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Fair-play vs sports performance: a critical investigation

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the need for fair-play among sportsmen and women in society, during trainings and competitions, and how their attitudes and behaviours reveal the presence of fair play. My working hypothesis is that sportsmen and women’s varies depending on their level of training, the type of sports that they practice and their level of qualification. The group on which I conducted my research is made up of sportsmen and women who practice the following sports: athletics, football, handball, rugby, volley. Data analysis and interpretation was done using SPSS 11.0 for Windows, a special software for psychological statistics. The research methods aim to prove the relevance of fair-play in high performance sports achievements and for an appropriate conduct in society. In order to investigate sportsmen and women’s opinions and attitudes in society and in competitions we designed and used a questionnaire to test fair-play, a questionnaire to test sportmen and women’s “moral values” and a questionnaire for sportmen and women’s “behavior self-determination”. The results of the questionnaire showed that sportmen and women who practice individual spots have lower scores for fair-play in competitions and social conduct in comparison with practitioners of team sports. Conclusions: From a qualitative point of view one can argue that the lack of statistically significant differences between our study groups could be due to the fact that fair-play has the same importance for all sportmen and women. Data analysis and result interpretation confirmed our working hypothesis.

1. Introduction

Education underlies the genesis of fair-play among highly performing sportspersons. “Fair-play” is materialized in sporting behavior and it refers to simple gestures towards one’s team-players, competitors, referees or audience, as well as to complex situations that suppose helping an injured opponent on the field, admitting a fault, solidarity towards an action, fighting doping, etc.

In sports, as in other fields, we can say with Socrates that “science without consciousness is nothing but the ruin of the soul.” It is not only science but morals and ethics as well serve as guidance for human behavior. Each value is, in its field, original and irreducible, but it cannot act in isolation from the other values. The ethical problems that high-performance sports face are the same as the ones that society faces at all levels. Sports education and education through sports cannot be left to chance because this could cause phenomena such as lack of sportiveness, sports violence, lack of fair-play, doping. They all pervert the original and authentic meaning of the Olympic spirit.

2. Research Methodology

Our research is an exploration; its first stage consisted of designing a fair-play questionnaire and pre-testing it on sixty subjects. At the same time we pre-tested the sub-scale “moral values” as well as the questionnaire...
“behavioral self-determination”. In the last stage of the research, we applied these three questionnaires on a research lot made up of one hundred and fifty subjects.

2.1. The subjects of the study

The members of the research lot are grouped according to the following variables: gender (male and female); age – subjects aged between 17 and 30 years old; practiced sports (athletes, player of football, handball, rugby, volleyball); level of qualification (National League, League A, League B, senior and junior sportspersons. The sampling was randomized.

The aim of the study is to highlight the presence and the need for fair-play among sportspersons in society and in sports activities (competitions and training), materialized in their attitudes and behaviors.

The general work hypothesis: sportspersons’ fair-play varies depending on the following variables: level of training, practiced sports and sportspersons’ level of qualification.

2.2. Statistical analysis

Data analysis and interpretation was conducted via SPSS 11.0 for Windows, the specialized psychological statistical software. We have conducted the following statistical analyses: ANOVA one-way in order to compare average values according to the “level of training” variable; ANOVA one-way in order to compare average values according to the “practiced sports” variable; ANOVA one-way in order to compare average values according to the “level of qualification” variable.

3. Results and interpretation

Hypothesis no.1: Sportspersons’ fair-play varies depending on their level of professional training, i.e. sportspersons of a high level of training score higher on this variable as compared to those who have a lower level of professional training.

In order to check this hypothesis we applied ANOVA One-way and we checked if the average values of the “level of training” variable differ significantly among the five groups of subjects in what concerns fair-play.

The hypothesis is confirmed for the two dimensions. The ANOVA value obtained for fair-play in competitions is $F = 3.525$, significant on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ ($p = 0.017$), for fair - play in society it is $F = 4.141$, significant on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ ($p = 0.008$). Thus, there are significant statistical differences between groups according to the “level of training” variable.

Table no. 1. Main ANOVA One-way statistics for fair-play, according to the variable “level de training”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play in competitii</td>
<td>615,495</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>271,832</td>
<td>3,525</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>11257,998</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>77,110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>12073,493</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play in societate</td>
<td>623,118</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>207,706</td>
<td>4,141</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7322,855</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>50,157</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>7945,973</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play general</td>
<td>2883,401</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>951,134</td>
<td>4.556</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>30478,092</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>208,754</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>33331,493</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are significant statistical differences on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ (p = 0.031) in what concerns only general fair-play between sportspersons who graduated from university and those who graduated from highschool. Thus, the latter score significantly lower on general fair-play ($M_1 = 104.61$) in comparison with the former ($M_2 = 111.54$).

The statistical data show that there are significant statistical differences (on the whole) for all analyzed variables. Yet significant statistical differences between the groups of the “level de training” variable (only for highschool and university graduates) were found only for the general fair-play dimension. For general fair-play there are differences between highschool and university graduates, which means that sportspersons of a higher level of training have a higher level of development of morals/fair-play, than those of a lower level of training.

Hypothesis no. 2: Sportspersons’ Fair-play varies depending on the practiced type of sports, i.e. sportspersons who practice team sports will score higher on this variable in comparison with those who practice individual sports.

In order to test this hypothesis we applied ANOVA One-way by checking if the five groups of the “type of sports” variable differ significantly among themselves in what concerns the average values obtained for fair-play.

The hypothesis is confirmed for all dimensions. Therefore, there are significant differences between the groups. The ANOVA valued obtained for fair-play in competitions is $F = 9.513$, significant on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ (p = 0.000), for fair-play in society it is $F = 8.161$, significant on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ (p = 0.000), and for general fair-play it is $F = 10.923$, significant on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ (p = 0.000). Therefore, there are significant differences between groups.

For the dimensions for which the hypothesis was confirmed, we sought to find out for which of the five groups of the "sports type" variable there are significant differences. For this purpose we applied the Bonferroni test.

1. There are significant statistical differences on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ for fair-play in competitions, between:
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice football (p = 0.002). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in competitions ($M_1 = 45.34$) than football players ($M_2 = 53.36$).
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice handball (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in competitions ($M_1 = 45.34$) than handball players ($M_2 = 54.12$).
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice rugby (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in competitions ($M_1 = 45.34$) than rugby players ($M_2 = 57.60$).
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice volley-ball (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in competitions ($M_1 = 45.34$) than volley-ball players ($M_2 = 55.13$).

2. There are significant statistical differences on the threshold $p \leq 0.05$ regarding fair-play in society between:
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice football (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in society ($M_1 = 48.37$) than football players ($M_2 = 55.80$).
   - sportspersons who practice running and those who practice handball (p = 0.001). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in society ($M_1 = 48.37$) than handball players ($M_2 = 55.45$).
• sportspersons who practice running and those who practice rugby (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in society (M1 = 48.37) than rugby players (M2 = 57.06).

• sportspersons who practice running and those who practice volleyball (p = 0.000). Athletes score significantly lower on fair-play in society (M1 = 48.37) than volleyball players (M2 = 56.33).

These statistical data show that fair-play, as sportspersons’ moral dimension, is present to a larger extent among sportspersons involved in team sports than among those who practice individual sports. Team sports favor the internalizing of norms, rules, desirable behaviors, self-respect and respect for one’s fellows.

Hypothesis no. 3: Sportspersons’ fair-play varies according to their level of qualification, i.e. sportspersons who perform in higher competition divisions will score higher on this variable than those who perform in lower divisions.

In order to test this hypothesis we applied ANOVA One-way by checking if the five groups of the “level of qualification” variable differ significantly among themselves for the average values obtained for fair-play.

The hypothesis is confirmed for all dimensions. Therefore there are significant differences between the groups. The ANOVA value obtained for fair-play in competitions is F = 8.915, significant on the threshold p ≤ 0.05 (p = 0.000), for fair-play in society it is F = 6.863, significant on the threshold p ≤ 0.05 (p = 0.000), and for general fair-play it is F = 9.659, significant on the threshold p ≤ 0.05 (p = 0.000).

Table no. 3. Main ANOVA One-way statistics for fair-play, according to the “level of qualification” variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play in competitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2383.143</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>595.786</td>
<td>8.915</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>9690.350</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>66.830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12073.493</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play in society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1264.815</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>316.204</td>
<td>6.863</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>6681.158</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>46.077</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7945.973</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair-play general</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7013.029</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1753.257</td>
<td>9.659</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td>181.507</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33331.493</td>
<td>149</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the dimensions for which the hypothesis was confirmed we sought to find out which of the five groups of the “level of qualification” variable there are significant differences. For this purpose we applied the Bonferroni test.

1. There are significant statistical differences on the threshold p ≤ 0.05 for fair-play in competitions between:

• sportspersons in the National League and senior sportspersons (p = 0.024). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in competitions (M1 = 56.51) than the latter (M2 = 47.33).

• sportspersons in the National League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.000). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in competitions (M1 = 56.51) than the latter (M2 = 44.47).

• sportspersons in the A League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.000). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in competitions (M1 = 55.09) than the latter (M2 = 44.47).

• sportspersons in the B League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.002). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in competitions (M1 = 53.20) than the latter (M2 = 44.47).

2. There are significant statistical differences on the threshold p ≤ 0.05 for fair-play in society between:
sportspersons in the National League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.000). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in society (M1 = 56.57) than the latter (M2 = 47.68).

• sportspersons in the A League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.001). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in society (M1 = 55.54) than the latter (M2 = 47.68).

• sportspersons in the B League and junior sportspersons (p = 0.000). Thus, the former score significantly higher on fair-play in society (M1 = 55.65) than the latter (M2 = 47.68).

The statistical data show that the hypothesis is generally confirmed. As sportspersons develop and are involved in competitions in higher leagues, their scores on the three fair-play dimensions analyzed in our study are higher than among sportspersons who perform in lower divisions of the same competitions. This fact can be accounted for by the higher intellectual and moral development of sportspersons who perform in higher leagues in comparison with those from lower divisions. Junior sportspersons score lower on the three dimensions, possibly due to the insufficient development of their moral judgment. That sportspersons in higher leagues score significantly higher on fair-play is a reason to rejoice; it means that in the future junior sportspersons will also develop a fair-play behavior that is superior to the current one.

Conclusion

The correlations that we identified between the “fair-play in competitions” and “fair-play in society” variables entitle us to state that sportspersons who have a fair-play behavior in sports competitions will have the same type of behavior in their social life. Sports norms, rules and regulations, as well as social norms and rules for social cohabitation leave their mark on the behavior of sportspersons who internalize them and behave in a spirit of fair-play.

The attitude-value structures of personality are constituted within the framework of and on the basis of individuals’ relations with their environment and they are manifested in individuals’ activity and behavior. Their strong orientation towards moral values underlies the manifestation of fair-play behavior in any situation.

Sportspersons of a high fair-play spirit have a higher consciousness of their own feelings and a more consolidated sense of the self; they live and perceive a particular sense of choice regarding their own behavior towards those whose fair-play is lower. We can similarly state that with the internalization of social, sports and social cohabitation rules and norms, sportspersons will have a more autonomous behavior than those who are only aware of the existence of these rules and norms. This behavior springs from individuals’ intentionality, i.e. it is self-determined.

The achievement of a sports education in the spirit of fair-play produces sportspersons as autonomous personalities, who can develop themselves in agreement with fair-play principles.

As for the correlation of the “self-determination” variable with the “moral values” variable, we can state that the more internalized and self-integrated the values are, the more individual behavior arising form one’s intentionality relies on a higher degree of reflection and thus, individuals engage actions with a full spirit of choice. This fact is explained by the intrinsically motivating effect of the constitution of the attitude-value system as an integral part of the individual self. This ensures a stable, coherent and lasting behavior in various life situations, a behavior that relies on the values to which the individual anchors himself or herself, on his or her spirit of fair-play.

References

House R.A., Bucureşti.