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Sport as a platform for values education

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ABSTRACT

Acuña-Delgado A, Acuña-Gómez E. Sport as a platform for values education. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.* Vol.6, No. 4, pp. 573-584, 2011. Sport as a cultural fact, reflected in it the characteristics of the society in which it is immersed, but at the same time constitutes a tool with which to act on the system, a vehicle of social change capable of generating attitudes and behaviors. To what extent contributes or can sport contributes to achieve an education in values? This will be the question to which we will try to answer in the present study, which we divided in two parts: First of all we define the meanings and characteristics that the sport has had and actually have. Secondly we broach the values associated with it and the educational potential it has. Finally for reflect on the state of the question right now and the future. **Key words:** SPORT, EDUCATION, VALUES, CULTURE, SOCIETY.

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INTRODUCTION

“We are going to use sport for national construction and to promote the ideas we believe that will lead to peace and stability in our country” (Carlin, 2009). These were some of the words that Nelson Mandela directed to François Peinar, africaner and Springboks rugby team captain, in private interview, moments before the beginning of Rugby World Cup in 1995, held in South Africa, and finally won the South African team. This World Championship’s story comes in handy gathered in the book *The Human Factor*, published by the journalist John Carlin (2009), and turned into a movie by Clint Eastwood (2010) entitled *Invictus*. It tells the story of a man who after spending 23 years confined in prison for his way of thinking, becomes President of his country, an unstable and divided country, in which he prevents a civil war, understanding at that time that above all he should deactivate the 50 years existing racial hatred, and achieve an emotional bond between blacks and whites. As a great strategist, he took the opportunity that the World Championship would take place there and clearly saw that sport was an extraordinary mean to achieve it. The effort finally paid off, not just because the mean employed was suitable to generate spontaneous social cohesion, but because it was managed by the political talent of a great person.

However, beyond this significant case, there are currently discrepancies between thinkers of the sport phenomenon about the benefits it brings to society, and the positive or negative values it can promote. In that sense, Arnold says (1999), quoting Huxley (1969):

“[...] as any instrument invented by the man, sport can be used with good and bad purposes. Properly implanted it can teach endurance and stimulate a feeling of fair play and a respect for rules, a coordinated effort and the subordination of personal interest to the group. Improperly used, it can stimulate the group and personal and vanity, the greedy desire of victory and the hate to rivals, a corporate spirit of intolerance and a disdain for those who are beyond a certain role arbitrarily selected” (Santiago, 2002).

Obviously, nothing is good or bad in itself, sport, as human practice and social phenomenon, has a wide repertoire of symbols, values and norms in permanent construction and promotion making it an important pedagogic tool, but by itself the satisfactory results in the formation of better people are uninsured. The many variables that make up its internal structure (players, coaches, federations, etc.) and the diversity of situations and contextual circumstances in which it develops, makes the variety of cases is endless.

We have divided the present work in two parts. First we try to clarify the importance that sport has as a socio-cultural fact, for which we have first delimit the concept and general characteristics it have in our time; to continue with an sport’s vision in a modern and advance society.

And in the second part we make a general review to values education through sport, and in which we will answer: how is it define value? Which values, functions, meanings and reasons derive from sport? How important are the media in the values transmission? And what kinds of intervention programs are implemented to achieve such values education through sport? Here, we can watch sport game as a pedagogical and political act in the contemporary world.

We will end with some concluding remarks in relation to the values conveyed through sport in the present and for the future.

FIRST PART

Field delimitation

The distinguished sports historian Richard D. Mandell (1986) show how sport, far from being a modern phenomenon, illustrated and reinforced the social and moral order of towns in all times known, giving us a panoramic view of sports activities from pre-Hellenic civilizations and classical world, to modern Europe and America, passing through pre-Columbian and medieval societies.

Modern sport, however, puts its appearance around Industrial Revolution in the Anglosaxon world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, corresponding with the special adaptations of political, economical and social modern life (Mandell, 1986).

According to Piernavieja (1985), the term *sport* (before *depuerto*) first appeared in Spain in the *Cantar del Mío Cid* (1140) meaning transportation, escape or entertainment.

But it is in industrial England where the modern idea of sport came, very close in its origins to the bet (understood at that time, not as a result of chance but of divine predestination), which practice experienced a huge global diffusion because of the country's imperialist vocation which facilitated its exportation. Later, it is worth mentioning the role played by modern Olympic Games, started in Athens in 1896, with its main ideologue Pierre de Coubertin, who without any doubt gave a decisive boost to sports development in contemporary era.

In any case and according to the expressed by Bröhn (1982), the factors which have contributed to the sport evolution in the way it has done in modern era have been: 1. "Development of leisure and entertainment", as a way for recovery, fun and personal development, and where sport activity takes a privilege position. 2. "Globalization of exchanges through transports and mass media", which led to a more cosmopolitan consciousness, with the aim of the record as a universal symbol. 3. "The scientific and technical revolution", which develop a quantitative ideal based in performance and productivity. 4. And "democratic and bourgeois revolution", which promotes the idea of opportunity's equality between people and consequently a sport for all and by all.

Anyway, with all the hoarded expectation and the boom experienced in recent times, it is difficult to find among their studios a common definition satisfactory and at the same time, without leaving any out, that encompassse all possible activities within the term "sport".

J. M^a. Cagigal affirm:

"No one yet has been able to define with general acceptance in what consists sport: not as antropocultural reality, or social reality. And ever going to be more difficult to define. It's a term which besides to change, it has expanded and continues to expand its meaning, both referring to an attitude and human activity, as above all, encompassing a social reality or a set of social realities or institutions" (Cagigal, 1981).

As a complex and changing phenomenon, it is necessary to resort to a wide and inclusive definition which delimit the whole field through its essential elements. In that sense, today we find successful the definition of sport which allows us to look at it as a dual perspective: as a closed system and as an open system (García, 1990; Puig & Heinemann, 1991). As a closed system, sport might be understood as all motor activity (physical and intellectual), competitive, regulated and institutionalized; while as an open system could include other aspects related with games and simple physical exercise. Scientific rationality and economic efficiency, with victory and/or record as a principal attribute, would be the hallmarks of the first; while enjoyment and fulfillment would be the ones of the second. In that way, walking along a road at a good pace (about 5km/h for example), with the deliberate purpose of maintaining or improving fitness can be considered as sport, seeing it as an open system, but not as a closed system. Contrasting system that together comprise sport reality in its forms and meanings diversity.

A look at sport from an advance modern society

The senses of sport are different and therefore also the applications or utilities that contains; its dialectical content allows seeing in it, beside a humanistic dimension, in which is presented as a collective identity vehicle, favoring communication, social dialogue, and personal development (Cagigal, 1981); a mercantile and politicized, marked by the law of economic benefit and sectorial interests of those who remain in power structures (Bröhm, 1982). Sport has without doubt values favoring biopsychosocial development of people, but is also nationalism, politics interests, propaganda advertising, and even vandalism groups home's.

We know that sport is generally beneficial to health, but also can be harmful and is not exempt from risk; deficient practice, recklessness and excesses are paid, and there are many injured athletes, or even killed, not only in the mountains but also in the playing fields by multiple organ failure.

On the other hand, sport offers an opportunity for values of middle and upper strata of society, noun in their practices, to be socialized by people from the lower strata and to integrate them (the values, not the stratum), although those would already take care of generating new practices or changing something the existing ones to continue setting distances and distinguish themselves from others (Bourdieu, 1988).

As a cultural product it largely reflects the contrasts and even contradictions of human beings, how does it unfolds between order and disorder, between collaboration and competition, between solidarity and conflicts. Sport is used as a leisure practice to fill the free time of people, and as a way of working with which others make a living, generating then, leisure and business around it, as well as practice and show. Sport has proven to be an important vehicle of communication between persons and towns, but also has been and continue being used as a form of alienation and acculturation, and even versus communication the power's service, its humanistic dimension is counterbalanced with commercialism and politicization tend to transcend what in "essence" is nothing more than a game.

A proof of sport's strength as an agent of change we had it very close in space and time with what happened with Spanish National Soccer Team, not just for the convening capacity but for the wills uniform way: in just three weeks of world championship, the sense of identity with the national flag has gone further than the work done in more than 30 years of democracy.

For the growing boom that its taking in advanced modern society (not coincidentally the main advertising claims are supported by sports figures), and being both widespread on a global scale with diverse forms and functions, the sport with all its envelope, deserves to be studied from a socio-anthropological perspective harder than what has been done so far. Not by be framed at first within the field of play and recreation ceases to be serious issue, very seriously not just because of the economic or political consequences resulting from there, but even for the implications that has in the realm of sacred, of the absolute, when becoming in something able to excite until the tip of fill the life content becoming essential.

SECOND PART: VALUES EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT

Concept of value

Fallding (1965) defined courage as “a widespread purpose that guides behavior toward uniformity in a variety of situations, to repeat certain self-satisfaction”.

Rocher (1973), meanwhile, says the value “is a way of being or acting that a person or a collective deemed ideal and makes humans or conducts desirables or esteemed.”

Similarly, for Rokeach (1973) value means “an enduring belief in which a mode of conduct or an ultimate state of existence is personally and socially preferable to an opposite mode of conduct or end state of existence”.

Values are in these senses inspiring attributes of judgments and conducts, anyway they are always relative to the person or collectivity that sustains them. They are, therefore, guiding and shapers principles of social behavior.

Values, functions, meanings and motives of sport

According to García et al. (1998), traditional values of sport culture are associated to competition, health, the progress idea, the systematic work, equality, the spirit of justice and the pursuit of victory by own merits.

Gutiérrez & González-Herrero (1995) analyze the reasons why a sample of 256 college students (men and women) practice or will practice physical exercise and get the following responses in order of importance: competition and success, health and fitness, challenge and adventure, hedonism and social relationship, and extrinsic reasons.

The study of Gutiérrez (1995) about the objectives and values of sport applied to a sample of 515 persons from 13 to 45 years old, 42.9% men and 57.1% women, students of BUP, Teaching and Physical Education teachers, belonging from many Spanish provinces, showed as differential results that men values significantly higher “achievement and social power”, “respect and fair play” and “skill and fitness”, while women values more “expression of feelings” (emotional control, usefulness feelings, injustice denouncing, personal creativity, etc...) as sport objectives. This last factor was closely related to age, where youngest were who most valued. Otherwise, although it is somewhat contradictory, nonpracticing people attributed more importance to get “achievement and social power”. Age didn't shows any significant differences, but the students group consider more than teachers that sport should aim toward fellowship and fun, the feelings expression, skill and fitness and self-realization.

Of the three surveys done by García (1998) to the Spanish population between 1985 and 1995 about the meaning that best approximates to what people mean by sport, the healthy nature of sport notes above the rest of notions, probably for understanding that it counteracts social lifestyle increasingly sedentary; and it's a great distance from those other meanings of sport (escape valve, social relationships, personal adventure, character trainer, etc.) that in Anglo-Saxon societies with more sportive and educative tradition, are widespread and assumed in a greater degree.

On the other hand, the reasons why practitioner people played sports between 1980 to 1995 resulted to be very diverse. It stressed the intention to do physical exercise to offset the negative effects of urban society and mass; followed by the playful component and the fondness for certain practice, as preferential reasons. The health concerns, meet friends, physical appearance, avoidance, competition and other reasons were also part of the responses.

In the comparison by gender the reasons offered by men and women are clearly differentiated. Men and women agreed in the physical exercise as dominant reason for sport, but not in others. Women practice it concerned mainly for health and the intention of improving their physical appearance, while males do it primarily for recreational reasons and social fulfillment.

Importance of media in transmission of values

A powerful transmitter of values agent it's constituted by the media and specially television, which helps to shape our perception of reality and normalizes those behaviors it present, whether extraordinary they are.

Sport is a whole communication system that makes possible the encounter between towns and seen the interest paid by the journalistic genre that deals with it creates a common language, with terms that are almost universally understood. Of all of them, the "goal", a term of English origin which means aim or objective, is possibly the most widespread, because of the global boom that has taken soccer.

If we examine the terminology of sports biggest circulation daily in Spain, such as "Marca" and "As", which occupy most of his information pages with soccer, we can appreciate the warlike character employed for making more illustrative the confrontation between two teams, especially if there is maximum rivalry; but we mustn't forget that the language, the words, translate a logic of thinking, a way of understanding the reality it presents. In that sense, how can we understand a meeting were the dynamic of action and its protagonists are described in terms such as bullying, harassment, attack, defense, battle, struggle, campaign, combat, epic duel, fight, brawl, murder instinct, shot, adversary, opponent, victim, executioner, danger, death penalty, sentence, revenge, win lose, triumph, victory, defeat?

In the analysis that Gutiérrez & Montalbán (1994) make about an animated television series aimed to children such as "Oliver y Benji", of Japanese origin but with global spread and success, where protagonists are children soccer fans, they found out that motivational domains of values that underpin the observed behaviors were those: The main domain of the total motivation of conducts is recorded on the "achievement" (50.6%), which combines the values of ambition (73.9%), capacity (21.6%), triumph (2.7%) and intelligence (1.8%). It is followed by the "power" (18.6%), which groups influence values (31.4%), social recognition (31.4%), authority (25.6%) and image care (11.6%). The third domain is "security" (12.6%), which includes values of team membership (92.6%) and family safety (7.4%). "Conformity (6.7%) is the fourth domain, when joining values of obedience (51.7%), submission (34.5%) and humility (13.8%). "Self-direction" (6.5%) represents the fifth domain, with independence values (85.7%) and goals choice (14.3%). Finally, it figures "benevolence" (4.4%), which reflects the friendship value (100%).

The catalog of conducts, attitudes and values that broadcasts this television series of highly successful among Spanish children and young people has a clear orientation. What can you expect from those viewers who are being bombarded with images and slogans permanently oriented to success, rivalry, triumph, ambition, power and sacrifice? Children are the stars of a sport professionally presented, where the inclusion or not in the team solely depends on the individual excellence to making possible the participation in the World Championships, the fact of making friends was irrelevant. Also striking (Gutiérrez, 1995) is how natural and spontaneous game made in the district passes directly to the uprooting and fame that acting in a big stadium full of people offers. Contradictorily, of course, are fictional series, but anyway, it would generate excitement and expectations of extreme fanaticism to succeed quickly and at any cost. Evidently, even being eastern, the series goes against the Chinese proverb that says, “start early without going too faster”.

Fair play, sportiness, respect for rules, or fellowship, are subject in that series, as in many real life cases, to the success achieved at any price. Under this dynamic, we can observe school sports are seriously influenced by two dominant ideologies, such as professionalism and Olympics, both marketed and given to the benefit law and most radical philosophy of winning at any price.

Durán (1998), to the persuasive power, the ideological abuse and the sensationalist manipulation of media, echoes the recommendations of UNESCO to propose a responsible education to sporting events that promote a more critical awareness and a an increase in the competence use and consumption of media, especially television.

Social intervention programs

Corruption and violation of fair play is the order of the day in professional and high-level sports. For the known cases, no one is above suspicion of not having doped any time to get advantage over its rivals, and going even further, having trafficked with doping substances, even being super-athletes. The tactical foul is part of the game system in many sports, it's in the trainer's manual. It's allowed to grab the opponent, or kick if necessary, at referee's back preferably as a preventive measure to avoid risks; and the raw is that these actions aren't only typical at professional leagues, but is also commonly seen in the school sports. Competition system imposed, the high level of demand, the permanent aspiration to overcome extreme limits, to be classified, to win at any cost... it don't only occurs in the top of the pyramid, but extends with different degrees by all of it.

We can often hear phrases as “the other day they lost the match and my son was depressed all week”, or “my daughter won the hockey match but she was sad. She told me: how am I going to be happy if Mariana scored two more goals than me?” Something is wrong with these feelings. What can we do?

Values education is a controversial issue for educators to the extent that there are no universal educational principles that guarantee a moral development among students adjusted to the principles of the society in which they live. In our case, the democratic society requires the development of values related to tolerance, respect to each others, natural environment, equality, solidarity, freedom, peace, health, friendship, etc., for which the education system choose to treat these issues in a transversal way within the educational matters, as occurs in physical education and sports (Fraile, 1998).

According to Blázquez (1985), between the y high-level and recreational sports extremes there is educational sport which allows a basic training first, and then another one continued through the movement, in order to contribute with the individual's harmonious development. School sports posits the finding of educational and pedagogical goals supported in sports initiation and leaves in the background the harsh demands of competitive sports, adapting in a coherent manner to the possibilities of every age, to develop motor and psychomotor skills in line with the cognitive, affective and social personality skills (Santiago, 2002).

Psychology coined the term "prosociality" (Roche, 1998) to describe those behaviors that lead to a more harmonious and solidarity coexistence in human groups under severe pressure, where conflicts is part of the normal dynamic. On the other hand, there's a broad agreement in recognize the high socialization potential of sport. In that sense, there are many experimental studies which demonstrate how can you promote values education through sport. The question, however, is knowing which values select, who should teach and how.

Researchers such as Weiss (1984) or Bredemeier (1994) indicate in their works that cognitive and moral development of students increases its level with the implementation of systematic and structured intervention programs, rather than leaving athletes simply exposed to the game dynamic.

Gutierrez & Vivo (2003) conducted an intervention program to develop ethic and social moral values at the gym, to a group of 120 students from high school, aged between 15 and 16 years, where 50 of them formed the control group and the remaining 70 formed the experimental group. Results were satisfactory as there was a "significant increase in the adolescents ethical reasoning and the improving of important aspects for the physical education class development, such as the reduce of discipline problems, the increase of mutual respect, the improve of the teacher-student communication and a more democratic atmosphere at the gym" (Gutierrez & Vivo, 2003).

Ossorio (2002) discusses the two most wide used theoretical models for education in values: social learning theory, which raises its acquisition supported in the imitation of famous athletes behavior, usually elite or professional athletes; and structural development theory which focuses on the moral development, taking reasonable decisions according with the practitioner's own evolution; to propose the ecological model as third way that distributes responsibilities and functions to each of the educational agents, requiring the joint and interdisciplinary participation of politics in general, particularly sports, the media and the family. On this basis provides some interesting recommendations as a proposal to integrate values in physical and sportive activities.

From this same ecological perspective with which he approached his work, taking into account the different influences areas that affects the sporting phenomenon, Gutierrez (1995) concludes that the most favorable values to achieve through physical activity and sport can be differentiated into two types:

"Social values: Everyone's participation, respect to each others, cooperation, social relationships, friendship, being from a group, competitiveness, teamwork, expression of feelings, social responsibility, cohabitation, fight for equality, fellowship, justice, concern for each others, group cohesion.

Personal values: ability (physical and mental), creativity, fun, personal challenge, self-discipline, self-knowledge, maintaining or improving health, achievement (success-win), rewards, adventure and risk, sportsmanship and fair play (honesty), sacrifice's spirit, perseverance, self control, recognition and respect (social image), leisure participation, humility, obedience, fairness, self-realization, self-expression" (Gutierrez, 1995).

In line with these values, Gutierrez (1995) recommends a series of measures that affects to parents, teachers, sports organizations, media, spectators and practitioners, and finally political power, which may enhance their transmission within the sport field and its transfer to everyday life.

Anyway, this author concludes his thought coinciding with Brenda Bredemier, saying: “Physical Activity and Sport, by themselves, aren’t generators of social and personal values; they are excellent grounds for promotion and development of those values, but it would depend on the use made, right or not, of Physical Activity, the promoting laudable values for the individual and his community or otherwise obnoxious to itself and its social context; and we must commit, insist in the fact of educate and promote social and personal values when practiced Physical Activities and Sport” (Gutierrez, 1995).

Worried about anxiety, bad temper and abandonment, among other harmful considerations, that extremely competitive sport produces within the school ambit, Perez (2002) implanted an intervention program in this area through a teaching style he calls competitive-collaborative, in which without removing the agonistic character of activities (viewing it as something necessary, as a self improvement stimulus, because life is competitive, like it or not), using the competition as an educational tool on the principle that winning is not always important, also improved cooperation and solidarity between both colleagues and colleagues and opponents, as well as technical-tactical learning. Significant case to show that it’s not competition by itself but its excesses which generates undesirable consequences in sports and other orders in life, and differently oriented than usual can be a great ally to instill appropriate social values.

But does competitive mentality of modern sport requires intervention programs to make it more friendly and respectful than it is? What does exists in other places, in other contexts? Are there any other ways to understand and assume sport competition in our days?

COLOPHON

Mark Spitz, swimmer who won seven gold medals in Munich 72 Olympic Games, says at the age of 57: “Great athletes are because we don’t support to lose”. We have heard something similar to Paquito Fernandez Ochoa or Angel Nieto, as we remember. Great champions insists a lot on the idea of being very competitive and not letting up, and it seems that this must be one of the keys to success, but is it necessary “not being a good loser”, that is to say, “not accept not winning” for becoming a champion?

Fortunately, champion’s spirit does not always go in that direction. Although we found examples of outstanding athletes who didn’t know or don’t know to lose as Drazen Petrovic or Divan Petrovic in basketball, John Mc Enroe or Novak Djokovic in tennis, goalkeeper Chilavert or Cristiano Ronaldo in football, or Jose Mourinho as coach, we also find who permanently give lessons of poising, both when winning and loosing. It’s difficult to find a more competitive player than Rafael Nadal, for example, but his sporting excellence is not incompatible with his humility and poise at all times; same happens to his arch rival and at the same time friend Roger Federer. And they are not isolated examples of humility and poise, Pau Gasol, Leo Messi, Andrés Iniesta, Iker Casillas, or even Vicente del Bosque as coach, for seeing the closest cases, also offers lessons in this regard. This last one certainly demonstrated that with humility, without bad manners and without raising the voice, as usually do most of his colleagues, he could become a world champion in one of the most competitive and spectacular sports there are.

By contrast and although it is not the most widespread pattern, the aptitude promoted by some educators and coaches, even in high performance sports, it is to learn to fail, to live with defeat and take risks without imposing frustration or bad temper those who receive it; to take the Thomas Edison's position, who was a winner, and apparently, when a reporter asked him how does he felt having failed 25,000 times in an attempt to create an accumulating battery, his response was "I don't know why do you call them failures. Now I know 25,000 ways not to make a battery. How many do you know?" The key to success lies in perseverance and sustained effort, and under that philosophy would be the feelings of shame or guilt if don't achieve the objective.

There are many benefits of sport in childhood and adolescence: enter the child in society, it can be co-educational, teaches to follow rules, to be disciplined, helps to overcome shyness, stop excessive impulse, develops the improvement desire, helps to build the character, makes him more collaborative, etc., but, as we already note, nothing of this is assured, it will depend on the way it is done.

We live in a society of excess and many of the problems generated around sports are due to excesses experienced in competition, both in its practice dimension as in spectacular una: doped athletes, swollen by violent fanatics.

Near-term future society is not expected to make a substantially change in the market model, increasingly widespread, and at that stage the sport, probably, will reflect both global and local trends. It will be an important educational tool, while business to sell various products.

From a political perspective and within the Spanish sphere, make education get a framework of stability as a matter of state, to avoid sudden changes in the system every four or eight years in order to accommodate to the occurrences of the political party in the Government, remains an aspiration. But in any case, values education across different disciplines and especially of sport, forms part of the social intervention programs for years, gaining in height each time.

Education in values that serve as a counterweight to what is generally installed on the professional and social sport system (extremely competitive), values that remove transcendence to winning or losing and to that circumstance be assimilated without arrogance on the one hand and without trauma in the other hand; that remove the hidden tramp (falls simulation, etc.) as normal and strategy of play; insults and abuse of vocabulary; lack of respect to each others; and instead of that, reward the tenacity, the spirit of sacrifice, the cooperation, solidarity, and all those positive values that improve people and life in society.

In private ambit it is more difficult to influence, in this ground the media, as opinion and attitudes generators, have a great responsibility and they know, of course, but commercial and ideological interests prevents the arising of the sensationalism and the fight that attracts more attention and has a better sale. However, we note that even from the media in the recent years there have been highlighting another set of values in athletes, far beyond its performance and technical-tactical ability, which have to do with his personality, to value positively or negatively. In any case, the responsibility to educate in values through sport, from the ecological perspective or model, which we share, is related to different agents, as we already discussed, and requires a deep reflection about the contribution that a seemingly innocent activity as the sportive practice and entertainment can do to improve the peoples and towns lifestyle.

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