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Over-emphasis on winning, host-to-win and winning-at-all-cost syndrome in modern sports competitions: implications for unsportsmanship behaviours of sports participants

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Abstract

Unarguably, winning should be recognized and appreciated but its over-emphasis which has extended to host-to-win and winning-at-all-cost in modern sports could be responsible for many unsportsmanship behaviours such as bribery and corruption in sports, sports violence and hooliganism, use of mercenaries in sports, match fixing, fielding of over-age athletes among others. Unsportsmanship behaviours affect the integrity, safety, security, health of sports and its participants. This issue demands serious attention from all sincere sports stakeholders. Hence, it was recommended among other things that athletes and coaches who engage in unsportsmanship behaviours to win sports competition at-all-cost should be banned for life in their respective sports and the athlete's or coach's country banned for at least 5 years. Baron Pierre de Coubertin's ideal and philosophy of Olympics which states that "The most important thing...is not winning but taking part" should be inculcated into every sports participant through seminars, workshops, and symposia.

Keywords: Win, sports participants, sports competition, unsportsmanship behaviours

1. Introduction

Competition is a social life experience and everyone has competed in one way or the other for survival or existence. Competition takes place when there is a struggle in an activity for supremacy between individuals or teams under predetermined rules at a place and specified period of time with the emergence of a winner. Winning and losing are outcomes of every competition. Competition takes place in every sphere of life including sports. Sports competition is a contest in a highly organized physical activity between individuals or teams who strive to triumph over one another under definite rules with the emergence of a winner. Competition is an aspect of sports irrespective of the level of involvement and characteristics of the participants. In competitive sport, maximizing performance or "winning" are the main objectives or goals [1], and everyone wants to win games [2]. Win, according to [3], means to be the most successful in a competition, race, battle. In this paper, winning means excellence and success in performance which is the final point of outwitting one's opponent which must be evident in the point(s) or score(s) made by the athlete or team which is more than the opponent's point(s) or score(s) during sports competition.

Winning was not emphasized in early sports competitions such as the modern Olympic Games. Winning is now over-emphasized in modern Olympics which is a deviation from its founding father's ideal and philosophy of the game, and could be a contributory factor to many unsportsmanship behaviours among sports participants. Sports participants are individuals who actively or passively participate in sports in or outside the field of play. They include athletes, coaches, officiating officials, sports organizers and associations, sports psychologists, fans, spectators, medical and paramedical personnel, media and security personnel, among others. The athletic goal of every sportsman and woman is to win and celebrate success.

The struggle to win is one of the sources of competitive pressure and anxiety which may lead to burnout and unsportsmanship behaviours among athletes, coaches, fans or supporters, and other sports participants in the contemporary sports society.

Unsportsmanship behaviours are unacceptable and unethical conducts that infringe on the rights, health and safety of sports participants and sports infrastructure. The modern sports environment is tensed during competition because of the winning mentality as nobody wants to be associated with failure. Fear of losing and fear of failure, according to ^[4], are predictors of anxiety in young athletes.

Athletes are usually rewarded for their successful athletic achievements. Commercial sports are organized and played for profit ^[5]. The commercialization and professionalization of contemporary sports has made winning the goal of every athlete, coach, sports marketers and sports managers. Athletes and coaches are rewarded for winning competitions. Professional sportsmen and sportswomen are paid to compete in sports ^[6]. According to them, winning is all-important. The more successful they are, the more money they earn. For the professional, the result is all important, a 'win at all costs' attitude is therefore a possibility.

In the same vein ^[6], remarked that for professional coaches who earn their living as coaches or trainers and to keep their job, they must be successful. Careers of some athletes, coaches and sports managers of professional clubs or teams have been cut short for failure to win tournaments or be at the peak of their career. The positions and jobs of coaches and athletes are retained for their ability to win and not to lose competitions. Coaches' job has always been tied to winning competitions. Sports administrators or managers especially coaches are often faced with threat of "if you win, you win your job, if you lose, you lose your job". Coaches are always threatened with losing their job in case they fail to win their matches. Many coaches have lost their jobs for inability win competitions. If an athlete must be remembered, recognized and appreciated, he or she must continue to win and never to lose. This makes sports coaching a delicate and anxiety-loaded profession. Nigerian coaches' contracts are usually terminated for failure to win the trophy or qualify the National sports teams for mega sports competitions like All African Games, World Cup, Olympics, and World Championship. For instance, Nigeria could not qualify for the 2012 Nation's Cup. This brought Coach Sampson Siasia to an end as the head coach of the male senior National football team "Super Eagles" as his contract was terminated by the technical committee of Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

Business or corporate firms that sponsor sports competitions are more likely to sponsor a winning team or athlete, as their partnership with the team or athlete is a pointer that the sponsors are equally the winning business or corporate firms. Fans always crave for goals or points from their athlete or team. The performance of an athletic team influences the behaviours of its fans or supporters before, during, and after competition. The mobility of fans or supporters to competition venues largely depends on a team's winning records and athletic performance. Fans cheer their team more when they are winning than when they are losing in a competition. The number of fans of any athletic team increases with the team's successful outcomes and decreases as the team records defeats.

Athletes in contact sports such as football, hockey and handball have been exposed to injuries because of the over-emphasis of winning than athletes in non-contact sports. Anti-social and unsportsmanship slogan of some football coaches such as "if you miss the ball, don't miss the leg" is fueled by winning-at-all-cost mentality. Some non-productive and ungentlemanly behaviours before, during and after sports competition are preceded by over-emphasis on winning,

host-to-win and winning-at-all-cost attitude of sports participants.

Host-to-win is a situation where a city, state or country that stages a sports event engages in acceptable and sometimes unacceptable acts in order to win the competition because the city, state, or country is hosting the competition. Host-to-win in sports is peculiar to only the competition hosting community. During sports competition, the city, state or country with host-to-win syndrome engages in acceptable and sometimes unacceptable sports behaviours. Both the host athletic team and visiting team(s) sometimes strive to win-at-all-cost.

Winning-at-all-cost is an intentional and conscious act of engaging in acceptable and unacceptable behaviours with the aim of winning sports competition. Winning-at-all-cost sports participants are those active or passive sports persons who see winning as everything and everything is in winning. They do everything to win. Sports participants with winning-at-all-cost syndrome usually violate the rules of the game and step on the rights, health and safety of other sports participants. They see sports competition as a 'do or die' affair. In the view of ^[7], winning-at-all-cost has negative effects and connotations on sports behaviours of every sports participant with this sports ideology.

The benefits accruing to an institution for athletic success which is winning has been studied by some researchers. For instance, athletic success translated into substantially increased exposure for the university, regardless of its academic reputation ^[8]. Sports promote the name and identity of the university ^[9]. The belief that sport is a means of moral development view athletics as a vehicle that teaches and reveals virtues such as truthfulness, courage, self-control, respect, and fairness ^[10, 11]. Sports competitions are expected to be conducted in the spirit of true sportsmanship. Sportsmanship behaviour refers to fair play actions and respect for the sports, one's teammates, opponents, sports officials, and other sports participants before, during and after sports programme.

At the end of every sports competition, the question is always "who won" and "not who played better". A team's or athlete's exhibition of skills and control of the game does not count for most fans or spectators but how many points or goals were scored at the end of the game. There is a social relationship between sports and media. Many sports depend on the media for publicity and revenues. Media representations exaggerate the importance of competitive rivalries as well as winning and losing in athlete's lives ^[5]. The way and manner of print and electronic media's report of outcome of sports competition is something that no team or athlete dreams to experience. The outcome of the match between team A and team B which team A won team B with 6-0 could be reported with degrading phrases like trash, hammer, white-wash, tumble, rubbish, humiliate, among others. The media could report that Team A trashed or hammered Team B with 6 - 0.

Moreso ^[12], stated that in today's sporting environment, displays of unsportsmanlike behavior in all levels of competitive sports are common. Olympic ideals preach against drug use in sports and winning at all cost, among other vices ^[13]. Unsportsmanship and immoral sport-related behaviors such as bribery and corruption, violence and aggression, drug use, among others has bedeviled contemporary competitive sports. This could not be far from the 'winning, host-to-win and winning-at-all-cost syndrome' which is the slogan of some sports administrators and athletes.

2. Implications for Unsportsmanship Behaviours

In modern sports, anyone that goes into a competition, goes into it to win, but the undue or over-emphasis on the winning by every sports participant has resulted to a lot of unsportsmanship behaviors such as bribery and corruption, sports violence and hooliganism, use of mercenaries in sports, nutritional abuse and drug use in sports, match fixing and manipulation of sports results, fielding of over-age athletes, among others.

2.1 Bribery and Corruption in Sports

Sports participants especially athletes and coaches may be involved in bribery and corruption due to winning-at-all-cost drive. Any athlete or team that wants to win-by-all-means may afford to pay money and other material gratifications to the officiating officials especially the referee whose decision is final in any competition. Some athletes or team officials may go as far as seeking to know who the officiating officials of their competition will be, where they are coming from and where they will be lodged for a particular competition. Some officiating officials equally may expect competing athlete(s) or team(s) to bribe them in order to get an officiating that will be to their favour if they must win-by-all means. Coaches' influencing match officials to gain undue favour; club managers giving bribe and fixing officiating officials are problems affecting the Nigeria premier league ^[14]. Sport-related deviance to be examined, according to ^[15] is sport administrators who take bribes and gifts in return for favour and who violate public trust and organizational principles by making decisions clearly based on their personal interests. Also to be examined are judges and other officials in events who take bribes or make agreements with others to alter the outcome of events ^[5]. The motive behind the immoral and unethical behaviours of judges and other officiating officials may not be far from some sports managers' anxious behaviours and attitude to win competitions especially winning by-all-means.

2.2 Sports Violence and Hooliganism

Severally, athletes who are loosing have been seen to be more violent and play contrary to the sports rules and ethics. Sometimes, sports organizers and security personnel have been faced with the challenge of controlling fans whose team or athlete lost a match as they sometimes exhibit violent behaviours. Some athletes or teams with their fans have been found destroying sports facilities and causing harms to other sports participants because they could not win a particular sports competition.

2.3 Use of Mercenaries in Sports

Use of mercenaries in sports is a deviant behaviour of falsehood and fraud where an athlete or athletes, who are not bonafide members of a team or club are hired, paid and all arrangements made for the athletes to play for the team or club against their opponent with the aim of winning the competition. Just to win a competition, some coaches import athletes from other cities, states, and countries. Such illegal contracts of the athletes end with the end of the competition.

2.4 Nutritional Abuse and Drug Use in Sports

Nutritional abuse has made some athletes to suffer undernourishment, dehydration, eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia, among others which have both short and long term dangerous effects on the health and live of the athletes.

There are drugs that enhance athletic performance and they are called performance enhancing drugs. The use of performance-enhancing substances in sports is commonplace ^[16]. Some athletes resort to performance enhancing drugs in order to win and be at peak in their athletic career. Athletes who are detected and found guilty of drug use have witnessed their medals stripped from them. Many athletes have been banned in participating in their sports for using performance enhancing drugs. Giving an instance ^[6], noted where a British sprinter, Dwain Chambers received a life-time Olympic ban in 2003 for use of the designer steroid tetrahydrogestrinone (THG). Athletes know the negative consequence of using drugs in terms of the result and their athletic career when detected yet they take them because they cannot afford to lose a competition.

2.5 Match Fixing and Manipulation of Sports Results

Some team managers may not want to compete with a particular team at the preliminaries, and the best way to avoid it is through match fixing. Match fixing is a conscious and calculated sporting fraud and effort to decide on the athlete, team or club to compete with, which is influenced by an athlete or team officials for the purpose of winning a tournament for oneself or others for the interest of the one doing the manipulation. Some team officials may influence the group they want to belong to in order to aid their qualifying and winning a competition. Match fixing involves soliciting and giving undue athletic advantage to a particular athlete or team before competitions. Some officials sometimes manipulate the sports results in favour of a particular athletic team.

2.6 Fielding of Over-age Athletes

One of the cheating practices in an attempt to win-at-all-cost is the fielding of athletes who are not meant for a particular age category for undue competitive advantage over the opponent or opponents. Physical and mental maturity which is associated with age gives an individual undue advantage over underage persons. Athletes are expected to exhibit both physical and mental maturity. For instance, fielding athletes who are above 17 years gives them undue advantage over their opponents who are below 17 years for U-17 FIFA World Cup. Countries have been involved and found guilty in age cheating during tournaments.

3. Conclusion

In modern sports, competition is inevitable as individuals, groups and nations converge to show and test their skills and abilities. Winning and losing are two ends of sports competition. Everyone identifies with and appreciates the winning team. Winning is a mark of success and achievement. There has been a paradigm shift from the philosophy of mere participation to winning. Certain unsportsmanship behaviours (e.g. bribery and corruption in sports, sports violence and hooliganism, use of mercenaries in sports, nutritional abuse and drug use in sports, match fixing and manipulation of sports results, and fielding of over-age athletes) have crept into modern sports which could be as a result of the over-emphasis on winning, host-to-win, and winning-at-all-cost mentality of some sports participants.

4. Recommendations

1. Athletes and coaches who engage in unsportsmanship behaviours to win sports competition at-all-cost should be banned for life in their respective sports and the athlete's

- or coach's country banned for at least 5 years.
2. Winning should not be over-emphasized by sports participants. Baron Pierre de Coubertin's ideal and philosophy of Olympics which states that "The most important thing...is not winning but taking part" should be inculcated into every sports participant through seminars, workshops, and symposia.
 3. Sports participants should be educated and always rewarded for the spirit of true sportsmanship.
 4. Sports competition organizers should map-out strategies to arrest the unsportsmanship behaviours of sports participants as a result of winning-at-all-cost attitude.
 5. Only incorruptible officiating officials should be appointed to officiate sports competitions.
 6. Sports organizers and associations should strengthen their drug testing efforts to detect athletes who may use drugs to win-at-all-cost.
 7. Age cheating detection technology should be used before and during sports competition for any age-specific competition.
 8. Sports organizations and organizing bodies should make strong policies and spell out serious punishments to guard against all forms of malpractices and unsportsmanship behaviours among sports person(s).

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