

Violence in Youth Football. Sports or Socio-Cultural Phenomenon?

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Abstract

Youth sport events are part of a growing industry to which event venues are tailoring their policies, procedures, and designs. The competitive nature of the events and their participants have caused these venues to examine their existing policies and adjust them to increase security and safety measures for the athletes, coaches, spectators, game officials, and venue staff. Tempers at these events will flare, and in recent years violence is becoming increasingly more common. Parents and athletes have attacked each other, coaches, and game officials due to the intense nature of these events. The result of these acts could range from minor injuries to death. In Montevideo and in all Uruguay, we are witnessing an escalation of violence that exists in all football training divisions. This aggression is not only detected in the official encounters, inside and out of the courts. They are also seen daily in practices, youth complexes, where the subjects are prepared. My dual role in sport organizations, as coach trainer of the technical bodies and sports psychologist at all educational levels, led me to observe and witness this phenomenon directly, achieving a practical study of the problem.

Keywords: Football, formatives, violence, competition, parents

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PROBLEM: Is the growing violence and aggressiveness in the divisions training of the professional club the result of the soccer itself or is it a parent-cultural event?

Material: Population: 120 Training athletes

Methodology: Personal interviews with athletes and relatives, direct observation.

OBJECTIVE: Directly detect the advancement of violence in youth football scenarios.

Introduction

Causes of athlete violence

Athlete violence can partially be traced to pressure from the parents and coaches to perform well in competition. Even media, as well as research and stories told by participants, show that children's behavior in sports is influenced by their parents. These adults consider that the athletes are constantly being watched by college and professional scouts. The athletes are pushed to perform and compete at levels beyond their skill, almost as though they would be training for professional sports. This increased pressure can push the youth to their breaking point. If the children feel that they will only find approval from their parents if they beat others, they will experience the pressure to perform. Some feel as though love from their parents will only be given to them if they are the highest performing athletes. This pressure can cause them to develop perfectionist attitudes, increasing the likelihood of a violent reaction if they do not perform to the standard they have set for themselves. They are pressured to specialize in sports at younger ages because their parents see extreme skill as an open invitation to play for elite colleges and universities. It holds the key to education and prestige. Even the very young children aren't immune to this influences.

It is also found that coaches and parents are placing a higher emphasis on winning than performing well and showing sportsmanship. As a result, the kids are approaching their games with the attitude that they need to win at all costs.]Also, they see the shortcuts of cheating as a better way to achieve their parents' goals. The athletes experience that they are judged by how many games they can win, as opposed to how they are winning or their performance and skill.

Athletes also find pressure to win in situations where the coaches are paid depending on their team's win-loss record. They understand that they will only be put into the game if they are winning, and will do whatever it takes to achieve this goal. The results of the competitions are made public, and the coaches understand that they are under constant scrutiny to produce a winning team. This will in turn result in them pushing winning upon the children. Another pressuring situation for athletes is found when they are compared to their teammates. When a coach shows high praise to another athlete or compares ability and productivity, children undergo the pressure to perform, and become more motivated to win at any cost. Studies have shown that this pressure to receive praise for their own ability has been found to precede unsportsmanlike conducts. The athletes become more competitive with each other when praise and admiration is shown by their peers.

Their desire to receive the same praise and acceptance overpowers their moral code. This will affect their behaviors, often resulting in their

willingness to do whatever it takes to receive the same recognition. Studies show that the social impact and pressure to be popular, well-liked, and admired among their peers can often serve as a usual predictor of the poor sport behavior. They focus on their ultimate goal, with little to no regard of the consequences.

This prompts them to act violently if they feel it will help them to appear more successful. And the coaches who place a higher emphasis on winning, tend to ignore the importance of sportsmanship in youth sports. Sportsmanship has come to be regarded as a simple hand shake at the end of a game or match. The athletes aren't taught sportsmanship, so the fighting becomes a natural part of the game. This is when they are most likely to commit foul play within the game. Athletes will intentionally hurt a good player from an opposing team to prevent them from returning to the game, thus increasing their chances of winning (Fiore, 2003). It will also occur out of frustration if they are being outplayed, blocked or covered during the game.

The lack of sportsmanship will also lead to fighting, as evidenced in the case of the youth soccer that began with the winning team taunting the losing team. Studies have shown that athletes respond to their parents' and coaches' actions. When sportsmanship is not shown to them, the young athletes will not see a need to use it. If they see their coach reacting in an unsportsmanlike way to the opposing team or coaches, they will do the same regardless of what the coach says. It has also been found that a coach who ignores unsportsmanlike conduct but still praises the athlete for accomplishing a goal will promote poor sportsmanship in the athlete.

The adults in authority over the youth athletes can tend to forget how impressionable the latter are. They will almost expect them to make the decision that they have not yet had enough life experience to make. For example, a coach who admonishes an athlete for an illegal act during the game, but then demonstrates a lack of sportsmanship by their own actions, is putting the athlete in a difficult position. They become confused by the stark difference between what they are told and what is being demonstrated to them.

The children will tend to react by doing what they perceive the coach values, often prompting unsportsmanlike conduct such as arguing, fighting, or other violent acts. Poor influence from role models is another way in which youth athletes view violence in sports. These role models can include parents, coaches, and even professional athletes.

The actions these children witness from their role models will shape their reactions. It shows them that the people they look up, to find poor behavior acceptable, so they are free to do the same. Parents of successful youth athletes have admitted to questioning their children's actions that

occurred during a game. Often as young as 13 or 14, these athletes have excused their behavior with the idea that inappropriate behavior is normal now in sports. Parents are exhibiting these behaviors during youth sports games for all ages. Reports have placed it at events for teenagers all the way down to 5-year old tee ball games. Unfortunately, kids are impressionable. They learn their behaviors from those around them. If they see negative behavior being portrayed from a person in a higher authority, they will be likely to mimic this behavior.

A previous study showed a direct correlation between the amount of negative parents and spectator behavioral occurrences, and the resulting increase of those behaviors in the youth athletes. Coaches as poor influences are becoming more common as well. According to a study done to survey coach, athlete, and spectator's behaviors, 26% of youth athletes reported being told by their coach that retaliating against an opponent was acceptable and being encouraged to participate in it.

Coaches further increase the problem by encouraging this type of behavior as well as demonstrating poor behavior through their own actions. Poor sportsmanship is taught through these examples. Coaches also become poor influences when their behavior demonstrates that violence is acceptable. Forty-eight percent of athletes surveyed in the 2005 project reported seeing their coaches arguing angrily in reaction to a game official's call. These reactions become extremely negative influences on the athletes.

The coaches are viewed as role models for the youth athletes, and this behavior encourages more of the same from the children. When children look up to their coaches, the praise they receive from them is of high importance. Coaches do not always recognize that the time they spend with the youth athletes makes them only second to parents and guardians in terms of influencing.

This makes them more likely to be influenced by their actions and words. Another study has shown that young athletes respond to all feedback given to them by coaches, and will react in a way that will conjure the same response from the coach as a previous occurrence. Thus, positive feedback for negative behavior will be met with additional poor behavior in the future.

Professional athletes and the media

The media has taken a profound effect on our society as a whole.

The same can be said for pop culture media. The internet and sports networks bring live activity into our homes. Celebrities are used to endorse products and keep children in school. This, along with the way their lives are glamorized, has turned celebrities into people to be admired and emulated, even before family and other influential institutions. Partially due to the influence of the media, professional athletes hold a high status and regard in

our culture. Professional sports are laden with athletes focused on competition and winning, partially due to the egos involved. This pushes sportsmanship to the background, and shows youth athletes that the professionals value their records more than their reputations.

A child who watched his or her sports idol participating in verbal and physical violence during a game will come to believe that it is part of the game. They try to emulate these athletes, partially because they think is the proper way to perform, and also because they think they will be viewed as those athletes are.

The performance of professional sports athletes can have a direct impact on how youth athletes understand morals and ethics in regard to athletic competition. The media reports of professional athletes and sports events feature the hard hitting, violent actions that occur during the game. While the best plays are also shown, a fight that occurs over the course of the game is brought to the forefront and will be repeatedly highlighted on broadcasts.

This is the constant exposure the children receive in relation to their idol's performance, which is part of what makes them find it to be so acceptable. The idolization of these sports professionals is reflected in the fact that, because of the high visibility afforded to them by the media, when questioned, young males replied that at 14 they would like to be remembered as an athletic star. Sports hold a high influence in our culture, and the athletes involved in professional sports can influence the moral decisions of the youth athletes.

When asked, many children have responded that their behavior was prompted by what they have seen on television. They are under the impression that it is acceptable because their professional sports idols are behaving in such a manor. Youth athletes learn their respective sports from a combination of both their coaches and the examples they see.

This is why it is natural for them to emulate the behaviors and actions they witness their professional role models demonstrating. Many professional athletes are not bad sports. The challenge lies in the acts that are being broadcast to the children. The newsworthy actions are the ones that display poor sportsmanship. If the adults directly influencing the children are not exposing them to the athletes that are good sports, the children will only learn from the ones who are not.

This increases the chance of their behavior becoming unsportsmanlike and violent.

Lessons through sport

Another factor behind athlete violence can be found in the actions leading up to violent situation. It can often be in response to verbal or

physical abuse directed toward other athletes, coaches, or game officials. This can cause the athletes to become defensive, or even prompt further abuse toward others. If the athletes see the others as being weak, they could be more likely to react violently to achieve their desired results.

Parental violence situations in sports are not new to the industry; however, their frequency has significantly increased in recent years. There are some reports that claim that these situations occur weekly. Each occurrence is documented by game officials. During the year, it was reported receiving notification of two to three acts of parental violence at youth sports events each week. This coincides with a study done by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS). According to that study, between the years 1995 and 2000 the number of parents losing their control at youth sport events jumped from 5% to 15%. This number still continues to grow.

In an email communication with Greg Bach, Vice President of Communications for NAYS, he revealed that by 2008 the number had jumped to 29% of surveyed individuals admitting to having witnessed physical confrontations at youth sport events. Large numbers of parents report witnessing other parents being verbally aggressive during youth sport events. These situations include derogatory comments being made toward their own children, children on both teams, coaches, officials, and other parents and spectators. Many also report witnessing severe physical interactions, such as fighting, among parents and other spectators. These behaviors range in severity. Some include verbal aggression, some are physical, yet nonviolent, such as mooning officials, and others are physically aggressive and potentially life-threatening.

Parents vs. other spectators

One of the most well-known stories. This situation occurred at a youth soccer practice. One father approached another who was supervising the practice complaining about the hard hits the children were using with each other. The supervising father referred to it as part of the game. In a 2014 study, 5% of youth athletes admitted being the victim of a physical attack by a spectator at their game. According to another portion of the survey, 17% of athletes replied that the behavior of a fan had scared them during their game. Physical violence toward the children occurs in a variety of sports. If they are not demonstrating the proper behaviors, the children and parents will both learn that violence is proper behavior and will act accordingly. Parent violence is a significant threat to the safety of the event staff, coaches, and athletes. Their lack of knowledge concerning the sport, financial investment both in the present and in their child's future, emotional attachment, and ego, can each impact their reactions to what is occurring over the course of the game.

Conclusion and recommendations

The violence in soccer is a socio-cultural trigger. The most important problem is the behavior of coaches, parents and relatives of the players, who use these games to express their daily frustrations. During the weekends, when they go to see their children, they forget that they are coaches, parents or relative, and are transformed into hooligans. The game, as well, is transformed into a war. Where is not a healthy competition to improve mind, and body, the only important thing is to win, no matter how it is achieved. We strong recommend psychoeducation's for everybody

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