be used to interpret these results, because regarding the existence of these two dissonant attitudes and/or perceptions, group membership and conformism may possibly push team members to a progressive acceptance of anti fairplay behaviors, while generating some kind of moral disengagement. However, this group and team pressure can work in a two ways mode, as it has been demonstrated when a team can also act as a preventive barrier of antisocial behaviors, such is the case of doping (Lucidi et al., 2008).

For future developments in this line of work, we have to perform in-deep studies on the psychosocial factors that surround the practice of different sports, from the families and coaches, to the most complex set of the ideologies and culture belonging to the clubs in which the sportive practice takes place.

	Cheating		Gamesmanship		Fun		Victory		Play hard	
	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>
Football	2.21	1.08	2.92	1.07	4.06	.83	2.64	.70	2.69	.63
Basketball	1.72	.88	2.39	.99	4.11	.68	2.21	.64	2.48	.64
Volleyball	1.83	.95	2.30	1.06	4.01	.67	2.18	.70	2.50	.61
Handball	1.78	.90	2.40	.96	3.82	.72	2.33	.63	2.60	.64
Rugby	2.06	.98	2.60	1.00	3.95	.58	2.56	.66	2.67	.65
Total	1.98	1.01	2.64	1.07	4.04	.76	2.44	.70	2.60	.64

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and mean differences of the results of the questionnaires CDED, EAF, and their subscales

	EAF		CDED		
	Fun	Play hard	Victory	Cheating	GMSHP ¹
Fun		-.24**	-.28**	-.27**	-.08**
Play hard			.33**	.33**	.23**
Victory				.74**	.59**
Cheating					.53**
GMSHP ¹					

* $p = .000$; ** $p < .001$; *** $p < .005$

¹GMSHP=Gamesmanship

Table 2. Pearson correlations between the results of the questionnaires CDED, EAF, and their subscales.

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PALABRAS CLAVE: Juego limpio, engaño, astucia, deporte base.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar las actitudes hacia el juego limpio y la aceptabilidad del comportamiento antisocial de los equipos, como el engaño y la astucia, en el contexto de los equipos deportivos de base. La muestra incluyó 48 equipos de baloncesto, balonmano, voleibol y rugby, entre ellos 1333 adolescentes (1013 niños y 320 niñas) con una edad media de 12.50 años (rango: 10-15; $SD = 2.09$). Para estudiar estas variables psicológicas, los atletas respondieron al cuestionario *Predisposición a la Trampa en el Deporte* y la *Escala de Actitudes de Juego Limpio*. Los resultados mostraron la importancia de la diversión en todos los deportes y una gran aceptación a la astucia y al engaño entre los jugadores masculinos. Hay diferencias significativas en todos los deportes y respecto al sexo de los jugadores. Considerando globalmente los resultados, la astucia es de alguna manera aceptada por los jugadores, mientras que el engaño no se acepta sino que se rechaza. Por lo tanto, se tendrá que considerar la astucia del juego.

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