

The Strategies for Character Building through Sports Participation

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Abstract

The sport participation has been a major part of our life in the societies. Studies on sports participation have found that sports have both positive and negative influence on character buildings. It has been on-going debate on whether 'sports build character' but through literature analysis, author had found that 'with the intention, sports do build character.' Therefore, strategies of building character through sports are suggested in this paper.

Key words: *Character building, Building character through sports, strategies on building character through sports*

Character can be taught and learned in a sports setting. A sport experience can build character, but only if the environment is structured and a stated and planned goal is to develop character. This kind of environment must include all individuals (coaches, administrations, parents, participants, etc.) who are stakeholders in the sport setting (Doty, 2006, pg 6).

1.0. Introduction

The positive character traits such as personality and social responsibility was believed can and should be taught and learned in a sport and physical activity setting (Parker & Stiehl, 2004). The sports and physical activity setting merely provides opportunities to athletes to learn skills, strategies, sportsmanship, commitment, respect and disciplines. Thus, with proper strategies it is in line with the six pillars of character; trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and good citizenship (Arizona Sports Summit accord, 1999). However, these character, sportsmanship and disciplines in sports cannot positively influence character development especially if 'winning' being emphasized (Barez, 2008). Perhaps, the 'winning emphasize' implants for coaches and athletes by the administrators will invite inappropriate behavior like cheating, overly aggressive or taking drugs for better performances (Doty, 2006). The sportsmanship in sport had slowly being declined by this 'monetary' influence. What they expect is winning and success to the team. This is true with the professionals, the more they win, the richer they are. In fact, winning will invited more and more sporting goods company wanting to sponsor them for advertising purposes. However, on the positive side, one has to realize that to be a world class athletes like Christiano Ronaldo, Lance Armstrong or Husain Bolt they have to prepare themselves by training hard mentally and physically, disciplines and committed in training and competition. This perseverance is also considered as positive character. Without these positive values, they will not be known as world class athletes in their own sports. Due to this contradict argumentations whether sports did or did not build character, the objective of this paper is to explore both perspectives and try to suggest strategies to ensure that sport can build character. More specifically, the author also suggests that 'sport do build character' if only the athletes have the intention for it. This is because, according to Austin (2010) sports can build character but it doesn't happen automatically, we must intentionally make it happen. Thus, with a proper teaching and coaching which also emphasized on character development, sports and physical activity can be appropriate platform for building a character (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995). This paper will be presented in four sub-topics which are: 1) The positive effects of sports participations, 2) The negative effect of sports participations, 3) The strategies for character building in sports, and 4) conclusion and recommendations.

2.0. The positive effect of sports participation

Each and every one of us might have had heard the words that "Sports build Character" and most of us believe that at the end of the day you have it all, a 'character' person. Thus, this 'words of mouth' not only true but had also been proven by research. For example, research had found that students athletes who participate in sports and extracurricular activities have

better attendance in school, lower drop-out rates, fewer discipline problems, and less drug use (Josephine Institute Center of sport ethics, 2006). The college students who have leave school have also suggested that physical education curriculum should be continued because it can provide knowledge of sports to promote the adolescents to participate in physical activities (Omar-Fauzee, et al. 2009b). The other positive impact is that it was found that with sports participation, it negatively correlated with school dropout and delinquent behavior (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). This shows that sports create interest among students to go to school as well as avoiding the negative behaviors. Moreover, research have also found that that these individuals has experience desired effect of their participation such as positive peer relationships, display courage, respect rules, become competitive, show leadership and foster citizenship (Evan & Roberts, 1987; Larson, 2000; Wright & Cote, 2003). Furthermore, those who participate in sports and physical activities facilitates themselves with wellness and less likely to developed numerous chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes, depression and cancer (Omar-Fauzee, Yusof,& Zizzi, 2009; Powell, Thompson, Caspersen, & Kendrick, 1987). Furthermore, sports and physical activity most likely to enhance cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, flexibility and health bone structure (Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985; Wenkel & Berger, 1990). Although the percentages of positive process of character building among athletes did not achieve 100 percent, however it had been shown that more than half of the athletes in respective games did show their moral reasoning character. According to Josephine Institute Center of Sport Ethics (2006);

- *Three-fifths of boys and three-fourth of the girls see that it was wrong with using a stolen playbook sent by anonymous supporter before a big game*
- *70 percent of all boys and 80 percent of girl softball players think it is not okay for a softball pitcher to deliberately throw at a better who homered the last time up.*
- *46 percent of male football players, 51 percent of male basketball players, and 82 percent of females in all sport disapprove of trash-talking*
- *66 percent of all boys and 88 percent of all girls disapprove of a coach trying to pump up the team by swearing at officials to get him or herself thrown out of the game.*

The figure above shows that the moral reasoning among our high school children was not so bad because the percentage was reasonable high, although it is not 100 percent positive.

3.0. The Negative effect of sports participation

Even though, Josephine Institute Center of Sport Ethic somehow found that the percentages of athletes who show moral reasoning was quite high, however, majority of other researchers report that there are negative relationship between sports participation and character development (Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Bredemeier, 1995; Hahm, 1989). Research by Hellison (2003) also found that positive character building is not inherent through sport participation. For example, Hahm (1989) had studied on 400 college students from America and Korea on their moral reasoning and moral behavior using HBVCI and Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1979). Result shows that the physical education majors and student athletes

score lower than general students on moral reasoning and moral judgments. On the other hand, from psychosocial perspectives, youth often feel excessive pressure to win, being pushed to win by society, perceive themselves as having poor ability, poor sportsmanship, and acts of violence and aggression have become common to them (Bredemeier & Shield, 1987; Lemyre, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2002; Wankel & Mummery, 1990). Furthermore, research has found that athletes deliberately violate the rules during games and act aggressively towards opponents which was interpreted as a lack of character (c.f., Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Silver, 1983). What happens to 'sports build character' connotations? What are the strategies for character building through sports participation?

4.0 The strategies for character building in sports

The above research and findings have shown that there are some vacant spaces for character building in sports. Some researchers argue that sports do build character, on the other hand, some debate that sports do not build character. Which one is true? To fill up the empty spaces of character building, perhaps, the intentions, planning and strategies reinforced by the environments (coaches, parents, participants, spectators, etc) should work together to ensure that the positive character can be built (Doty, 2006). This is true when leadership and verbal persuasion from coaching staffs were identified as the two main reasons of why university students participate in sports (Omar-Fauzee, et al., 2009a). This shows that coaching staffs did influence athletes to participate and can motivate athletes to pursue their excellence. Thus, coaches and educators must create environments in the playing fields that support ideal notions of ethics, moral reasoning, character and sportsmanship (Stoner, 2004). In doing so, the coaching staffs should have the intentions of building the character when they are teaching. Meaning that without intentions from athletes and coaches themselves, sports cannot build up character (Austin, 2010). In order to find the solutions for making it work for athletes, the following strategies were suggested for character building:

- 4.1. Strategies for athletes (Adopted from Mango, 2011; Heart of Illinois Conference, 2007)
 - A high emphasis on character- place a high level of value must be placed on good characters so that the individual becomes part of the process of good character.
 - high expectation of behavior- The higher you expect, the more you can anticipate getting it
 - set a good example- Illustrate what you expect you want others to do.
 - Good sportsmanship a MUST- sportsmanship and character go hand in hand. Show sportsmanship in victory or defeat
 - accountability – a check and balance in building character, you are fairness, compassion and consistency
 - Holistic approach – Look beyond wins or losses, view it from more global, well rounded development of a person.
 - Respect our game, yourself and others
 - Respect our officials all the time
 - Be active in your actions and comments
 - Practice self-control

- 4.2. Strategies for Coaches (adopted from Clifford & Feezell, 2009; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011).
- Be a good model- a coach should show their sportsmanship and respect to opponents, team members, and the sports. Athletes will follow coach's step to have a positive character.
 - Emphasize sportsmanship from the beginning
 - Talk about - combining of seriousness and playfulness
 - Regularly use the language of sportsmanship
 - Expect sportsmanship in practice and games
 - Reinforcing the good sportsmanship
 - Reinforce continually that participating in interscholastic sports is and should be fun
 - Emphasize that the purpose of the interscholastic sports is to teach sports skills and life lessons
 - Help each athlete develop and achieve his or her all-around potential
 - Follow the rules explicitly and reinforce fair play and sportsmanship at all times
 - Teach how to learn from failures and successes
- 4.3. Strategies developing Moral Principles (Full quotations from Lumpkin, 2009).
- Modeling what character is, shaping and continuing to mold moral values, and consistently reinforcing and praising the ethical behaviors of young athletes.
 - Teaching what it means to treat opponents, officials, and teammates honorably and respectfully while following the letter and spirit of the rules
 - Modeling how to behave when faced with morally challenging situations
 - Shaping players' thinking so effort, hard work, and doing one's best are more important than winning
 - Reinforcing how character is displayed in sports, such as through sportsmanship and fair play, and how moral values can be applied in other aspects of life
- 4.4. Promote sportsmanship and foster good character by teaching, enforcing, advocating and modeling the "Six Pillars of Character": trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and good citizenship. (Full quotations from Arizona Sports Summit, 1999; pg 1).
- *Develop and enforce a written code of conduct that stresses the importance of good character and specifies ethical obligations and sportsmanship expectations.*
 - *Discuss the importance of character, ethics and sportsmanship during the recruiting process and in promotional and descriptive materials.*
 - *Incorporate explicit language in the job descriptions and contracts of administrators, athletic directors, coaches and others involved in the*

sports program stating the obligation to promote sportsmanship and foster good character by teaching, enforcing, advocating and modeling trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and good citizenship.

- *Incorporate explicit incentives and disincentives in the contracts of athletic administrators, coaches and others involved in the sports program relating to desired and undesired behavior beyond sports performance. These might include incentives for high grade-point averages, graduation rates, games free of sportsmanship-related penalties; disincentives for conference, league or school rule violations, discrediting on-field conduct (e.g., technical fouls and other unsportsmanlike conduct penalties) discrediting off-field conduct (e.g., drug use, DUI's, assaults, illegal gambling). Financial and other consequences relating to these sorts of factors must be significant in relation to the overall compensation package and reflect the high degree of importance associated with the sportsmanship and character-building goals of the program.*

- *Coaches should be hired and retained not merely for their capacity to develop winning teams and high-performing athletes, but for their ability as teachers to support the educational and character-building goals of the institution.*

- *Devote a substantial portion of each yearly pre-season meeting to stressing the importance of good character and ethical and sportsmanship expectations.*

- *Teach athletes to discern and deal with ethical and sportsmanship issues by discussing these issues in relation to actual and hypothetical situations occurring or likely to occur in practice or game situations.*

- *Teach athletes that good character, ethics and sportsmanship are essential to honorable athletic competition and that victory attained in any other way is empty and unworthy.*

- *In communicating to athletes and to others about the athletic program, regularly use the language and concepts of character, ethics and sportsmanship, including: integrity, honor, honesty, respectfulness, courtesy, civility, responsibility, duty, accountability, fair play, empathy, compassion, kindness, unselfishness, teamwork and playing by the rules.*

- *Establish and regularly practice rituals and traditions that reinforce the principles of sportsmanship.*

- *Establish and discuss guidelines for dealing with unethical and unsportsmanlike behavior by athletes and impose sanctions regardless of the competitive impact.*
- *Communicate the importance of sportsmanship to parents and spectators by frequent public announcements, by posted signs and on programs and other materials.*
- *Establish and enforce guidelines for dealing with unsportsmanlike conduct by coaches, parents, spectators, cheerleaders and other spirit groups.*
- *Develop a league-campus-wide educational campaign promoting sportsmanship and celebrating the positive aspects of athletic competition beyond winning.*
- *Insist that coaches and athletes avoid displays of emotional immaturity after a, bad play or losing a game.*

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

This brief concept paper should be explored further in order to make sure all individuals who involved with athletes know their roles, expectation, and responsibility to develop the intention of how to build character through sport. As mention earlier, without intention it is quite difficult for character building in sports. To promote sportsmanship and character building to athletes, author had identified four strategies (i.e., strategies for athletes, coaches, moral reasoning, and six pillars of characters) which were adopted from literatures (Arizona Sports Summit, 1999, Clifford & Feezell, 2009; Heart of Illinois Conference, 2007, Lumpkin, 2009, Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011, Mango, 2011). By doing so, the urgent needs of interest towards building character in sports are continuously remind to coaches and athletes. Thus, author hopes that the poor character issues among athletes such as cheating, rules violation and aggressiveness can be reduced among athletes. In the long run, it helps pursuing victory among our young athletes with honors. Based on the literature, author has also suggested the following recommendation for future research to enhance character building in sports:

- *The sports program should be conducted in such a way that promotes the mental, social and moral development of the athletes that will teaches athletes skills that will help them be a good citizen and responsible person.*
- *The sport higher authority should maintain the integrity and socialbility of the program conducted. The program should compromise the character-development that will ensure the academic, physical, emotional, and moral well-being of the participants.*
- *The discussions by the experts of the importance of character, ethics and sportsmanship should regularly being promoted by sports media so that people will always looking forward to 'feel the importance' of moral reasoning in life.*

- *The moral reasoning questionnaires specifically related to sports should be invented so that what is measure is validated by expert in sports character and ethics. The previous questionnaire used to measure moral reasoning such as Hahm (1989) should be re-structured.*
- *Although, future research should focus on the positive side of sports towards character building more, but the focus of negative side of it should also be tracked. This will ensure that the sports ethic researcher understands the latest trends of good and bad character among athletes.*

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