

Critical Review of the Double Standard of Fair Play - Can we teach "Fair Play" to Children? -

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The Japan Football Association requests that instructors who coach children (under 12-years old) give priority to the observance of rules over securing victory at all costs. On the other hand, the JFA requests all players to pursue victory as part of the JFA's fair play policy. This is a double standard. The purpose of this paper is to consider the following: firstly, criticism of the double standard about fair play by the JFA, and secondly, how to answer this question: "How can we teach fair play without contradicting ourselves?" by analyses of various interpretations of fair play. To achieve this, we will analyze some remarks concerning ethical elements of fair play. After that, we will identify any contradictions regarding these remarks.

KEYWORDS : fair play, utilitarianism, rule, football, moral education

1. Introduction

On a consultation site on the Internet, a Japanese spectator questioned a foul that a Japanese player committed in the Women's World Cup finals held in Germany, in July, 2010.

"Japanese DF player, Azusa Iwashimizu, extinguished the scoring chance of an American player when she executed a dangerous sliding tackle near the end of the game. Afterward, the referee showed her a red card, and she had to leave the game. I thought this had indeed been a dangerous play for which she was duly penalized. But many commentators deemed the red card to be too harsh, reasoning that if she hadn't committed the foul, the American team might have scored the winning goal in regulation time, possibly dashing all hopes of Japan winning the championship. I was really ashamed to be Japanese, because the commentators had praised her foul as a strategy

and made light of it. Why was everyone praising her for executing a dangerous foul for which she deserved the red card?"¹⁾

I came up with the following answer as the "Best answer" to this question.

"The foul had been carried out to prevent the opposition's goal despite the risk of committing a technical foul or a professional foul and receiving a red card. It is a play that can be done effectively by a professional football player, especially a defender. Had she done it properly, we could have praised her for being a "clever player with a high soccer IQ."

This scene contains a very difficult element when seen from the viewpoint of sports ethics. On one hand, this can be seen as a reprehensible act if it is an intentional foul – designed to stop the opponent at all costs; on the other hand, it is a sublime act if it is seen from the viewpoint of self-sacrifice for the teammates. If fairness is not necessarily moralistic and if a moral act is not necessarily fair, how should we adults

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reconcile this when we teach children about fair play?

The purpose of this paper is to look for an answer to the question: “How should we teach fair play to children without being contradictory?”, while considering the diversity of the meaning of fair play. Initially, we must first analyze some remark theories about the “ethics of fair play”, and consider potential contradiction points when seeking an absolute definition of “fair play”.

2. Using theories of ethics to define the requirements of fair play

When seeking a reliable way to teach what is meant by fair play, is a theory of ethics useful? Essentially, ethics theories are not useful for deriving an answer to the question: “How can we effectively teach fair play to children?” Although theories of normative ethics, virtue ethics and utilitarianism might provide a means to explain: “Why a player should play fair?” Actually, in the field of sports ethics, virtue ethics has been used to justify the need for fair play.

We can endeavor to discuss the necessity for fair play by using deontology and utilitarianism. Although it is difficult to explain the necessity for fair play from the aspect of deontology, because categorical imperatives, such as “Play by the rules at all time” or “Always show respect to others”, aren’t consistent. As mentioned above, there are imperatives, such as “Obey the rules, especially if victory is not paramount”, that is one of many professional players’ game scenarios. Conversely, there are occasions when players don’t hesitate to break the rules to win at all cost. If a player touches the ball with his/her hands in the penalty area and the referee misses the infraction, is the player who alerts him to the fact really giving his/her team an advantage? If esteem for teammates creates a disadvantage to a player of the opposition, this doesn’t become a fixed categorical imperative. In other words, this

contradicts the norm of “esteem all others”.

However, if utilitarianism is used, an explanation of the need for fair play is possible to some degree. Actually, the Japan Football Association requests that coaches make their players respect “teammates, the opposition, coaches, referees, spectators, managers, parents, the game, the rules, and facilities and tools.”²⁾ Regarding the case of the Women’s World Cup finals, as mentioned before, if a player attempts a dangerous sliding tackle on an opponent without injuring her, they might be said to respect the items in the JFA list, except for the “Rules”. And one wonders if there is a coach who is keen enough to teach such a dangerous sliding tackle to children?

However, I want to avoid virtue ethics as the grounds for the need for fair play, and instead invoke utilitarianism, because I think that the former is not suited to the ideal of fair play education, but is better suited to the reality of fair play education. But I digress. I shall temporarily interrupt the explanation of ethics theory, and return to defining fair play.

3. What is fair play?

There are a lot of definitions of fair play and sportsmanship, but the definition used by the International Council of Sport and Physical Education is our focus here.

The fair play declaration, which was made public by the International Council of Sport and Physical Education and approved by UNESCO and the International Olympics Committee, emphasizes the importance of players obeying the rules. “Fair play is demonstrated in particular by the competitor. It requires as a minimum that she/he shows strict, unfailing observance of the written rules” “Fair play is embodied in modesty in victory, in graciousness in defeat, and in that generosity of outlook which creates warm and lasting human relationships.”³⁾ Specifically, it is exemplified in, a) honesty, straightforwardness and a firm and dignified attitude when others do not play fairly;

b) respect for team mates and staff; c) respect for opponents, given whether they are winning or losing, and with an awareness that an opponent is a necessary partner in sport, to whom one is bound by the companionship of sport; d) respect for the referee displayed through a positive attempt to collaborate with him at all times.⁴⁾

Therefore, the following 3 features are a common denominator of "Fair play" and "Sportsmanship": the observance of the rules, respect for the decisions of the referees, and respect for the opposition as a partner.

4. Victory or Fair play?

In the following case, we need to consider the meaning of fair play: an ultimate choice between a player aiming at victory even if she dispenses with fair play, or playing fair even if she comes up short of victory. How we teach players about good judgment, and whether we give priority to fair play or to victory also depends on a player's age, seniority and position.

4.1. Is a player a professional or an amateur?

The commercialization of sports has advanced from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, and the number of professional players to make a living in sports has increased. Therefore, the numbers of strategic fouls toward victory and monetary rewards have both risen.⁵⁾ The discussion about whether to admit "strategic fouls" are "plays that help the team" (do players just have to abandon fair play for money and victory if they are professional?) has not been settled yet.

A questionnaire survey issued by Professor K. Heinila at the Jyväskylä University (Finland) in 1970, clearly showed the difference of views between professional players and amateur players about "strategic fouls". It asked 125 professional football players and 111 amateur football players in England whether strategic

fouls are needed in their game. Professional players' affirmative rate was higher than the amateur players'. Examples included: i) "A fast opponent must be stopped by any means, lawful or otherwise, where 55% of professionals said YES, to 37% of the amateurs who replied YES", ii) "A player who is in an obvious position to score must be brought down unmercifully: 70% of professionals said YES, and 54% of amateurs said YES", iii) "In major games all means are permissible to win the game: 54% of professionals said YES, and 38% of amateurs said YES", and iv) "A player plays a tough game because his opponent is more skilful: 83% of professionals said YES, and 78% of amateurs reported YES".⁶⁾

From these results, the tendency to give priority not to fair play, but to strategic fouls favors professionals over amateur players. It should be pointed out that opinions fluctuate between professional players and amateur players about the observance of fair play.

4.2. Is a player a boy (girl) or an adult?

A strategic foul is not to be recommended for young players, and it must be taught that all fouls are strictly prohibited for young players. Promoting adherence to the rules not only protects the rules, but also for promotes a mechanism for keeping the game fair. So, it is necessary and sufficient to teach players about the spirit of fair play and that fair play is the highest priority.⁷⁾

We will consider the case of the Women's World Cup final with Ae's insistence that we apply Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development to fair play education.⁸⁾ We presume that the morality of a child-player can develop in the following six-stage sequence. 1. Obedience and punishment orientation (How can I avoid punishment?): I do not think I am violating the rules, though I worry that someone will reprimand me if I am not being obedient. 2. Self-interest orientation (What's in it for me? /Paying for a benefit): I think that this was a

good play that changed the flow of the game. 3. Interpersonal accord and conformity (Social norms /The good boy/girl attitude): I feel that one has a debt to pay if s/he injures an opponent and jeopardizes the opponent's career as a result. 4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation (Law and order morality): In the Azusa Iwashimizu example, it is not good to stop reaching for the goal even if she hurts her opponent. 5. Social contract orientation: She is wrong though I understand her intention. She will not feel comfortable if she wins by breaking the rules. She should understand the importance of a fair and square fight. 6. Universal ethical principles (Principled conscience): Her act offends the spirit of fair play. However, when her team must win and the opponent is in a position to achieve victory, one can see that breaking the rules is one strategy.

If the process of moral development is based on "observance of the rules", then it becomes an element that can be as flexibly developed as skill and judgment; i.e., "Our training after the initial stages consists of taking these principles and making them less provisional. We do this by using them continually in our own decisions, while sometimes making exceptions to them; some of the exceptions are made because our instructor insists that certain cases are instances of classes of exceptions to the principle, and some of the exceptions we decide for ourselves."⁹⁾

Consequently, we can say that the observance of the rules is an absolute condition for young, beginner players; while it is a relative condition for veteran, adult players.

5. What constitutes fair play to the Japan Football Association?

The Japan Football Association (JFA) attempted a novel idea to solve the inconsistency between a strategic foul and the observance of the rules. In short, they changed the definition of "fair play". According to the JFA, the essence of fair play is to "Compete

seriously using one's ability", and that "the fair(er) team is not necessarily the team with the fewest yellow and red cards. Besides that, coaches should not warn children not to do something, but instead, they should cultivate a positive feeling for the rules by praising fair play."¹⁰⁾ "Fair play" then becomes a common element to the beginner, the expert, the professional player, the amateur player, the young player, and the adult player, if based on this definition. Certainly, we can admit that this definition has a universal appeal because all players should try to play to their full capacity.

However, we cannot deny that this is an idealistic definition, although it contradicts the original definition. In fact, the JFA is seeking coaches who can coach 12-year-olds and younger to respect the rules and the judgments of a referee.

For instance, the JFA asks the teams that have under-12-year-old players to participate in a fair play contest. At the beginning of this fair play contest are guidelines, in fact, the following is written: "We especially want our children to embody the true spirit of fair play", "Children should esteem competition rules and the rally rule."¹¹⁾ In fact, the JFA is requesting coaches who coach under-6-year-old players to guide children to respect the rules and their opponents.¹²⁾ Besides that, the JFA is looking for coaches who can coach under-8-year-old players to guide children to affirm and respect the judgment of the referee who controls the game.¹³⁾

To reiterate, the JFA has succeeded in solving the contradiction between a strategic foul and the observance of the rules by excluding respect for the rules and opponent players from the concept of fair play. But the JFA acknowledges the following double standard: On the one hand "All players should do their best to be triumphant" is based on the concept of fair play; on the other hand, "U-12 players should give priority to respecting the rules more than being the victor."

6. Conclusion

If we want to solve the inconsistency “victory versus observance of the rules” concerning the fair play education, we should not widely interpret “fair play”, but rather “victory”.

Sports cannot exist as sports if the rules are not followed. For instance, a 100-meter runner and a weightlifter that use illegal drugs are not fair sports, but cyborgs in contests. If each player obeys the fair play rule, then the sport will continue to exist as a sport.

We might have to give priority to teaching children the importance of fair play, if we think about “Victory” as a means to improve the entire sport in the long run.

Supplement

However, the discussion doesn't end here. The coaches who guide U-12 players might feel that the opinion of “we might have to give priority to teaching children the importance of fair play” is nonsense. This is because, the concept of “fairness” has only one meaning, whereas, the embodiment of “fairness” has many guises, and it can be duplicitous at the same time.

I will introduce two specific examples; both of which are concerned with professional football players' conduct. From these examples, we can understand that we cannot answer the question of “how can we teach fair play to children?” but we can answer the question of “what is fair play?”

The first case involves an international friendly match held in Hong Kong in February, 2003.

The national football team of Denmark played the national team of Iran in a friendly match “According to the Associated Press, near the end of the first half, an Iranian player touched the ball with his hands. The referee immediately awarded a PK (penalty kick). However, Denmark's head coach Olsen (Morten Per Olsen) directed the captain

Wieghorst (Morten Wieghorst) to deliberately misfire and not score, and the captain complied with the instructions. The captain commented that “the Iranian player did not understand what had occurred, therefore it would have been unfair to take advantage of the situation.” Denmark was eventually defeated by Iran: 0-1. Iran's winning goal came on a PK early in the second half.”¹⁴⁾

Can we call the captains' act to deliberately misfire, fair play? If this game were not a friendly match, but a qualifier for the World Cup, would the captain of Denmark have done the same thing unhesitatingly? We cannot help but recognize the limits of a discussion about “fair play” that does not include objectivity and universality.

The second case is about a contradictory event where a team “endeavors to compete seriously with the utmost skill and effort”, though, as I mentioned before, there is a notion of “competing seriously by ability” that is included in the definition of “fair play”¹⁵⁾. How should other teams “compete seriously using the power they possess” with a team that has lost most of its top players in a plane accident?

Eighteen players, supervisors, and coaches of Torino AC, an excellent football team that had won four consecutive championships in Italian football's premier league, died in a plane accident, in February 1949. Torino AC fielded its youth members (U-18 players) during the last four games, because most of top team members were dead. The opponents expressed a countenance of deep mourning for the famed and “Great Torino” team's loss, and all opposing teams also fielded their U-18 players. As a result, Torino won all its remaining games and accomplished five successive championships.

In another incident with opposite results, an airplane carrying Manchester United FC experienced tragedy taking off in Munich Germany, in February 1958, and 23 players died. Manchester United FC also fielded a team of U-18 reserves for their final 14 games of the

season. However, in contrast to Torino AC, their opponents played their regular rosters and Manchester United ended the season with 1 victory, 5 draws and 8 defeats.

It is very difficult to give an answer to the question of “which teams’ acted in a fair manner, the opponents of Torino AC or Manchester United FC?” However, it is clear that the opponent of both depleted teams had “competed seriously with the power of the roster they chose to field.”

As is apparent in these cases, “fair play” is a concept whose origin is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. I think that it is important to recognize these imperfections and to clarify our priorities when teaching fair play to children.

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