

ETHICAL ISSUES IN SPORTS: UNFAIR ADVANTAGES DUE TO PRESSURE TO WIN AT ALL COST

Uzor, Theresa Nkiru PhD, & Ujuagu, Nonye Ann PhD

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Abstract

The paper presents the role ethics plays in sports and implications for unfair advantages due to pressure to win at all cost. It highlighted a lot of unfair and immoral sports-related advantages such as drug use and abuse in sports, using of non-bonafide athletes, violence and hooliganism and among others. The paper made some useful conclusions as well as recommendations that will improve athletics in modern sports such as NUGA and Olympic Games.

Keywords: Code of Ethics, Competitive advantage, Ethical Issues, Morality, Unfairness

Introduction

Ethics derives from the Greek word “ethicos” which means arising from custom or from the French word “ethos” meaning custom. According to Webster’s dictionary ethics is a concept that deals with moral issues of good and bad, based on societal norms. Gibbon (2018) added that ethics is generally accepted norms of right or wrong behaviour, often based on universal values. Ethics is not about legality nor is it meant to be legalistic. Telfer (2010) expressed that when the word ethics is mentioned, often the first reaction is to assume that what follows is a right and a wrong way of doing things. This is not necessarily the case. The determination of what is right and wrong is more complex, relying on situational factors that are often unique. Clutterbuck (2016) defines ethics as the code written or unwritten that guides the behaviour of human beings, in the context of different cultures and situations. It is also a set of moral principles of conduct governing an individual or a group such as professional ethics. These moral values may vary from society to society. Global Code of Ethics (2016) expressed that a code of ethics is a list of guidelines that signposts what is to be expected from a practitioner of a particular profession. In essence, it is a set of standards of conduct that dictate what is considered morally acceptable behaviour within a particular field of practice and or organization.

Competitions take place in every sphere of life including sports. One of the main objectives of every sportsman and woman is to win and celebrate

success. It means that winning and losing are outcomes of every competition and everyone wants to win games. In competitive sport, creating fun, maximising performance, unity in diversity and “winning” are the main objectives but not winning by all means. Win according to Elendu and Mina (2017) means to be most successful in a competition, race or battle. Winning was not emphasised in early sports competitions such as Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA) and modern Olympic Games. Winning is now over-emphasised in modern games such as NUGA which is a deviation from its founding father’s idea and philosophy of the game and could be a contributory factor to many unfair advantages among sports athletes. Some universities even give admission based on athletes who have won medals in national events not on intellectual abilities any longer such as University of Port Harcourt (Uniport). According to Anugwueje (2017), Uniport gives scholarships and free hostel accommodation to athletes that win medals in NUGA in form of motivation which is over-emphasis of winning at all cost. The aim of every sportsman and woman is to win and celebrate success. The struggle to win is one of the sources of competitive pressure and anxiety which may lead to burnout and unfair advantages among athletes, coaches, fans or and other sports participants in the contemporary sports society.

Unfair competitive advantages are unacceptable and unethical conducts that infringe on the rights, health and safety of sports athletes and sports infrastructure. The modern sports environment is tensed during competitions because of the winning mentality as nobody wants to be associated with failure. Fear of losing and fear of failure to Elendu and Mina (2017) are predictors of anxiety in young athletes. Athletes are usually rewarded for their successful athletic achievements. Commercial sports are organised and played for gain or profit. The commercialisation and professionalism of contemporary sports has made winning the goal of every athlete, coaches, and other stakeholders. Athletes and coaches are rewarded for winning competitions by cash such as Uniport gives money to her athletes during NUGA at University of Agriculture, Markurdi 2017 Gold= 30,000, Silver=20,000 and Bronze =10,000 according to Anugwueje (2017). Professional sportsmen and women are paid to compete in sports. Meeting Uniport athletes in any event is like a big war battle. According to them, winning is all-important. The more successful they are, the more money they earn.

In the same vein, professionals who earn their living as coaches also to keep their jobs, they must be successful. Careers of some athletes, coaches and sports managers of professional clubs or teams have been cut short for failure to win competitions or be at the peak of their career. The position and job of

coaches and athletes are retained for their ability to win and not to lose competitions. Stapleton, Hanks, Hays and Pharham (2010) asserted that coach's job has always been tied to winning competitions. Coaches are always threatened with losing their job in case they fail to win their matches. Sports administrators or managers especially coaches are often faced with threat of "if you win, you win your job, but if you lose, you lose your job". If an athlete must be remembered, recognised and appreciated, he/she must continue to win and never to lose. This makes sports coaching, delicate and anxiety-loaded profession. Nigerian coaches' contracts are usually terminated for failure to win the trophy or qualify the National sports team for mega sports competitions like World Cup, Olympics, All African Games and World Championship. According to Vargas-Mendoza, Aguilar and Gonzalez (2018), Nigeria could not qualify for the 2012 National' Cup. This made Coach Sampson Siasia to an end as the head coach of the male senior National football team "Super Eagles" as his contract was terminated by the technical committee of Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

Athletes in body contact games such as football, basketball, hockey and handball have been exposed to injuries because of the over-emphasis of winning than athletes in non-contact sports. Anti-social and unfairness slogan of some football coaches such as "if you miss the ball, don't miss the leg" is fueled by winning at-all-cost mentality. Some non-productive and ungentle man behaviours before, during and after sports competitions are precedence by over-emphasis on winning at-all-cost attitude of sports athletes (Hanson & Savage, 2012).

At the end of every sports competition, the question is always "who won" and not "who played better". A team's or athlete's exhibition of skills and control of the game does not count for most fans or spectators but how many point or goals were scored at the end of the game. There is social relationship between sports and media. Many sports depend on the media for publicity and revenues. Media representatives exaggerate the importance of competitive rivalries as well as winning and losing in athlete's lives.

More so, Elendu and Mina (2017) stated that in today's sporting environment, displays of unfairness behaviour in all levels of competitive sports are common. NUGA and Olympic ideas preach against drug use in sports and winning at all cost among other vices. Unfairness and immoral sport-related advantages such as drug use in sports, violence and aggression, bribery and corruption, among others has bedeviled contemporary competitive sports. This could not be far from the winning at all-cost syndrome which is the slogan of sports administrators and athletes. An ethical approach to sport

rejects this bracketed morality and honors the game and one's opponent through tough but fair play.

The Role Ethics Plays in Sports

According to Hanson and Savage (2012), to understand the role ethics plays in sports and competition, it is important to make a distinction between gamesmanship and sportsmanship. Gamesmanship is built on the principle that winning is nothing but everything. Athletes and coaches are encouraged to bend the rules wherever possible in order to gain competitive advantages over an opponent, and to pay less attention to the safety and welfare of the competition. Some of the key tenants of gamesmanship are:

- Winning is everything.
- It's only cheating if you get caught.
- It is the referee's job to catch wrong doings and the athletes and coaches have no inherent responsibility to follow the rules.
- The ends always justify the means.

Hanson and Savage further explained that a more ethical approach to sports is sportsmanship. Under a sportsmanship model, healthy competition is seen as a means of cultivating personal honor, virtue and character. It contributes to a community of respect and trust between competitors and in society. The goal in sportsmanship is not simply to win, but to pursue victory with honor by giving one's best effort.

Ethics in sport requires four key virtues: Fairness, integrity, responsibility and respect.

Fairness

- All athletes and coaches must follow established rules and guidelines of their respective sport
- Teams that seek an unfair competitive advantage over their opponent create an uneven playing field which violates the integrity of the sport.
- Athletes and coaches are not discriminated against or excluded from participating in a sport based on their race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Referees must apply the rules equally to both teams and cannot show bias or personal interest in the outcome.

Integrity

Similar to fairness, in that any athlete who seeks to gain an advantage over his or her opponent by means of a skill that the game itself was not designed to

test demonstrates a lack of personal integrity and violates the integrity of the game. For example, when a player fakes being injured or fouled in soccer, he or she is not acting in a sportsmanlike manner because the game of soccer is not designed to measure an athlete's ability to flop. Faking is a way of intentionally deceiving an official into making a bad call, which only hurts the credibility of the officiating and ultimately undermines the integrity of the game.

Responsibility

- To be sportsmanlike requires players and coaches to take responsibility for their performance, as well as their actions on the field. This includes their emotions.
- Many times athletes and coaches will make excuses as to why they lost the game. The most popular excuse is to blame the officiating. The honorable thing to do instead is to focus only on the aspects of the game that you can control, that is your performance, and to question yourself about where you could have done better.
- Responsibility requires that players and coaches be up to date on the rules and regulations governing their sport.
- Responsibility demands that players and coaches conduct themselves in an honorable way off the field, as well as on it.

Respect

- All athletes should show respect for teammates, opponents, coaches and officials.
- All coaches should show respect for their players, opponents and officials
- All fans, especially parents, should show respect for other fans, as well as both teams and officials

Blackman, Moscardo and Gray (2016) affirmed that the sportsmanship model is built on the idea that sport both demonstrates and encourages character development, which then influences the moral character of the broader community. How we each compete in sports can have an effect on our personal moral and ethical behavior outside of the competition. Some argue for a "bracketed morality" within sports. This approach according to Anderson and Gerrard (2005) holds that sport and competition are set apart from real life, and occupy a realm where ethics and moral codes do not apply. Instead, some argue, sports serves as an outlet for our primal aggression and a selfish need for recognition and respect gained through the conquering of an

opponent. In this view, aggression and victory are the only virtues. For example, a football player may be described as mean and nasty on the field, but kind and gentle in everyday life. His violent disposition on the field is not wrong because when he is playing the game he is part of an immoral reality that is dictated only by the principle of winning.

An ethical approach to sport rejects this bracketed morality and honors the game and one's opponent through tough but fair play. This means understanding the rules and their importance in encouraging respect for your opponent, which pushes you to be your best.

Implications for Unfair and immoral sports-related Advantages in Sports

In modern sports, anyone that goes into a competition goes into it to win, but the undue or over-emphasis on the winning by every sports athletes and coaches has resulted to a lot of unfair and immoral sports-related advantages such as abuse and use of drugs in sports, use of non-bonafide athletes, violence and hooliganism, manipulation of sports results and among others.

1. **Drug Use and Abuse in Sports:** There are drugs that enhance athletic performance and they are called performance enhancing drugs. The use of performance –enhancing substances in sports is common. Some athletes resort to performance enhancing drugs in order to win and be at peak in their athletic career. Athletes who are detected and found guilty of drug use have witnessed their medals stripped from them. Stovitz and Satin (2004) expressed that abuse and use of these drugs has made some athletes to suffer eating disorder, dehydration, baldness, undernourishment, even death among others which have both short and long term dangerous effects on the health and life of the athletes. Many athletes have been banned in participating in their sports for using performance enhancing drugs. Giving an instance, (Turner & Passmore, 2018) noted where a British Sprinter, Dwain Chambers received a life-time Olympic ban in 2003 for use of the designer steroid tetrahydrogestrinone (THG). Athletes know the negative consequence of using drugs in terms of the result and their sports career when detected yet they take them because they cannot afford to lose a competition.
2. **Using of Non-Bonafide Athletes:** One of the cheating practices in an attempt to win at all cost is the fielding of non-bonafide athletes who are not meant for a particular event for undue competitive advantage over the opponents. None bonafide- athletes can be over-aged to play with under-aged or under-aged hired to play with over-aged. It could be a non-university student playing as a full registered university student. The use

non-bonafide athletes in sports is a deviant behaviour of falsehood and fraud where an athlete who are not bonafide members of the team or university, state are hired, paid and all arrangements made for the athlete to play for the team or university against their opponent with the objective of winning the competition. Just to win a competition, some coaches import athletes from other universities, cities, states, and countries for example universities like Imo State University (IMSU) do use their state athletes from Grasshopper Stadium to represent their IMSU medical students at UNILORIN 2010 (Uzor, 2017). They were screened out remaining only three students who were true bonafide of IMSU medical students that participated in the game. Such illegal contracts of the athletes end with the end of the competition. Some coaches also use over-aged athletes who are not meant for a particular age category for undue competitive advantage over the opponent. For instance, fielding athletes who are above 17 years gives them undue advantages over their opponents who are below 17 years for U-17 FIFA World Cup. Countries have been involved and found guilty in age cheating during tournaments.

3. **Inflicting pains or Injury on an Opponent:** Inflicting pains or injury on an opponent with the intention of knocking him or her out of the game, like the Saint's bounty scandal. Some even covert personal fouls, such as grabbing a player underwater during a water polo match in order to gain unfair sports-related advantages over an opponent and to win by all means.
4. **Violence and Hooliganism:** Severally, athletes who are losing have been seen to be more violent and play contrary to the sports rules and ethics. Sometimes, sports organisers and security personnel have been faced with the challenge of controlling fans whose team or athlete lost a match as they sometimes exhibit violent behaviours. Some athletes or teams with their fans have been found destroying sports facilities and causing harms to other sports participants because they could not win a particular sports competition.
5. **Technology:** Technology brings benefits to sports, but it also brings disadvantages. Sometimes the technology needs to be embedded and improved before it is fully effective, often the problems only emerge after time. Some advantages of technology to athletes includes; improved kit that is more comfortable, more efficient and safer, better medical care which results in fewer injuries, faster recovery from injury, better performance with marginal gains that makes the difference, feedback from coaches is more focused, objective and helpful. It has its disadvantages too which includes among other, technology makes sport and success exclusive to wealthy people and countries who can afford the cost

expensive equipment. This has increased chances of excluding those who cannot access the technology due to cost may lead to unfair advantage for some athletes and coaches.

6. **Bribery and Corruption in Sports:** Sports athletes and coaches may be involved in bribery and corruption due to the drive to win at all costs. Any athlete or team that wants to win by all means may afford to pay money and other material gratifications to the officiating officials especially referee whose decision is final in any competition. Some athletes or teams officials may go as far as seeking to know who the officiating official of their competition will be, where they are coming from and where they will be lodged for a particular competition. Turner and Passmore (2018) highlighted some of the ways officials were bribed which includes: Coaches influencing match officials to gain undue advantage; club managers giving bribe to officiating officials to favour their teams are problems affecting the Nigeria Premier League. According to Elendu and Mina (2017), sports-related deviance to be examined is sport administrators who take bribes and gifts in return for favour and who violate public trust and organisational principles by making decisions clearly based on their personal interests. Also to be examined are judges and other officials in events who take bribes or make agreements with others to alter the outcome of events (Gibbons, 2018). The motives behind the immoral and unethical behaviours of judges and other officiating officials may not be far from some sports manager's anxious behaviours and attitude to win competitions especially winning by all means.
7. **Fixing of Match and Manipulation of Results:** Some team managers may not want to compete with a particular team at the preliminaries, and the best way to avoid it is through fixing of match. Fixing of match is a conscious and calculated sporting fraud and effort to decide on the athlete, team or club to compete with, who is influenced by an athlete or team official for the purpose of winning a tournament for oneself or others for the interest of the one doing the manipulation. Some team officials may influence the group they want to belong to in order to aid their qualifying and winning a competition. Fixing match involves soliciting and giving undue athletic advantage to a particular athlete or team before competitions. Some officials sometimes manipulate the sports results in favour of a particular athlete or team.

Conclusion

In modern sports, competition is inevitable as individuals, groups and nations converge to show and test their skills and abilities. Winning and losing

are two ends of sports competition. Everyone identifies with and appreciates the winning team. Winning is a mark of success and achievement. There has been a paradigm shift from the philosophy of mere participation to winning. Certain unfair advantages such as drug use and abuse in sports, use of non-bonafide athletes, violence and hooliganism, bribery and corruption to mention but a few have crept into modern sports especially NUGA which could be as a result of the over-emphasis on winning at all cost mentality of some sports participants including athletes and coaches.

Recommendations

1. Winning should not be over-emphasised by athletes and coaches. The philosophy of NUGA and Olympics Games which states that the most important thing is not winning but taking part should be inculcated into every sports athlete through the University Directors of Sports by organising conferences, seminars, workshops and symposia at different sports zones.
2. The use of certificates for participation to both athletes and coaches to replace the use of medals should also be introduced in these modern sports such as NUGA and Olympic Games. This is because Medals are graded such as Gold for 1st position, Silver for 2nd position and Bronze for 3rd position while certificates for participation is only one common certificate for all.
3. Sports organisers and associations should strengthen their drug testing efforts to detect athletes who may use drugs to win at all cost.
4. The sports organizing committee from NUGA and Olympic Games should ban athletes and coaches for life in their respective sport who engage in unfair sports-related advantages to win sports competition at all cost and the athletes or coach's country banned for at least four years.
5. The elected sports organising bodies from different sport zones should make strong policies and spell out serious punishments to guard against all forms of cheating, malpractices and unethical behaviours such as unfair advantages among sports persons.
6. Only registered officiating officials with license should be appointed to officiate sports competitions because he/she will work with sports ethics to avoid losing his/her certificate.
7. Athletes and coaches that exhibit the best maximum performance at any sports competition should be rewarded, honored, respected, encouraged and motivated through putting them at the wall of fame to encourage others by the Sports Organising committee

8. The government and the sports organisers should provide modern high technology facilities and equipment to athletes and coaches before and during sports competition arena to train and perform at their highest level to avoid giving unfair advantage to some who cannot afford it.

References

- Anderson, L.C. & Gerrard, D. F. (2005). Ethical issues concerning New Zealand sports doctors. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2005; 31: 88-92. *Doi: 10.1136/jme2002.000836*. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar].
- Anugwueje, K. (2017). Uniport Director of Sports strategies on rewarding Uniport athletes' for winning medals during NUGA Games at University of Agriculture, Markurdi 23rd April 2017
- Brenna, D. & Wildflower, L. (2010). Ethics in coaching, pp369-380.in *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*. E. Cox, T. Bachkirova & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.). London: Sage.
- Blackman, A.; Moscardo, G. & Gray, D. E. (2016). Challenges for the theory and practice of business coaching: a systematic review of empirical evidence (pdf). *Human Resource Development Review*. 15 (4): 459-486. *doi: 10.1177/1534484316673177* ISSN 15344843.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2016). Working with ethical dilemmas. Retrieved from <https://www.coachingandmentoringinternational>
- Elendu, I. C. & Mina, I. D. (2017). Over-emphasis on winning, host- to-win and winning –at-all cost syndrome in modern sports competitions: Implication for unsportsmanship behaviours of sports participants. *International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health*, 4 (5):104-107.
- Global Code of Ethics for Coaches and Mentors (2016). Association for Coaching & European Mentoring and Coaching. Retrieved 25th April 2020 from <http://www.coachfederation.org/files/includes/docs/086088TheDublinDeclarationwithAppendicesEnglish.pdf>.
- Gibbons, A. (2018, 25 January). Five ethical frameworks for coaches. Retrieved from <https://www.trainingjournal.com/blog>
- Hanson, K. O. & Savage, M. (2012). What role do ethics play in sports, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Retrieved from <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-appliedethics>
- Harrott, A. (2014). Advantages and disadvantages of technology in sports. Retrieved from <https://www.prezi.com/gobapu0ing>

- ICF (2017). ICF Code of Ethics. Retrieved on 31st March, 2020 from <https://www.coachfederation.org/about-icf/ethics-&-regulation/icf-code-of-ethics>
- ICF (2017). ICF Ethics Hotlines. Retrieved 25th April 2020 form <https://www.coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx/itemNumber=850&navItemnumber=621>.
- Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Ethic Merriam-Webster, Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethic>. Accessed 16th April 16, 2020
- Michael, W. A. (2010). Sports and moral development. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- Passmore, J. & Mortimer, L. (2011). *Ethics in Coaching* in L. Boyce & G. Hernez-Broome, (ed.). *Advancing Executive Coaching: setting the course for successful leadership coaching* (pp205-228). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Spence, G. B. (2007). Further development of evidenced-based coaching. Lessons from the rise and fall of the human potential movement. *Australia Psychologist*, 42(4): 255-65.
- Stapleton, A. B., Hankes, D. M., Hays, K. F. & Parham, W. D. (2010). Ethical dilemmas in sport psychology. Retrieved from <http://www.psychology.iresearchnet.com>ethics>
- Stovitz, S. D. & Satin, D. J. (2004). Ethics and the athlete: why sports are more than a game but less than a war. *Clinical Sports Medicine* 2004;23:215-225. Doi: 10.1016/j.csm.2004.01.002.[PubMed] [CrossRef] [GoogleScholar]
- Telfer, H. (2010). *Sports coaching: Professionalisation and practice in Coaching practice and practice ethics*. Retrieved from <https://www.books.google.com> on 3rd May 2020
- Turner, E. & Passmore, J. (2018). Ethical dilemmas and tricky decisions: A global perspective of coaching supervisors practices in coach ethical decision-making. Retrieved from *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. 16 (1), Doi: 10.24384/0000473.
- Uzor, T. N. (2017). Using of bonafide athletes during the accreditation and screening exercise for 2010 Nigerian Medical Student Association (NIMSA) games at University of Ilorin (Unilorin).
- Vargas-Mendoza, N., Aguilar, T. F. & Gonzalez, J.A. (2018). Ethical concerns in Sports: When the will to win exceed the spirit of sport. Retrieved from <https://www.bi.nlm.nih.gov> on 1st May 2020.