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Effect of a Psychological training on football grassroots coaches upon young player's fairplay and disposition to cheat

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Introduction

Different studies have used the terms sportpersonship and fairplay and the terms cheating and gamesmanship interchangeably, but in the present article we try to distinguish these concepts. The construct of sportpersonship according to Vallerand, Brière, Blanchard, and Provencher (1997) implies: a) Full commitment: valuing personal improvement through maximum effort and learning from mistakes; b) Social conventions: respect for the sport and engagement in pro-social behaviours ; c) Rules and Officials: respect for and willingness to abide by the rules and for those who enforce them; d) Opponent dimension: level of respect and concern for the opponent(s); and e) Negative approach: the extent to which the athlete reacts negatively to their participation. As Weiss, Smith and Stuntz (2008) have outlined, sportpersonship depict behavioral norms and conventions that are expected within society (e.g. follow the rules, be honest) as well as concerns about physical and psychological well-being of others (e.g. don't make fun of others, don't hurt others physically). In summary, sportpersonship involves respect, fairness, honesty and responsibility in regard to the rules and people participating in a particular sport.

The concept of cheating supposes to infringe the rules of a given sport with the intention to deceive and put the opponent at a disadvantage. This personal disposition is expressed in different ways, as along with the specific cheating behavior: "It is ok to cheat if nobody knows"; "If other players are cheating, I think I can do the same too"; "I would cheat if I thought it would help the team win" (Lee, Whitehead and Ntoumanis, 2007; Ponseti et al., 2011).

The gamesmanship implies a kind of actions which, while not infringing the rules of any specific sport, they do affect the spirit of the game, and they can even use the rules themselves to gain an incorrect advantage. This concept may include faking injury, wasting time, or trying to unnerve the opponent (Sage, Kavussanu and Duda, 2006). All these behaviors result in negative consequences for the opponent, and reflect an absence or diminution of fair play (Boixadós, Cruz, Valiente and Torregrosa, 2004; Olmedilla, Ortega, Almeida, Lameiras, Villalonga, Sousa et al., 2011).

Sportpersonship, cheating and gamesmanship are controversial issues among sport psychologists. Some researchers argue that sport is an appropriate developmental context for teaching and learning fair play and sportpersonship, although critics outline the importance of cheating and aggressive play has as a means of attaining the goal of winning. The empirical literature indicates that sport participation does not automatically lead to character

development and the promotion of sportpersonship. As Weiss et al. (2008), and Shields and Bredemeier (2009) summarize, the question of whether sport builds sportpersonship or promote cheating and gamesmanship depends on the quality of adult leadership and the types of experiences afforded to participants in sport competitive environments. The positive developmental outcomes are likely to occur only when competent agents of change design appropriate activities, show adequate role models, reinforce fair play behaviors and take advantage of teachable situations. In summary, the social environment in which an athlete operates can have deep effects on the development of moral functioning.

One of aims of The PsyTool program was to test the applicability of a package of lessons in different Agents of Change and assess its effects in the level of sportpersonship, cheating and gamesmanship in their soccer players. Therefore, the specific objectives of this study were twofold: 1) assess the level of cheating and gamesmanship before and after the education of coaches as agents of change in football players between 13-18 years old of two clubs of Spain and Portugal; and 2) study the relationships between sportpersonship, and gamesmanship in the aforementioned players.

Method

Participants

The coaches' sample included 10 coaches from Sevilla FC and 10 coaches from Sporting de Portugal, aged between 23-37 years, mean age of 29.3 years ($SD = 4.29$). The athletes's sample included 189 football players, the sample included: Sevilla FC 121 boys; Sporting Portugal 68 boys, 132 with a age of 13-15 years, and 57 with a age of 16-18 years.

Instruments

The PsyTool Program consisted of a package of 10 self-contained lessons pertaining to various important issues in sports. The lessons range from the importance of Sports Psychology and its impact in sports, Sportsmanship and gamesmanship in sports, ethical principles in sports, racism and discrimination in sports, gender in sports, aggression in sports etc. Each lesson was structured in a similar way, with a summary of each lessons contents, the importance of the contents, case studies that can be debated and suggested readings. There is also a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of each lesson, regarding the materials of the lesson, as well as a series of evaluation questions regarding the lesson's materials.

The questionnaire entitled *Predisposition to Cheating in Sports* (CDED, Ponseti, et al., 2012) was based on the *Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire* (AMDYSQ-1, Lee, Whitehead and Ntoumanis, 2007). It consists of six items and was reported to have two factors: Predisposition to acceptance of cheating, and Predisposition to acceptance of gamesmanship.

The questionnaire used for data collection has been the MSOS questionnaire designed by Vallerand et al., (1997), in its version translated and validated in Spanish by Martín-Albo, Núñez, Navarro and González (2006). This scale is composed of 25 items structured in 5 subscales, each composed of 5 items; Commitment, Social conventions, Rules and referees, Opponents and Negative focus.

Procedure

Coaches completed the ten lessons of the PsyTool program during the season. Pre and post intervention administration of both questionnaires to players was done after ethical permission was obtained from coaches and parents for the participation of their children in the study. The researchers met with each coach at the end of a training session, and the participants completed the questionnaires that took 15 to 20 minutes.

Results

The ANOVA results yielded a statistically significant decrease between the scores of the pre-intervention and post-intervention on the Cheating ($t = 6.95, p < .001$) and Gamesmanship ($t = 9.59, p < .001$) scales.

Regarding self-reports on respect for social conventions scale, tests showed a statistically significant increase between the pre- and post-tests on young footballers ($t = 4.65, p < .01$).

On the rules and referees scale, tests revealed a statistically significant decrease between the pre and post-intervention self reports ($t = 10.89, p < .001$). Regarding the opponents' scale tests show a statistically significant decrease from the pre- to the post-interventions self-reports ($t = 12.34, p < .001$).

On the Commitment scale, tests revealed a statistically significant increase between the pre- and post-intervention self-reports ($t = -12.75, p < .001$).

On the Negative Focus Scale tests showed a small but statistically significant decrease

between the pre- and post-intervention self-reports ($t = 2.89, p < .004$).

Discussion

Regarding the questionnaire of predisposition to cheating in sports and its subscales of cheating and gamemanship, the results showed a decrease in self-reports of behaviours regarding cheating and gamesmanship from the pre- to the post intervention. This shows that athletes are less likely to cheat in matches, and to waste time trying to rile up their opponents.

When analysing this results of the MSOS questionnaire in light to what was our expectations, and taking into account the PsyTool model, the increases in self reported behaviors towards the social convention subscale and self reported behaviors of engagement in practices, games and personal development (commitment subscale), as well as the decrease in self reported behaviors of cheating, gamemanship and negative focus, were in line with what was expected. In respect to the rules and referees scale, we found a decrease in the self-reports from the pre- to the post intervention results.

This seems to suggest that athletes had less respect for the decisions of referees and the rules of the sport. The opponents scale showed a decrease form the pre- to the post intervention reports. This is indicative of a decrease in pro-fair play behaviours from players, such as helping adversaries getting up from a fall, or lending an adversary some piece of equipment. These two last results are not in line with our expectations, suggesting that there is not a straight connection between the Education of the Psytool Agents of Change, and the changes (be it for the better or for the worse) in the self-reports of the young athletes. In this way, we can further strengthen the link between the Agents of change, their training through the PsyTool Project and any positive effects that we can then safely say will trickle down to the athletes, administering a pre and post intervention questionnaire for the agents of change, so we can have data on the efficacy of the lessons provided to them.

Key Words: Psytool, Fair play, Cheating, Gamesmanship, Grassroots Sports.

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