



FAIR PLAY, CHEATING AND GAMESMANSHIP IN YOUNG BASKETBALL TEAMS

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyse young basketball players' attitudes towards fair play, winning, enjoyment, hard play and the acceptability of antisocial behaviour in the context of sports teams, such as cheating and gamesmanship. The sample included 230 adolescents (139 boys and 91 girls) with a mean age of 12.5 years (Range: 10-15 years; SD = 2.09 years). Results showed the importance of fun in sports, and the greater acceptance of gamesmanship and cheating among female players.

Key words: Fair play, cheating, gamesmanship, team sports, young players.

Introduction

Sport is considered an appropriate instrument for the transference of the practical values of personal and social development, such as: improvement, integration, respect for people and their different capacities, tolerance, cooperation and fair play. The concept of fair play in sports teams can be observed through behaviours 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.

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 are present. However, according to many studies, positive values and desirable personal qualities for all can be achieved through the correct orientation of sports practice [3, 11].

Anti-social behaviour, such as cheating or gamesmanship, is well recognized among athletes of different ages, gender, and at various competitive levels [8, 10]. These behaviours 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 trying to unnerve the opponent [12]. All these behaviours result in negative consequences for the opponent and reflect an absence or diminution of fair play [1, 6].

While there are numerous studies aimed at analysing behaviours associated with fair play and sportsmanship [1, 13, 4], there are few studies dedicated to examining the acceptance of antisocial behaviours by team players and, specifically, acceptance of cheating and gamesmanship [9, 5]. These behaviours, 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 [7]. Therefore, examining the relationship between acceptance of fair play, gamesmanship and cheating is the main goal of this study. These results are closely studied in the current paper.

METHODS

Participants

The sample involved 230 basketball players (139 boys and 91 girls; M age= 12.50 years old, SD= 2.09, range 10–15). These athletes were from competitive teams belonging to federations from the Balearic Islands. Age ranged from: between

10-11 years (44,8%), 12-13 years (30%) and 14-15 (25,2%).

Instruments

In order to assess predisposition to cheating in sports [7]: the study adopted the Attitudes to Moral Derived Decision-making in Youth Sport Questionnaire [4]. It consists of six items and was reported in a previous publication [7] as comprising of two factors: predisposition to the acceptance of cheating, and predisposition to the acceptance of gamesmanship. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. Reliability, constructs and factor validity have been described in the same paper.

The fair play attitudes scale (EAF) [2]; consisting of 22 items to assess the attitudes of the players in situations related to a game of football. The items of the questionnaire included different ideas concerning attitudes that occur in sports and for expressing the degree of agreement and/or disagreement regarding these attitudes. Each item is accompanied by a Likert response scale of 1-5, so that 1 means strongly disagree with the statement and 5 fully agree with the sentence. Once they interpreted the factors, variables were generated: victory; fun and hard play.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from coaches and parents of children to participate in the study.

Data were collected following the same protocol for all participants. The researcher met with each coach to explain the study. At the end of a training session, participants completed the Spanish version of CDED and EAF questionnaires. The questionnaires took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. All players participated voluntarily in the research. The researcher was present while the participants completed questionnaires and emphasized the opportunity of asking any question that might arise during the process.

Analysis

The average score was calculated for each participant based on the tabulated answers. Differences between genders were tested by t student. Subsequently, an analysis of the descriptive statistics of items of the questionnaire was carried out, along with the significant differences between them, and a predictive analysis between the study variables was performed using the statistical software SPSS 19.0

Results

As illustrated in Table 1, it can be seen how much gamesmanship and cheating is used by basketball players. However, the values obtained are not high. Fun in the game is valued well above hard play and winning the game.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics from CDED, EAF and Subscales

Questionnaire	Subscale	M	SD	Range
CDED	Gamesmanship	2.40	1.01	1-5
	Cheating	2.60	0.61	1-5
EAF	Victory	2.15	0.62	1-5
	Fun	4.14	0.69	1-5
	Play hard	2.47	0.66	1-5

Note. CDED = "Predisposition to Cheating in Sports" questionnaire; EAF = "Fair play attitudes scale" questionnaire. All scales were rated on a 5-point scale with 1: Strongly disagree, 2: disagree 3: Neither agrees nor disagrees, 4: agree 5: Strongly agree. M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

As shown in Table 2, it is noted that the score for cheating is very low in both cases, boys and girls, although girls present higher scores. Victory and hard play score lower than fun, with victory having the lowest score. This item evaluates whether the objective of the player is to win. Hard play reflects unsportsmanlike behaviours, and it also scores higher in girls and only fun is lowest amongst girls.

Table 2. Comparison of Means on the CDED and EAF by Sport and Gender

Subscales	Boy		Girls		Gender comparison	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Gamesmanship (CDED)	2.24	0.97	2.65	1.04	-3,46	.001
Cheating (CDED)	2.49	0.54	2.78	0.70	-3,04	.003
Victory (EAF)	2.09	0.61	2.25	0.63	-1.90	.058
Fun (EAF)	4.20	0.69	4.05	0.69	1.58	.115
Play hard (EAF)	2.40	0.67	2.59	0.66	-2.11	.036

Note. CDED = "Predisposition to Cheating in Sports" questionnaire; EAF = "Fair play attitudes scale" questionnaire. All scales were rated on a 5-point scale with 1: Strongly disagree, 2: disagree 3: Neither agrees nor disagrees, 4: agree 5: Strongly agree. M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

As shown in table 3, some associations have been found between the outcomes studied. All associations indicate a positive relation between correlated outcomes, except in comparisons between victory and fun.

Table 3. Partial correlation adjusted for sex between subscales of CDED and EAF

	Fun (EAF)	Play hard (EAF)	Victory (EAF)	Cheating (CDED)	Gamesmanship (CDED)
Fun (EAF)	—	-.128	-.189**	.174**	-.017
Play hard (EAF)		—	.249***	.269***	.203**
Victory (EAF)			—	.498***	.373***
Cheating (CDED)				—	.265***
Gamesmanship (CDED)					—

DISCUSSION

Results show that basketball team players have fun while playing this sport. The sample included in this study scored very high on the fun subscale which indicates that having fun playing is highly recognized among young basketball players. In terms of gender, there are no significant differences in this subscale.

When the sample was analysed together, data show similar acceptance of gamesmanship and cheating behaviours in both genders. However, data obtained in the subscale of cheating for girls' basketball players (which

highlights that female players significantly accept their teammates' use of nonaggressive antisocial behaviour, compared with boys) could be confirmed by interpreting partial correlations between cheating and gamesmanship. These high scores could be explained because many coaches openly express their desire to have players ready to take advantage in game situations over their opponents.

Data show a positive correlation between these two antisocial behaviours. In contrast gamesmanship is much more likely than cheating behaviour [14]. In general, all subscales scored more among girl players. Data show that

girls accept significantly more “hard play” compared to boys. Again it shows that hard play is positively associated with willingness towards and an acceptability of antisocial behaviours.

Football players who show willingness towards gamesmanship perform actions that do not infringe game regulations. As was mentioned before, such actions do not infringe sport rules; however they affect the spirit of the game and can even be used to obtain an improper advantage. For instance, trying to unnerve the opponent through discussion or distraction, destabilizing them psychologically, or wasting time when ahead on the scoreboard are examples of this actions. In those cases, there is no willingness to accept cheating, but players try to obtain advantages through developing

behaviours not described by the game rules. Moreover, trying to waste time, or feigning injury, is not in the same category as touching the ball with the hands; however, these behaviours are presented by some players during competition [7].

The results of this study should be taken with caution. The small sample, unequal distribution of gender and the impossibility of establishing causal relationships, are limitations to be taken into account when results are interpreted. This research highlights the need for intervention programs in basketballs teams. These programs should, among other areas, encourage positive social behaviours and moral attitudes.

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