

# Emotion and Stress Management –Special Reference to Violence and Aggression in Sports

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## ABSTRACT

Aggressive behaviour is quite visible in sports. Not all aggressive behaviour in sport is violent and destructive. In fact many forms of aggressive behaviours are accepted and even prompted. Use of term aggression refers to a wide range of sports behaviours that causes confusion. Most aggressive behaviours in sport are neither clearly desirable nor clearly undesirable. Instead, most aggressive acts are seen as distasteful by some people and justifiable by others. Aggression has long been a part of the sport domain. Instead, Russell (1993) suggested that outside of war time, sports is perhaps the only setting in which acts of interpersonal aggression are not only tolerated but enthusiastically applauded by large segments of society. In recent years, however, violence in sports, both on and off the field, has come to be perceived as a social problem. For instance, commissions have been appointed in Canada, England and Australia to investigate violence in the athletic setting (National Committee on Violence, 1989, Pipe, 1993). In the past few years a great deal of attention has been focused on the increasing violent behaviour of sport participants and spectators. There have been numerous accounts of fighting between players in football, basketball and hockey games as well as rioting by spectators at various sporting events. The media must become responsible in its reporting of sport. There is no need to rehearse examples of violence and aggression in sports. The focus should be on the skills demonstrated and strategies employed by athletes and coaches rather than on acts of aggression. There are many sensitive and human athletes and coaches who are involved in sports at all levels. Attempts should be made to present these individuals in a favourable light and give them greater media coverage. Coaches should be made aware of the potential damages of aggression in sport, not only for their team and the player at hand, but for society as whole. The tightening of rules, imposing of harsher penalties and changing of reinforcement patterns are only part of the answer to inhibiting aggression in sports.

**Keywords:** Aggression, Attention and Violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behaviour is quite visible in sport. Not all aggressive behaviour in sport is violent and destructive. In fact, many forms of aggressive behaviour are accepted and even prompted. Use of the term aggression refers to a wide range of sport behaviors that causes confusion. Most aggressive behaviors in sport are neither clearly desirable nor clearly undesirable. Instead, most aggressive acts are seen as distasteful by some people and justifiable by others.

Aggressive behaviour is difficult to define because the subtlety of man's behavioral repertoire provides him with the capacity to injure another in an infinite variety of ways. The degree of injury may vary from marginally 'hurt feelings' to death and yet the cause of the injury comes under the same label. Aggression is difficult to define. It is the intentional infliction of some type of harm upon others (Baron, & Byrne, 1988). Social scientists define aggression as harm-doing behaviour initiated by the intent to do harm. In sports, aggression is used to gain advantage or victory. Basically, aggression is a kind of behaviour that is intended to injure another person either physically or verbally or to destroy property. Aggression is defined as the infliction of an aversive stimulus, either physical, verbal or gesture, upon one person by another. Aggression is not an attitude but behaviour and most critically, it is reflected in acts committed with the intent to injure (LeUnes & Nation, 1989). This definition of aggression includes such wide ranging acts, engaged in by athletes, coaches and /or spectators, as physically hitting another individual and verbal abuse. In recruiting athletes, coaches often describe the desirable athlete as one who is "hungry, aggressive "mobile, agile, hostile" and a competitor". Aggressive athletes seem to be desirable athletes.

Violence refers specifically to the physical component of aggression. It is defined as harm inducing behaviour bearing no direct relationship to the competitive goals of sport and relates, therefore, to incidents of uncontrolled aggression outside the rules of sport, rather than highly competitive behaviour within the rule boundaries (Terry & Jackson, 1985). In other words, violence is equated to physically inflict illegal and hostile aggressive acts.

Aggression has long been a part of the spoil domain. Indeed, Russell (1993) suggested that outside of wartime, sports is perhaps the only setting in which acts of interpersonal aggression are not only tolerated but enthusiastically applauded by large segments of society. In recent years, however, violence in sport, both on and off the field, has come to be perceived as a social problem. For instance, commissions have been appointed in Canada, England and Australia to investigate violence in the athletic setting (National Committee on Violence, 1989; Pipe, 1993). Aggression is a term that is used extensively in sport. If coaches were surveyed and asked to identify the characteristics of successful athletes, aggression would be high on the list. What is meant by aggression in sport? Aggressive plays are used in football, for example when the defense executes a fierce tackle. In basketball, good re-bouncers, good defensive players and the players who consistently drive to the basket are all described as an aggressive. Aggressive tennis players rush to the net at every opportunity. The volleyball player who dives to the floor to attempt an apparently impossible save is playing aggressively. In these and other examples from sport, aggressive acts can be defined as those, in which the athlete

- is highly motivated,
- demonstrates a great release of physical energy and / or
- Is not inhibited by fear of potential failure or injury (Liewellyn & Blucker, 1982).

In physical education and sports following are the sources of aggressive behaviour:

### **Social Activities**

The social learning theory hypothesizes that aggression is dangerous and unsettling as it is a learned form of social behaviour. As per psychological theory inborn neural mechanisms located in the hypothalamus mediate aggressive responses when they are activated by particular stimuli. Thus aggression is neither biological nor solely environmental but it is intertwined in an individual's physiology, genetics and psychological make-up in an extensive variety of social circumstances (Chitra & Singh, 1999).

### **Imitation**

In observing aggressive behaviour in children, many studies have reported the imitation of aggressive behaviour when apparently little or no reinforcement is available at the time. When children observe aggressive behaviour in sport they are likely to produce the same kind of behaviour themselves in that situation out of a generalized tendency to imitate. One of the findings from research in this field is that the prestige or status of the model is an important determinant of the degree of imitation. In sport the superior performers are credited with very high status. Their behaviour is likely to be imitated to a greater extent for this reason and where it includes aggressive activity, we should not be surprised to find that these actions are also copied by children.

### **Media Presentation of Aggressive Situations**

An additional cause of the failure of punishment generated by the media to influence behaviour on the field is its temporal relation to the offence. The effectiveness of punishment is always reduced due to delay in presentation. The press provides delayed punishment which is probably minimal. Research findings also suggest that fans like violence in their sports (Bryant, Brown, Comisky & Zillman, 1982). Bryant and Zillman (1983) have proposed that the media exploit this desire for violence in three ways.

I One is through over-coverage of violent plays. For example, instances of violence in sport are often sensationalized and replayed over and over again on television.

II Secondly many feature articles in magazines focus on and glorify violence.

III Finally, promotions in television programming are often exploitative by using past violent acts seen in previous sport contests to encourage spectators to attend or watch upcoming events.

### **Perception of Opponent**

Another factor found to influence the aggressiveness of participants is the perceived intent of an opponent. If an opponent is perceived in a positive way, little aggression will be directed towards him or her; a negative perception of an opponent will lead to greater levels of aggression being directed at that opponent. It is frequently within the coach's ability to control this perception. Exhortation of players with references to the dirty tactics and unfair practices of an opponent will help to develop a negative perception of that opponent and invites an eruption of violence during that particular contest. Some coaches feel that they must build up feelings of hostility toward an opponent in their players, using real or fabricated information to achieve this end.

It appears that competitive sports have inherent qualities that make them frustrating (winning/ losing, unexpected actions by opponents) and hence are a potential source of aggression. But research also shows that individuals can learn non-aggressive responses to these situations. Learning occurs mostly by observing others and by being reinforced positively for appropriate responses and negatively for inappropriate responses. Coaches have the opportunity and the responsibility to develop in the young athletes with whom they are working a non-violent approach toward sport and competition. Through this approach we can better serve athletes and society as a whole.

Issues which need attention regarding control of aggression and violence in sports

As the urge of aggression is a deep-rooted problem of human mind, the source of solution must be finding out in the deeper levels of mind. The urge of aggression can be subjugated by developing the power that lies deeper in the sub-conscious. Fortunately, such power is inherent in all human beings but there is need to adopt the right technique to develop that power. Following are the issues which need special attention to control the aggression and violence in sports. Awareness of the athlete regarding negative spectrum of aggression and violence.

As Thirer (1993) stated those with a legitimate, genuine concern for all levels of sport, from early childhood experiences to age group and master's competition need to be acutely aware of the negative spectrum of aggression and violence. This applies equally to participant behavior and spectator behaviour. Since sport and society are presumed to mirror each other, the frequency and intensity of aggressive acts in the athletic realm take on added importance, i.e., the high levels of aggression and violence in sport may indeed go beyond the competitive event itself and have larger societal implications. Encouragement for development of the "self controlled players"

Several techniques such as punishment, catharsis, non-aggressive models, training in several skills and incompatible responses like empathy, humors etc. exist for the control of human aggression. Both in the press and amongst physical educationists there has been discussion concerning aggression in sport and very frequently the phenomenon has been described as 'unsporting'. Attempts have been made at encouraging coaches to stop this behaviour on the part of their players. The players themselves have been exhorted to show more 'self control'. Sports may be used as a controlled and no-harmful outlet for hostile feelings. A good deal of care is needed to be sure that harmful violence does not result. Training for controlling hostile feelings should begin at a relatively young age. Only positive performance and acts of instrumental aggression be approved and constantly reinforced (Chitra & Singh, 1999).

#### **Accountability of media in reporting the sports events**

The media must become more responsible in its reporting of sport. There is no need to rehearse examples of violence and aggression in sport. The focus should be on the skills demonstrated and strategies employed by athletes and coaches rather than on acts of aggression. There are many sensitive and human athletes and coaches who are involved in sport at all levels. Attempts should be made to present these individuals in a favorable light and give them greater media coverage (Tenenbaum et al., 1996).

#### **Development of Fair play code-of-conduct**

Coaches should be made aware of the potential damage of aggression in sport, not only for their team and the player at hand, but for society as a whole. At each competitive level and for every sport, a fair play code- of- conduct should be made compulsory elemental established and enforced guidelines for coaches (Tenenbaum et al., 1996).

#### **Separation of athletes from the spectators**

Although athletes and spectators are physically separated at sporting events, violent outbursts involving both parties have required the lines of demarcation be made more visible and in some instances, more impenetrable (Arms et al. 1982). Spectators may also exhibit aggression when they verbally abuse or throw objects at an opposing athlete or team. If the intent is to physically or psychologically injure the athlete, spectators are being hostile. If their intent is to gain an advantage for their team by distracting the opposing player(s), then this is considered instrumental aggression (Tenenbaum et al., 1996).

#### **Development of control on both, the participants and the spectators**

The organized sports, whatever their nature, are a form of social organization that exert some degree of social control both over the participants and over the spectators. Spectators of sports involving some degree of violence will become excited to express violence themselves but this will ordinarily be expressed or restrained according to the training which they have previously received. Unless the crowds have been thoroughly trained in the principles of sportsmanship, violent behaviour is likely to break out without any warning.

Development of "fun and fair play" quality not "winning at all costs" in the players Winning has become an essential part of sport and increased professionalism breeds an atmosphere of winning at all costs. The traditional causes of sport engagement such as fun and fair play appear to have decreased substantially. Research has shown that when athletes place a strong emphasis on beating others (in contrast to focusing on personal improvement and their own performance), they are more likely to endorse cheating and perceive intentionally injurious acts as more acceptable (Duda, Olson & Templin, 1989). Unfortunately some coaches and athletes take this state of affairs to the extreme and suggest that the use of aggression is necessary in order to win. Although there is some suggestion in the literature that aggression can lead to winning the human and monetary costs associated with the injuries that often accompany aggressive acts call into question such short-term gains.

#### **Improvement in Officiating ability**

Mark, Bryant and Lehman (1983) indicated that charged with the responsibility of making important split-second decisions and rule interpretations, officials can be a catalyst for arousing emotions conducive to player or spectator

violence. Like players, officials are placed under great stress during games. Improving their ability to concentrate, control unnecessary arousal and cope with pressure will enable officials to officiate more competently and eliminate errors that inflame aggressive acts in athletes and spectators. With the development of such mental skills, officials should be more likely to consistently and appropriately enforce game rules which promote fair play and minimize violent behaviour.

#### **Development of positive post game atmosphere**

Winning and losing have been found to play a large part in the level of aggression exhibited by participants following athletic contests. Losers tend to have higher levels of aggression after competition than do winners. Coaches may be able to reduce levels of aggression in losing competitors by praising their efforts and maintaining a positive note throughout post-game comments to athletes. Negative and inflammatory comments can have the effect of increasing already heightened aggressive feelings. In such a state, athletes may become involved in antisocial acts as a means of expressing their aggression.

#### **Development of positive perception about the opponents**

Coaches should be attempting to direct their players toward a more positive perception of their opponents. It is not unwise to praise opponents for their respect of rules and sense of fair play before a contest. Emphasizing such positive virtues would do a great deal to reduce or eliminate the possibility of violence during athletic contests. This is not to suggest that athletes enter any contest, particularly aggressive games such as football or hockey, in a complacent or unmotivated state since this can often lead to injury and / or defeat. Rather, athletes should be motivated through accentuation of their own positive values and always with a sense of fair play and sportsmanship. Coaches can do a great deal to prepare athletes for handling these situations during games by making the players more aware of acceptable behavior in that sport. Often young athletes are unfamiliar with accepted tactics and become frustrated at what is actually a legitimate tactic or technique as exhibited by an opponent. This frustration can lead to aggression against the opponent. Coaches should spend time educating less experienced athletes as to what they can expect during a game, thereby dealing with the situation before it is given the chance to develop into an incident.

Provision of negative reinforcement (punishment) for all act of violence Coaches who wish to control violence in sport should provide negative reinforcement for any act of violence during practices of games. Such negative reinforcement will reduce the players' tendency toward aggression and the player learns through the reinforcement applied that aggression is not an acceptable form of behaviour. In the same fashion, athletes can learn non-aggressive responses to competitive situations. This can be accomplished by positive reinforcement of non-aggressive responses to a particular situation, a situation which in the past might have brought about an aggressive response by that particular athlete.

#### **Disciplinary action for both male and female players equally**

There is evidence that men tend to be more aggressive than women. Differences in aggressive behaviour are probably the result of influences that begin in childhood. In a review of the literature on this topic, it was found that girls are consistently more punished for aggressive behaviour than are boys. In our culture, aggression has traditionally been viewed as a desirable trait for men but not for women (Lyewellyn & Blucker, 1982). There are obvious cultural differences in the reinforcement provided for aggressive behaviour.

Society, as a whole, tends to reinforce aggression in males to a very much greater extent than in females. Society also tends to punish females for aggressive behaviour to a much greater extent. Any stimulus in the sports context which is perceived as being aggressive is likely to stimulate aggression as a reaction. Within our culture there are also class differences in the degree to which aggressive behaviour is condoned. The lower classes tend to reinforce aggressive behaviour, in general, to a greater extent than the upper classes. It seems that such cultural influences may be changing. Today, girls who are interested in sport are not afraid to develop the aggressive tendencies that will enable them to be successful athletic competitors.

#### **Appropriate goal setting**

If sports are going to be a major factor in the control of aggression we must develop both a wider variety of sports suitable to different kinds of individuals - both men and women and young and old - and a social or educational system which permits a much wider degree of participation in sports. It would be necessary to develop self-reinforcing activities like swimming. Discretion must be used in the matter of setting goals and presenting challenges. Demanding impossible from an average athlete is likely to lead to aggressive behaviour. This needs to be avoided.

#### **Development of greater public awareness**

Greater public awareness of the dangers of the continued trend toward increasing violence and the importance of participation in sports activities in the release of aggression may be helpful in curbing aggression in sport and in life. Finally, games and sports restore homeostatic balance through vigorous activity, when this balance is upset by strong emotions such as fear and anger. Though many sports activities provoke such emotions, they relieve them also and provide opportunities to the players to deal with such emotions.



## CONCLUSIONS

In a hope of dramatically reducing the incidence of aggression and violence in the athletic domain, the International Society of Sport Psychology makes the following recommendations:

- Management should make fundamental penalty revisions, so that rule violating behaviour results in punishments that have greater punitive value than potential reinforcement.
- Management must ensure proper coaching of teams, particularly at junior levels, which emphasizes a fair play code- of-conduct among all participants.
- Management should ban the use of alcoholic beverages at sporting events.
- Management must make sure that facilities are adequate regarding catering and spacing needs and the provision of modern amenities.
- The media must place in proper perspective the isolated incidents of aggression that occur in sport, rather than making them 'highlights'.
- The media should promote a campaign to decrease violence and hostile aggression in sport which will also involve the participation and commitment of athletes, coaches, management, officials and spectators.
- Coaches, managers, athletes, media, officials and authority figures (police) should take part in workshops on aggression and violence to ensure that they understand the topic of aggression, why it occurs, the cost of aggressive acts and how aggressive behaviour can be controlled.
- Coaches, managers, officials and the media should encourage athletes to engage in pro-social behaviour and punish those who perform acts of hostility. Coaches should be made aware of the potential damage of aggression in sport, not only for their team and the player at hand, but for society as whole. The tightening of rules, imposing of harsher penalties and changing of reinforcement patterns are only part of the answer to inhibiting aggression in sports.

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