



July, 2005
Volume 7, Issue 2

Sportspersonship in Youth Basketball and Volleyball Players

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine sportspersonship orientation in youth basketball and volleyball players. Participants of the study were 302 male and female high school basketball and volleyball players. Result suggested that male rather than female players, older rather than younger players, and basketball rather than volleyball players have a lower regard for sportspersonship. Moreover, younger female players were found to possess the highest regard for sportspersonship.

Introduction

As sports educators, we often take pride in saying that sports builds character. Indeed, through taking part in sports, one is expected to develop “sportspersonship”, a term coined to include virtues such as fairness, self-control, courage and persistence (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). However, in today’s sporting environment, displays of un-sportpersonlike behavior in all levels of competitive sports are all-too-common (Hopkins & Lantz, 1999). This phenomenon heightens the need to understand factors associated with attitude towards sportspersonship and the display of sportspersonship behavior. Previous research such as those by Bredemeier and Shields (1986) and Miller and Jarman (1988) contested that team sports, such as basketball, are more conducive to displays of poor sportspersonship than individual sports such as swimming because of the nature of the sport. Basketball affords more opportunities for physical contacts and aggressive maneuvers. However, the comparison of different sport types is not common in the literature. Chantal and Bernache-Assollant (2003), as a concluding comment in their study, also urged for sport type comparisons. Specifically, they suggested that sportspersonship orientation between contact and non-contact sports warrants investigation.

In addition to sport types, gender difference in sportpersonship orientation is another area requiring further work. Until recently, studies in sportpersonship involved mostly male players as subjects. Where males and females were included as a study sample, findings were inconsistent. For example, whereas Bredemeier (1995) did not find any gender difference in her study on sport specific moral reasoning with children aged between 9 to 12, Duda, Olson, and Templin (1991) and Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) obtained contrary results. Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) studied morale judgment and intention among male and female collegiate basketball players and found the female players displayed higher levels of moral functioning. This finding echoed previous studies such as that by Duda et.al (1991) with collegiate level basketball players. However, as studies by Duda et. al (1991) and Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) involved older participants, perhaps the issue of gender does not come into effect until a later age.

While these early studies provide valuable insight about important correlates of sportpersonship, the paucity of research on this topic warrants continued effort. Specifically lacking in the literature is the inclusion of age, gender, and sport types as possible factors that might influence orientation towards sportpersonship. Therefore, the primary aim of the present study was to identify the sportpersonship orientation of male and female high school basketball and volleyball players. These two team sports were selected to represent a contact sport (basketball) and a non-contact sport (volleyball). Through examining sub-group differences, a better understanding of the impact of these individual variables on sportpersonship orientation could be obtained. Such information might be profitable to coaches and parents when planning developmental programs for youth players.

Method

Participants

A total of 148 male and 154 female high school basketball and volleyball athletes from three urban secondary schools took part in the study on a voluntary basis. The percentage of players in basketball and volleyball were 40.7% (n=123) and 59.3% (n = 179) respectively. In selecting schools for the study, care was made such that they were of similar playing levels, namely, they were all ranked in the mid portion of the ranking system of the inter-schools competitions. The age range of the athletes was between 12 and 18 ($M = 14.48$, $SD = 1.76$). All athletes had participated in high school competitions for at least one season (12 months).

Instrument

Sportpersonship was assessed with the 25-item Multidimensional Sportpersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS; Vallerand, Briere, Blanchard, & Provencher, 1997) which uses a 7-point scale was used for scoring each item. A score of 1 represents the statement of “does not describe me” and a score of 7 represents the statement of “describes me exactly”. The MSOS has five sub-scales: Commitment, Social convention, Rules and officials, Opponent, and Negative approach. For example, an athlete who shows up and works hard during all practices and games would be considered as displaying sportpersonship in the Commitment dimension. Behavioral characteristics of the other dimensions would include acts such as recognizing the good performances of opponents and being a good loser (Social convention), showing respect and

concern for rules and officials, even when the official appears incompetent (Rules and officials), showing true respect for the opponent by refusing to win by default as in the case when the opponent shows up late (Opponent), and showing a sense of non-control in face of adverse experiences (Negative approach). This last dimension, Negative approach, was entered as a reversed score during the data input process so that interpretation of the score can be consistent with other dimensions. After the score has been reversed, an individual with a high score in this dimension would represent an ability to exercise self-control when facing adverse experiences. A summative score to represent an index of sportpersonship, was generated by scores of all items such that a higher summative score would represent a higher regard for sportpersonship.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As the questionnaire used in the study was not developed for this sample, their psychometric properties were re-evaluated. The coefficient alpha obtained for the total scale of the MSOS was high (.82), and although the alphas for the sub-scales were not as high as desirable, they were high enough to be accepted (George & Mallery, 2003). The values obtained were .68, .64, .71, .64, and .66 for the sub-scales of Commitment, Social convention, Rules and officials, Opponent, and Negative approach respectively.

Group Comparison

To understand whether sportpersonship differs between gender (male and female), age group (12-14, >15), and players of different types of sport (basketball versus volleyball), a 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA was performed on the summed score of the MSOS. All main effects and the interaction effect between age group and gender were significant (Table 1). Examination of the mean scores showed that male players rather than female players, older players rather than younger players, and basketball rather than volleyball players had lower regards for sportpersonship. The respective means of these sub-groups are presented in Table 2. When the mean scores of the sub-groups involved in the significant interaction were examined, younger female players were found to possess the highest level of regard for sportpersonship (Female 12-14: $M = 71.11$, $SD = .20$; Female >15: $M = 69.60$, $SD = .22$; Male 12-14: $M = 69.24$, $SD = .20$; Male >15: $M = 68.90$, $SD = .21$).

Table 1. Result of 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on sportspersonship index

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Gender	1	119.12	38.70*
Age Group	1	61.77	20.07*
Sport Type	1	346.10	112.46*
Gender x Age Group	1	25.02	2.84
Gender x Sport Type	1	8.74	20.07*
Age Group x Sport Type	1	3.88	1.26
Gender x Age Group x Sport Type	1	1.15	.37
Error	294		

* $p < .01$

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of MSOS dimensions

Source			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Commitment</i>	Male	Young Basketball	13.90	.11
		Volleyball	14.06	.09
		Older Basketball	13.78	.11
		Volleyball	13.74	.09
	Female	Young Basketball	14.02	.10
		Volleyball	14.27	.08
		Older Basketball	13.79	.00
		Volleyball	14.11	.09
<i>Social Convention</i>	Male	Young Basketball	13.98	.09
		Volleyball	13.94	.08
		Older Basketball	13.82	.10
		Volleyball	13.65	.08
	Female	Young Basketball	14.14	.09
		Volleyball	14.67	.07
		Older Basketball	13.91	.10
		Volleyball	14.24	.08
<i>Rules and Officials</i>	Male	Young Basketball	14.01	.10
		Volleyball	14.02	.09
		Older Basketball	13.64	.11
		Volleyball	14.03	.09
	Female	Young Basketball	13.98	.10
		Volleyball	14.52	.08
		Older Basketball	13.77	.02
		Volleyball	14.27	.09
<i>Opponent</i>	Male	Young Basketball	13.60	.07
		Volleyball	14.34	.06
		Older Basketball	13.79	.08
		Volleyball	14.49	.07
	Female	Young Basketball	14.29	.08
		Volleyball	14.67	.06
		Older Basketball	13.75	.08
		Volleyball	14.39	.07
<i>Negative Approach</i>	Male	Young Basketball	12.97	.10
		Volleyball	13.61	.08
		Older Basketball	12.75	.11
		Volleyball	14.08	.09
	Female	Young Basketball	13.44	.10
		Volleyball	14.18	.08
		Older Basketball	13.04	.11
		Volleyball	13.90	.09

In addition to the investigation of sub-group differences in the overall orientation towards sportpersonship, separate analyses for sub-group differences in each of the dimensions of sportpersonship were also performed. A summary of significant findings is presented in Table 3. Significant gender differences were found in four of the five dimensions (Social convention,

Rules and officials, Opponent, and Negative approach). In all dimensions, females were found to score significantly higher than the males. This suggested that female players rather than male players have higher regards for these dimensions of sportpersonship. Age-group differences were also found in three dimensions (Commitment, Social convention, and Rules and officials). Younger players have higher mean scores thus suggesting that they have higher regards in these dimensions of sportpersonship. Specifically, as suggested by the significant interactions between gender and age-group, younger females, as compared to other sub-groups, have the highest regards in the dimensions of Opponent and Negative approach.

Table 3. A summary of significant sub-group differences ($p < .01$)

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>Commitment</i>			
Age Group	1	3.69	8.87
<i>Social convention</i>			
Gender	1	11.20	38.83
Age Group	1	5.32	18.46
Gender x Sport Type	1	5.19	18.02
<i>Rules and officials</i>			
Gender	1	3.22	8.45
Age Group	1	3.07	8.08
Sport Type	1	9.34	24.52
<i>Opponent</i>			
Gender	1	3.48	16.70
Sport Type	1	27.17	130.16
Gender x Age Group	1	6.14	29.43
<i>Negative approach</i>			
Gender	1	5.95	17.05
Sport Type	1	57.16	163.62
Gender x Age Group	1	3.96	11.35

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether sportpersonship orientation differs with respect to gender, age, and sport type. Within the sample examined, male players were found to have lower a regard for sportpersonship than female players. This result of gender differences is in line with previous research such as those by Duda, Olson, and Templin (1991). Several

interpretations have been offered to explain for gender differences in the literature. For example, Weiss and Bredemeier (1990) suggested that males are more accepting to aggression in sport and thus, tend to be more tolerant of un-sportpersonlike behavior. Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) are of the view that basic differences in achievement orientation between males and females are partly responsible for their differential regard for sportpersonship. When the separate dimensions were examined, females were found to score higher than males in their attitudes towards Social convention, Rules and officials, Opponent, and Negative approach. This suggests that females are more prone to mirror behaviors such as congratulating opponents after a loss, shaking hands with opponent's coach, rectifying unjust situations for opponent, helping a fallen opponent from the floor, controlling self when mistakes were made, and readiness to admit to own mistakes.

Older players are also found to have a lower regard for sportpersonship than younger players. Younger players scored higher than older players in the dimensions of Commitment, Social convention, and Rules and Officials. This suggests that younger players are more prone to mirror behaviors such as giving maximum effort, think of ways to improve, shaking hands with opponents regardless of win or loss, respect officials' decisions, and truly abide by all rules of the sport. As age group differences had not been thoroughly examined in previous works, this finding should pose a new direction for future research. For example, future research is needed to determine whether age group differences in sportpersonship is a reflection of the individual's age per se or a reflection his/her length of exposure in the sports system.

With respect to players of different sport type, volleyball players are found to have a higher regard for sportpersonship. In this study, basketball and volleyball were selected as sports to be studied because the former is a contact sport and therefore, has a greater potential in raising issues related to un-sportpersonlike behaviors (Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001). Finding from this study certainly highlights the need for future research to query whether the nature of certain sport type is more conducive for nurturing sportpersonship.

An interesting result from this study pertains to the finding of younger female players having a higher regard for sportpersonship than older female players or male players. Bredemeier and Shield (1986) suggested that the detrimental aspect of sports appear to be less pronounced in women's sport programs because sport has been traditionally seen as a male domain. However, this does not explain why younger females, in particular, have higher concerns for sportpersonship. Perhaps length of exposure to the sports system, as mentioned previously, also plays an influential role. Given the consistency of this finding with previous work (Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Treasure, Carpenter, & Power, 2000), it becomes necessary for coaches and parents to seriously consider downplaying the emphasis of winning, especially among male athletes. This suggestion was also mentioned by Stornes (2001) when he found that younger male handball players were more susceptible to displays of un-sportpersonship behaviors than older players. He further pointed out that coaches are a major source of influence among less experienced younger players, and that if sports is to be a vehicle for developing sportpersonship, there is much room for educational programs.

In sum, this study provided evidence regarding gender differences with respect to sportpersonship. In particular, among older male contact sport players were found to have lower regards for this important aspect. However, although this study brings additional support to

previous findings on sportpersonship, there are two important short-comings. First, the study relied on self-reports of behavioral intentions rather than observed behavior, and although there is strong evidence suggesting the link between intention and behavior, future research might consider providing additional data source to verify the link. Second, results were obtained from a fairly homogenous sample, therefore, to be able to generalize the finding, future studies might consider including more sport types and players of different levels. Despite these limitations, the finding of younger female players as having the highest regard for sportpersonship should provide food for thought among coaches, parents, and researchers alike.

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