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**Ayush Garg**  
Director in Tirang Sports,  
Rajapuri Market, Dwarka,  
New Delhi, India

## A study of fan perceptions on different scoring rules in badminton

**Ayush Garg**

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### Abstract

This study was undertaken to examine the fan perceptions regarding different scoring rules used in badminton. The study was guided by researches on fan perception in sports which predominantly focused on team sports like basketball, football and cricket. In order to collect data about subjective opinions of fans, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with badminton fans. The dimensions of fan perception identified to be suitable for badminton were: *fan engagement, fan association and loyalty, entertainment and viewership, and game structure and strategy* and interview questions were based on these dimensions. Data collected from 10 participants was analysed using thematic analysis, in which a total of 3 themes and 2 sub-themes each, emerged. The findings from the analysis revealed that fans considered the scoring formats that took long hours to complete were repetitive, boring, slow-paced and involved defensive gameplay. On the other hand, for the shorter time length of formats, fans described it as uncertain, fast-paced, time-saving and involving attacking gameplay. Study participants were found to be most interested and entertained by the game played under shorter time length formats like 11 points best of 5 sets and 15 points (without service break rule) best of 3 sets. Interestingly, the study also unexpectedly revealed that results of this study contradicted to some of the theories and notions established in the previous researches and hence, suggests a further investigation in the concerned subject areas.

**Keywords:** badminton, badminton fan perceptions, badminton world federation, badminton scoring rules

### Introduction

#### Context of Research

The research is based on fan perceptions for different badminton scoring rules. Badminton's scoring rules have gone through several changes since the formation of Badminton World Federation (BWF) as the governing body for the sport. One of the key changes which transformed badminton as a sport was the adoption of the '21 points best of 3 sets' scoring rule in August 2006. The current rule is easier to understand as the player who first wins 2 sets by scoring 21 points in each game, wins the match. It doesn't require the break of the opponent's serve before scoring a point. Recent evidence suggests that changing the scoring format to 21 points, decreased effective playing time of the matches (Laffaye, Phomsoupha, & Dor, 2015) [7]. The quicker format of the game satisfied the interest of the broadcasters and viewers as long hours of matches did not bore the audience anymore and it also benefited the commercial aspect for the sport.

Another scoring rule, which was played to 7 points in best of 5 games, was experimented in the year 2002 but was soon abandoned after the 2002 Commonwealth Games because of its ineffectiveness in reducing the match time (BBC, 2002) [2]. In yet another scoring rule experiment, the BWF committee also tested an '11 points best of 5 sets' rule during a period from 1st August to 1st November 2014 and was turned down because of the criticism by the players (BBC, 2014) [1]. Although all the experimented rules were dropped, these rules are being used in the matches other than BWF competitions, for example, in leisure sport, local tournaments and international leagues. This research will aim to study the perception of badminton fans regarding these different scoring rule formats.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Ayush Garg**  
Director in Tirang Sports,  
Rajapuri Market, Dwarka, New  
Delhi, India

## Objective

- To study consumer preferences on using different scoring rules in badminton.
- To explore factors that influence fan interests for the different scoring rules used in competitions.
- To determine the most entertaining scoring format, if any, for the fans.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants for this study were badminton fans in Loughborough University, UK. A total of 10 badminton fans participated in the study from whom interview responses were collected at the Badminton Centre in Loughborough University, UK. The age range of the participants was 20 to 47, with an average age of 25.2.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with badminton fans. The interviews were recorded and saved using codes for the participants to keep their identity anonymous. A small question sheet was handed out to collect information about their age, gender, work and preference of scoring format with any suggestions on it.

## Results and Discussion

### Approach

Data collected from interviewing 10 badminton fans were thematically analysed where, firstly, transcripts from the interviews were read repeatedly to identify codes in the data. On the basis of the coded data, various themes that were (i) time length of scoring formats (ii) effect of the scoring system on gameplay (iii) behaviour of fans, were organised and assigned to different codes associated with them. Under the above themes, various sub-themes were also identified which are explained in the analysis of individual themes. These themes are defined and results are explained below.

### Analysis

Theme 1: Time length of different scoring formats

The first theme is based on the fan beliefs regarding the time consumed in the completion of matches under different scoring formats. This theme divided scoring formats into two sub-themes according to the time consumed which are (i) shorter time length formats, and (ii) longer time length formats. Majority of fans considered that scoring formats of 11, 7, 5, 9 and 15 without service break rule WOSBR are shorter formats whereas, 21 and 15 with service break rule WSBR are longer formats for a badminton match.

Few research participants also considered 21 points scoring format to be a medium time length format because it is neither too short nor too long. A collective response from all fans shows that both time lengths of the matches can have their own merits and demerits.

### Shorter time length formats

Fans felt games of 7 and 9 points to be too short for viewing whereas, games of 11 and 15 scores WOSBR were considered to be shorter formats that are perfect for the sport. Majority of fans believed that shorter formats could involve characteristics like uncertainty of outcome, quick and offensive gameplay style which is more likely to interest fans. One other characteristic which some fans stated include team sport suitability and less proneness to injuries for players. Another interesting comment which was brought to notice by

a participant was the introduction of betting in the sport after the shorter formats were put into action because it consisted feature of the uncertainty of outcome in the badminton games.

### Longer time length formats

80% fans characterised the time length of other formats that were 21 and 15 WSBR being lengthy by referring to it as a game of more than 1 hour, in which players tend to start slow, with defensive gameplay and involve a lot of physical, skilful and tactical elements. Some of the participants also said that comebacks in these formats make the game interesting. 2 out of 10 of them believed that this format of game represents traditional Badminton and it's well suited for international tournaments.

### Comparison with existing literature

The results of this theme contradict to that of Buraimo and Simmons (2008) <sup>[3]</sup> who found that the audience tends to disfavour uncertainty of outcomes and comebacks by opponent teams in English Premier League football matches. The responses from the current study, tell that most fans are interested in outcome to be uncertain for matches, to promote competitiveness, watch tensions and intense games on the court.

### Theme 2: Effect of the scoring system on gameplay

This theme describes the perception of fans on how playing style of players differs in different scoring formats? The theme also has two subthemes under it, that are: (i) Defensive gameplay, and (ii) Attacking gameplay.

#### Defensive Gameplay

As mentioned in the previous theme, most of the fans stated that longer formats have more defensive gameplay, whereas in shorter formats players focus more on attacking gameplay. 90% of the fans mentioned that defensive gameplay is boring to watch as it consists of a lot of clears and rallies. They also mentioned, rallies being slow-paced and long, where some of the fans specifically mentioned about women doubles being boring because of the defensive gameplay.

#### Attacking Gameplay

For the attacking gameplay, most fans described it as an intense, aggressive, fast-paced and quick rally game because players focused majorly on attacking shots. These fans believe that this type of gameplay is more interesting and entertaining to watch for themselves and other fans.

Few fans also stated the reason they believe, attacking gameplay to be associated with the shorter formats. According to participants, players don't need to exert high physical abilities in shorter formats because of which it is easier to play with fast and quick movements without getting tired as compared to the longer formats.

### Comparison with existing literature

Kitchin (2008) <sup>[6]</sup> explained how cricket evolved as a sport after being played in a shorter format of T-20. According to him, T-20 format of the game was able to engage and interest more cricket fans into the sport as compared to the longer format of test match cricket. The theme found in the current study shows findings which are similar to the evolution of cricket. A sports science research confirms that a shorter format is associated with an increase in the intensity of the game (Laffaye *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[7]</sup>. The results of the other study found a change in the game's temporal structure and game

intensity by comparing the game of different scoring formats. This supports the notion of fans that short games of badminton involve attacking and quick play, which is of higher intensity than longer format matches.

### Theme 3: Behaviour of fans

This theme is based on the behavioural characteristics of fans in regard to their favourite team/player, rival team, buying practices, interests and preferences. Examining the codes generated at the initial stage, there were four sub-themes that seemed relevant under this theme- (i) fan relations with favourite player/team (ii) interests and preferences of fans (iii) social interactions of fans (iv) buying habits of fans. Out of these sub-themes mentioned above, codes related to social interaction and buying habits do not show any association with the change of scoring format and hence, these sub-themes were dropped at the stage of reviewing themes and sub-themes in thematic analysis. Dropped sub-themes showed that most social interactions between badminton fans are infrequent, usually nearing tournaments, and conversations are mostly limited to skills and techniques of players or comparisons between players. The buying habits of only a few fans were found to be associated with their fan-ship for a player/team and most of the fans buying decisions for products like racquets, shirts, shorts, bags, shoes and other badminton products are based on its cost and features.

#### Fan relations with favourite player/team

These were found to be associated with the different scoring formats used in badminton. Except some participants, the rest of the participants treated their favourite players as their role model and idols. Majority of the participants felt that their relationship with their favourite player would not change even if different scoring format affects the performance of their favourite player. Instead, they believed that their favourite player should adapt to any given scoring format or different game conditions.

Another interesting thing which was explored in regard of fan relation with the favourite player/team is that 90% of the Badminton fans do not have a favourite team and do not mind supporting their favourite player's/team's rival player/team as well.

#### Interests, beliefs and preferences of fans

This examines the elements of interest and entertainment in Badminton for the fans and why the fans preferred a particular scoring format. As discussed in previous themes, most of the fans believed that shorter formats of scoring are entertaining and interesting to watch as an audience because of uncertain outcome and attacking gameplay. Some fans also said that longer formats are also interesting and entertaining for them sometimes when their favourite player is performing or is playing against the rival player.

Most of the fans felt that viewing players in a different scoring format will be interesting and believe that good players will be the ones who are able to adapt to the changed game conditions.

#### Comparison with existing literature

As mentioned in the literature review, Yoshida *et al.* (2014)<sup>[9]</sup> showed that consumer relations with the favourite team are one of the factors in measuring fan engagement. Based on the outcomes from the current study, it can be said that badminton fans are engaged in the sport because of a personal association with their favourite player. Outcome of this theme

shows that most badminton fans do not practice other aspects of consumer engagement: the non-transactional and transactional behaviour. The current research findings contradict to the Balance Theory by Harvard *et al.* (2013)<sup>[5]</sup>, which suggests that fans have a negative relationship with their favourite player's rival player, as well as, to the study by Snyder *et al.* (1986)<sup>[8]</sup> which showed the tendency of fans to disengage in supporting the weak performing player.

### Results

Above analysis show that sub-themes: shorter time length scoring formats, attacking gameplay and interest, beliefs, and preference are interconnected.

Based on the analysis, scoring formats can be distinguished between shorter time length formats- games to 7,9,11 and 15 points WOSBR, and longer time length formats- games to 21 and 15 points WSBR. Participants' comments suggested that shorter time length of formats have an uncertain outcome and players tend to indulge in attacking game, which is interesting and entertaining for the fans. On the other hand, sometimes longer time length of formats can interest fans when their favourite player is performing or is playing against any rival player. Longer formats are believed to be time-consuming, repetitive, slow-paced and boring by a majority of the fans but some also felt that it could be occasionally entertaining as it consists a chance of a comeback for the losing player. More than half of fans believed that their favourite player could adapt under any alternate scoring format and win. Responses also suggest that most badminton fans rarely engage in buying products in social interactions related to their favourite players or watching matches at the stadium. However, they tend to maintain a long-term relationship with their favourite player with occasional interactions about them with family and friends. Surprisingly, more than half of the fans also supported their favourite player's rival player and 9 out of 10 did not have a favourite badminton team. Lastly, 8 out of 10 Badminton fans were found to be entertained by shorter formats, games to 15 points WOSBR and 11, but 2 of them believe 21 points to be the traditional format for badminton and still want it to be used in international competitive badminton.

### Conclusion

The study was set out to examine consumer opinions on using different scoring rules in badminton and determining any suitable scoring format for maximum entertainment of fans. Results from the current study suggest that fans feel that the scoring formats with shorter time length will be more viewer engaging for them because of the increased entertainment feature in it. Fans believe that past 1 hour, badminton games involve more employment of physical abilities and defensive gameplay, and less of attacking gameplay, skills, tactics and trick shots by the player. These results show that in order to draw the interest of maximum fans and enhance the entertainment feature of the sport, matches should not exceed 1-hour mark. Majority of the fans wanted badminton matches to be played with either 11 points or 15 WOSBR to make the matches shorter (less than 1 hour). Interestingly, one of the findings suggested the scoring format of 21, in which if the game goes on to the third and final set, then the final set is played to 11 points to complete a game within 1 hour. The results from the current study, show a similar case from the sport of cricket were decreasing the time length of the match format from test matches and 50 overs to 20 overs, resulted in the more entertaining and appealing sport for the audience.

Introduction of T-20 in cricket made the sport appealing to women, children and general fans, and created a better commercial future for cricket. Hence, in order to engage and entertain maximum fans of badminton, scoring formats of 11 best of 5, 15 best of 3 WOSBR and 21 points with a final set of 11 points should be used. The findings of this result will be of interest for governing bodies, which should look forward to altering scoring format for women doubles category as it was mentioned by most fans to be boring for them. Surprisingly, fans do not have a favourite team and do not follow badminton as a team sport, although it is also secondarily a team sport. 8 out of 10 fans believed that team sports should also have a shorter format in order to complete all of the matches in time. Since shorter formats were found to be entertaining and interesting for the audience, therefore, suggestively team competitions should have a shorter format of the scoring rules. Another objective of the study was to explore factors that influence fan interests for different scoring formats used. This study has identified that fans are interested in game factors like the uncertain outcome, comebacks of the losing player, performance of their favourite player, the performance of their favourite player against rival player, skilful, tactical and attacking gameplay and ability of players adapt in different game conditions. These findings will be of interest to governing bodies of badminton, which can use this study and its findings to lay an effective scoring format and other rules for enhancement of fan experience for badminton.

This study has identified that badminton fans are engaged in the sport by mostly maintaining a long-term relationship with their favourite player and do not engage much in transactional behaviour (buying match tickets and player-related products) or non-transactional behaviour (social interactions). For instance, Harvard *et al.* (2013)<sup>[5]</sup>, suggests that fans have an opposite relationship with their favourite team's/player's rival team/player. The current study found that badminton fans tend to even support their favourite player's rival player. Another research that contradicts with the findings of the current study, states that fans tend to disassociate themselves from the weak performing player, whereas in Badminton, fans consider their favourite player as their role models and maintain a long-term relationship with their favourite player regardless of their performance standards or match results. Comparing current study findings to the existing literature shows that, theories and notions developed in these researches are not applicable to a primarily individual sport like badminton. It further suggests that work needs to be done to establish whether theories and notions developed using team sports are actually applicable to individual sports or not. Gladden and Funk (2001)<sup>[4]</sup>, who explained the importance of fan loyalty, suggested that: (a) loyal fans support players even when not performing well and (b) it helps in the sale of player-related products to the fans. Results of the current study found that a majority of fans support their favourite players even in worst conditions but do not engage in any buying habits for the player-related products. Hence, this research area needs a further investigation to examine the relationship between the performances of players, and fan association and loyalty.

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