
The Influence Of Sports Competitions On Society

Sports are often regarded as a setting that allows for the development of values that are important in interpersonal relations and society; however, they may also give rise to value conflict. Sports figures are often regarded as role models, with the presumption that they model the virtues to which all should aspire (Simon, 2000). Some people feel that sports generate values which are adopted by individuals and society, while others feel that sports simply mirror the values present in society (Simon, 2000). Whether values arise in sports or are simply reinforced in sports, some people feel that the values associated with sports are in conflict with generally accepted values in society (McNamee & Jones, 2000). Some examples of this conflict include that the idea of fair play may not be completely compatible with the idea of making every effort to win a competition, that sports promote or condone dishonesty at some level, and that the large role of money in televised professional sports leads to bad behavior that is widely viewed, especially by children.

It may be said that efforts to win a sports competition may be restrained by the boundaries of fair play, but the potential conflict is obvious. The desire to win satisfies values of accomplishment and excellence, but winning is inherently associated with losing (McNamee & Jones, 2000). For there to be a winner, there has to be a loser. There have been concerns about the effects of losing on children involved in sports. Fair play, on the other hand, is based on the values of social justice and equity for all (McNamee & Jones, 2000). Referees are present as the analogue of the law enforcement officer, and confusing what one gets away with on the field with what is fair and right highlights the potential for value conflict in this area in sports.

Honesty is a value that everyone would agree is important; however, there are many times in sports that it is intentionally suspended. The practice of a player feigning an injury to allow his team to benefit from the associated interruption of play is essentially accepted as standard practice, but it is not scrupulously honest. Even the practice of the intentional foul in the last few minutes of a basketball game has a component of dishonesty; yet, it is accepted practice. The numerous examples of outright cheating are more clear examples of the motivation that some feel to suspend honesty to win at all costs.

In our society, the fact that much of sports competition is based on high quality underlying values may be overshadowed by the fact that television often emphasizes and replays instances in which athletes are not at their best (McNamee & Jones, 2000). Highlight reels are prone to show the bench clearing brawl on the baseball diamond. It is a common joke that one might go to a fight and witness a hockey game breaking out. While this may be humorous, it is

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easy to lose sight of the fact that children may be adversely influenced by these events.

Sports competition is a fixture in our society. It represents in controlled form the inherent competition and conflict of mankind and society in general. The emphasis on fairness and respect for referees provides a way to see the benefits of sports; however, it is important to recognize potential conflicts. There are times in which sports brings out the worst in people instead of the best. The involvement of the media and selective attention plays a role in this that cannot be ignored. Awareness of value conflict allows for examination of these issues, and hopefully both sports as well as society will benefit from these considerations.

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