

Ethics in Sports

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. Today sports events are close to battles: winning at any cost is what matters. in this context ethics are nowhere in sight.
2. Instances of violence in sports events.
3. The issue of doping in sports.
4. Big money and speculation with consequences like match-fixing.
5. Why unethical practices abound in sports today.
6. Unethical practices antithetical to the very principle of sports.

George Orwell once commented that serious sport had nothing to do with fair play; it was bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. The comment is apt in summing up the attitude that governs sports in modern times.

Professional sports is nothing less than a battle, and winning is a matter of life and death. This kind of an attitude has seeped through to sports at the amateur level as well. As a result, sports has been increasingly witnessing a complete disregard for sports ethics. Today, the influence of the money factor in sports is so great that not only are contestants ready to go to any lengths to win a match but also, they are ready to cheat, lie or commit other crimes if they have to. Thus cheating, lying and bribery, violence, doping have become almost essential in sports.

Let us take violence first. Cases of extreme injuries and even deaths as a result of intentional violence have been on the rise. Some sports disciplines such as boxing and soccer have been in particular prone to such violence, Frenchman Battiston was seriously injured in the 1986 Soccer World Cup by a tackle of the West German goal keeper, Schumacher. In the 1994 World Cup, Brazil Leonardo knocked out American Tab Ramos with his elbow in an act of aggression. Maybe the worst instance of violence in recent times has been the killing of Columbian football star, Andres Escobar by his fans for scoring a goal against his own country which helped the US beat his team 2-1 in the 1994 World Cup Soccer. Monica Seles, the most successful woman tennis player in 1993, was felled by a knife on the back while on a tennis court by a fan of her main rival. Another incident that drew a lot of international criticism was the attack on the American skater, Nancy Kerrigan inspired by professional jealousy. Sports violence is not restricted to a handful of nations; it has become a universal phenomenon. It is not only the contestants who are involved in such acts; the spectators and fans as well commit violence to help their teams or players win or simply out of anger and frustration. In ancient Greece and Rome, new violent games, such as Pankration, were

invented to delight the people. It was a craze for witnessing and reveling in extreme violence that prevailed then and the same remains to this day. Witness, for instance, the 'mania which the new form of extremely violent wrestling promoted by the WWF has acquired in the last few years. The violent nature of games such as boxing and motor racing results in great physical damage and even death.

Another serious problem in modern sports is doping, or use of drugs to improve one's performance. Today it is a major issue of controversy in the Olympic Games, the Asian and other major games. Chinese sportsmen and Sportswomen in particular are increasingly being held up on charges of doping. The punishment for use of drugs in Sports is strict: drug-using players are not only stripped of their medals but temporarily suspended, and banned from the sport for life if drugs are again detected in the tests Conducted by the authorised organisation. However, these have failed to discourage the players from using them. What has also failed to check doping is the harmful effects of use of drugs for increasing performance. The major consequences of performance boosting drugs are cancerous growths, liver damage and impotency. it is shocking to observe that mostly it is the managers of the teams as well as the coaches who are responsible for encouraging the taking of drugs among players. An incident that comes to mind is the suspension of Argentinian soccer superstar, Diego Maradona for testing positive for a drug containing five banned substances.

Bribes to players are increasingly on the rise. This practice has been most widely seen in what was once the gentleman's game-cricket. Bribes are offered to teams players so that the other contesting team player can win a match. A reason for the offering of bribes is the huge amount of money that is spent by fans and groups on betting upon the winner. Thus, the defeat of a team can spell a loss of millions of dollars for international players in the betting market. Another unethical practice is that of cheating by players on the ground or the field itself. This problem is not of new origin; however, it remains a menace to the healthy development of sports. In the game of cricket, for instance, cheating has involved use of Vaseline on the ball and tampering with the ball to get quick wickets as well as throwing the ball violently to seriously injure the batsmen.

There is a need to understand why ethical standards in sports have so drastically fallen in modern times. Professional sports today is not just a game; it is taken very seriously and given all the attention that excelling in a profession demands of a person. It involves a great deal of physical and mental strain. Training often starts at a very young age-as early as the age of four or five. The child is mentally trained with the object of securing a high level of excellence in his or her discipline. For years, the blooming player spends all his time, energy and resources on acquiring the talent, devotion and perfection that will put him on the top at the earliest possible time. He sacrifices his family life and social life in the process. Thus, to

achieve his aim is nothing less than an obsession for him. It is not only the urge to excel that comes from within himself; pressure from outside is equally keen to ensure that he gives more than his best. Winning means a lot of fame and most importantly, money. The wish to be seen as a legend in the sport concerned is very strong in professional players. Thus, when they are not able to achieve their dream. They sometimes take to cheating, lying, doping or even outright violence out of psychological strain and frustration. They sometimes, though sincerely, try so hard to win that they end up hurting themselves psychologically or even physically. The death of the legendary Senna, whose name is counted among the greats in car racing, on the track during a race is only one example amidst a host of others. Maybe such an attitude in sports only reflects the modern man's attitude towards life in general-one that is stressful and measured by material success alone.

The people who view the performance get equally involved in the game. What results is fights among fans of different teams while watching a game, threats to players and attempts on the part of fans to prove their craze or loyalty, call it what you will, towards a player or team. Often, matches between teams representing two nations are taken so seriously that a defeat may be considered nothing less than a loss of prestige and honor of a country, and it may inspire a violent expression of patriotism.

Such unethical practices are antithetical to the very principle of sports. 80 apart from strict penalties and punishments, what can be done to ensure 'clean' sports? There is a need to sincerely understand that sports ought to be 'played' and not 'fought'. Winning and losing must be viewed as part of the game. Thus, what is required is developing a sportsman spirit within the players, the coaches, the managers as well as sports fans. Resorting to scheming and cheap practices to simply win is not fair towards the players and teams who play the game with honesty. The Wrong-doers must remember that even these players train hard to physically and mentally equip themselves for a match. Sports must involve real competition that calls into play the talent, stamina, perseverance and determination that the players naturally possess or have acquired from hard training.

Use of wrong means to achieve a victory is degrading to the very spirit of sports and humanity. Use of drugs, in particular, ought to be effectively tackled as it shows the Way to physical, mental and moral degeneration of man.