

ETHIC AND SPORT

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author considers the rules of sports (constitutive and sportsmanship rules), moral values of sports (justice, honesty, responsibility, beneficence) and fair play. Constitutive rules are the rules which determine the essence of the game itself, determine the structure of a certain sport, standardize the way in which it is played and sanction unallowed sport activities. Sportsmanship represents unwritten moral rules based on virtues of righteousness and honesty. Moral values are predominant forms of understanding of the purpose of human activity and the way in which human moral character is practically manifested. Fair play can be defined as commitment to the spirit and letter of equality of competitors in relation to the rules, and all towards the common search for excellence. The author believes that the rules, moral values and fair play in sport are required for any game to become actually possible to play. Nevertheless, occasionally, the necessity of some of the above mentioned preconditions, for example sportsmanship, is being relativized. Namely, the standing point that a competitor needs to make a certain effort in order to encourage his opponent to play well, and thus raise the level of enjoyment for both himself and his opponent, does not meet either the general approval of athletes or of the public. It is generally claimed that it is sufficient to play by the rules in order to proclaim the playing as morally correct. The author looks at such an attempt to separate the sport from morality through the prism of modern tendency to separate different forms of practical activity from their ethical implications.

Key words: *ethics, sport, sport rules, sport moral values, fair play*

INTRODUCTION

Before considering different aspects of ethics and sports, relations within them and their mutual interaction, something has to be said about these terms, that is one has to try to understand them. It is not enough to presuppose what ethics and sport are, i.e. have an idea about them. Rather, they need to be clearly articulated. In the broadest sense, ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with morality.

In other words, it is a part of practical philosophy concerned with moral activity, validation of morality as well as meaning and justification of morality.

Morality is one of the ways people can conduct themselves in accordance with the rules and regulations of society. Therefore, even though the terms ethics and morality are comparable, they are not synonymous.

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The term ethics is primarily related to philosophical considerations on morality in practice (ethical refers to science, reflection, ideas, problems, theories, theses and teachings), while the term morality is concerned with the practice of morality itself (character, action, judgment and notion are moral). Paraphrasing St. Augustine's view on the nature of time one could state that if no one raises the question of what sport is then everybody knows the answer to this question. However, when the question is, in fact, raised the answer seems to elude us.² Out of numerous definitions of sport given by different international organizations only three have been used in this paper. Sport has been defined by UNESCO Committee as: "Any physical activity which has the character of play and which involves a struggle with oneself or with others, or a confrontation with natural elements" (<http://www.answers.com/topic/sport>). They added that if this activity involves competition, it must then always be performed in a spirit of sportsmanship. It follows that there can be no true sports without the idea of fair play. The Council of Europe has established that sport "means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels" (<http://www.bris.ac.uk/sport/development/>).

The report of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force "Sport for Development and Peace" views sport in a broad sense and defines it as: "All forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include play; recreation; organized, casual or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games" (<http://www.un.org/themes/sport/reportE.pdf>). The first thing mentioned in these definitions is the fact that sport is a kind of physical activity.

2 Sport Law of the Republic of Serbia ("Službeni glasnik RS"/*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 52/96) divides sport into sport education, competitive sport, recreational sport and school sport competitions. It also defines sport activities and sport businesses. It identifies sportspeople as well as competitors and determines their rights and obligations. However, it does not give a definition of sport.

Furthermore, two out of three definitions state that it should improve physical fitness and mental well-being as well as develop meaningful social interaction between people.

Thirdly, an aspect of sport which is more or less emphasized in all definitions is its competitiveness. Last of all, sport is associated with play or is considered to be a physical activity that resembles it.

Once the nature of both ethics and sport has been outlined we can consider sport rules, sport moral values and fair play. The lack of standard rules in sports enables participants to play without any limitations, to agree on several rules before the game, or to create their own rules during the game when necessary. This "flexible" approach is only possible in games played by children or in ad hoc recreational sport activities. However, there are increasing demands for clear-cut rules that regulate the game itself both in the recreational activities and, even more so, in the official sport events. Rules are usually divided into two types: constitutive rules and sportsmanship rules. Rules that govern athletes' actions in a particular game are called constitutive rules. For example, football rules that define goal, goal kick and throw-in are constitutive rules. These regulations have developed gradually because it was necessary to standardize the game with formal rules regarding duration, minimum number of players and illegal moves. Constitutive rules do not only prescribe which actions players may perform during the game, but also define specific skills for a particular game. Moreover, they define strategies and techniques which make football distinguishable from basketball, and at the same distinguish football and basketball from handball.

Furthermore, these rules restrict players' actions. They determine what kind of behavior is acceptable or required, which is a precondition for a game. For example, even though football is considered to be a "man's game" in which a strong physical contact between the players is permitted, rules clearly define when such a contact is no longer acceptable.

Hitting an opponent from behind or charging him within the penalty area is immediately sanctioned as foul play and the penalty kick is awarded to the defending team. In addition, if a player commits an offense, he can be cautioned or shown the yellow card. In the case of a serious offense a player can be sent off or even banned for several matches.

Constitutive rules create the structure of a particular sport, ensuring fair play for all participants.

These rules standardize the game, giving each player an opportunity to excel. Constitutive rules regulate different aspects sport such as age, weight, ability and maturity standards for young people at the different competition levels. For athletes who also attend school or university these rules prescribe age, sex, residence and academic achievements.³

Sportsmanship rules are concerned with the inherent quality of a particular sport that is with following the spirit of the rules, not the letter.

Many sportsmanship rules pre-empt athletes who want to win at all costs, regardless of the opponent's well being and of the play. Sportsmanship rules have been created in order to prevent morally questionable behavior and, in some cases, violent behavior in sport. Although there is a general approach to sportsmanship and a lot is being said about it by athletes and sport officials, it is still unclear what sportsmanship really is and who does it apply to. Sportsmanship code of conduct is a set of unwritten rules based on virtues such as fairness and honesty. The highest principle of sportsmanship, according to some authors Keating (see Morgan and Meier, 1995, p. 147), is evident in an attempt to always raise the level of enjoyment, for oneself and the opponents. A narrow interpretation of sportsmanship, on the other hand, suggests that it is typical of recreational sport activities and cannot be applied to official sport events. The belief that an athlete has to try to raise the standard of the play in order

to increase the level of enjoyment for oneself and the opponent, is no longer widely accepted, neither by athletes nor the public, who are focused on the competitive aspect of sport. Nowadays the importance of winning is over-emphasized, a blind eye is turned when rules are broken or when athletes are mistreated, even unfair competitions are sometimes organized. The predominant attitude is that both sport and play are defined only by constitutive rules, with an occasional acknowledgment of certain conventions, which enable legal tactical moves within the game.

All these issues are related to the active forms of morality. In modern philosophy this question has been transformed into an axiological assumption, i.e. value theory, where it is, on a general level, expressed through moral values and, on a particular one, through moral norms. Moral values and norms lead to better understanding of the purpose of human activity and the ways through which active morality is achieved. Moral values are defined as a specific type of value, related to man's actions, both general and particular ones.

Man is capable of action, even a moral one, because he is motivated by his desires, interests, wishes and thoughts. What keeps him going is a specific notion or a set of notions that constitute a value. For that value (or a system of values) to be realized in a particular direct action, it has to become clearly defined as a moral ideal, i.e. acceptable moral values, which have to be followed in moral actions. General moral rules of a society are created by opposing, negotiating and harmonizing personal values of various individuals.

However, these personal values can never be fully harmonized because different people and different social groups can choose to create, accept and follow very dissimilar value systems. In modern societies value systems cannot, theoretically, be imposed on people and are, in fact, chosen freely by individuals or social groups.

3 Constitutive rules are usually established by the official sport organizations (in football these include FIFA, UEFA and national football associations). The rules of football were codified in 1863, the year the Football Association was founded.

There is no universal system of moral values which would be valid in all times, for all societies, social groups and individuals.⁴

Differences between them stem from the fact that, at this day and age, man is entitled to freedom of his own moral conviction and consciousness. However, there is a general tendency to make moral values consistent and widely accepted.⁵

First moral value, frequently mentioned in sport, is justice. There are numerous types of justice⁶ but here we will focus on the following: distributive, procedural, retributive and compensatory.⁷ In sport distributive justice is connected to the idea of equal intrinsic value and dignity of each athlete. Clearly, this does not mean that all athletes will be treated equally.

4 Walzer (2000), for example, believes that it is not possible to create a theory of justice outside of a historical and cultural context, that is regardless of the definition of social goods it applies to. In other words, he agrees with the idea that a valid theory of justice is just one of the elaborations of the existing conceptions of justice, which are based on conventions and, therefore, vary from one case to another.

5 Rawls (1998), for example, tries to define a distributive theory of justice which would be universally acceptable for all societies. Rawls's theory of justice is focused on adaptation of two fundamental principles of justice which would guarantee a just and morally acceptable society. The first principle states: "Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all". The second principle states: "Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: a) they are to benefit all the members of society, and b) they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

6 Literature on both philosophy and law mentions numerous types of justice, including anamnetic, distributive, economic, egalitarian, formal, global, civil, international, intergenerational, corrective, commutative, cosmopolitan, compensatory, criminal, procedural, spatial, political, retributive, distributive, restorative, reparative, world, substantive, social, transitional, legal, women's, etc.

7 Distributive justice ensures that the profit is distributed according to merit, making profit proportional to merit and vice versa. Distributive justice is based on a principle of geometric equality. It makes sure people are treated with dignity and takes into account their contributions to community. Procedural justice ensures that all actions and agreements are carried out properly. Retributive justice is concerned with appropriate punishments for those who have broken the law or the rule. Compensatory justice refers to the extent to which people are fairly compensated for their past injuries or misfortunes.

In football, for example, it would be unjust if children, women or special needs athletes were to play a game with healthy and physically fit men. Therefore, in the case of distributive justice we are talking about equivalent possibilities, rather than equal treatment. Procedural justice is also inherent to moral reasoning and making decisions in sport. It presupposes that relevant sport organizations have rules and regulations stating which actions are acceptable and which ones are unacceptable during the play. To put it simply, there are rules which teams and players have to follow in order to be able to take part in a sport activity.

If they break these rules, they are punished for their offense in accordance with the rules and regulations, which, in turn, is an example of both retributive and compensatory justice applied.

Honesty, the second moral value, enables athletes to be trustworthy and honest in their dealings with others including the competitors during the play. Honesty is based on the assumption that athletes will never knowingly lie or cheat.⁸ It implies that once they have accepted the rules of the game they cannot but to follow them.⁹

Third moral value, responsibility, refers to the idea that athletes are responsible for their actions. It is widely believed that responsibility is the strongest moral value in the life of an athlete. Athletes are proud of their sense of responsibility to the team, the coach and the play. It implies that athletes are responsible not only for their personal conduct but also for the actions they take in relation to their opponents, and the play itself. They have a responsibility to give their best and to exhibit sportsmanship. In addition, they are responsible for encouraging the opponents to play well, in order to achieve mutual excellence.

Beneficence, last of the virtues mentioned in this paper, is a state of not doing harm, preventing harm, removing harm, and doing well. It is intertwined with sportsmanship and fair play, because it asks for more than just a game.

8 According to Gert (1998, p. 194) cheating is an intentional breaking of public rules system to achieve personal gain.

9 According to extensive researches conducted in the USA, honesty is last on the list of moral values, which were analyzed (Beller and Stoll, 1992, 1995).

In other words, it is truly an act of civilized behavior. However, some of its aspects are unacceptable to the present day athletes.

They mostly¹⁰ agree that other athletes should not be harmed and that harming the opponent should be prevented. Nevertheless, they disagree with the third stipulation since most of them feel that it is not up to them to remove harm. As for the fourth stipulation, doing well, they strongly disagree with it because they feel it cannot be reconciled with the reality and the present day competition requirements.

Fair play can be defined as following both the spirit and the letter of the rules, in a mutual quest for excellence. Why is it not enough to simply define fair play as following the rules, as some sport commentators suggest?

If we identify fair play as following the rules, and consider all acts of breaking the rules as immoral, then we, according to the author, narrow the idea of fair play. As a result, moral becomes the same as legal, and sport becomes a play defined through its constitutive rules. This formalist understanding can maybe help us to comprehend the nature of the play, but it lacks normative basis which is vital in dealing with numerous moral dilemmas that appear in sports. The same is true when the implicit conventions of a particular sport are emphasized. There is an unwritten rule in football according to which a tactical or so-called “clever” foul in the centre field area is considered to be a legal move when impending the attack. The problem here is the moral status of the convention itself because it raises two questions: how can the convention evolve and how can it be applied.

Finally, in order for sport to be in accordance with the principles of fair play, it has to confirm to the norms inherent in the very idea of sport. Even though it is neither easy nor necessary to clearly distinguish between sportsmanship and fair play, there is a difference between the two.

¹⁰ “Mostly” because there are athletes in so-called contact sports and in highly profitable sports who believe that, in order to win, they have to incapacitate the opponent at all costs. Unfortunately, this includes inflicting intentional harm to members of the opposing team. Kretchmar (1995) writes about the effects of moral insensitivity in athletes.

Fair play requires that the athletes win fair and square. However it does not require them, even though it appreciates its importance, to improve their opponents’ performance, which is an important aspect of sportsmanship. Fair play always presupposes correct behavior and concern for oneself and the others.

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