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## **Ethics in Sport: Socio-Political Point of View<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Sport is a natural medium for bringing together people of different backgrounds throughout the world. If grounded in ethics and if participants follow the rules and cooperate, sport can be a conduit for world harmony (Sport great for human bonding, 2010). As international relationships are developed through sport, those relationships can help support larger global endeavors in pursuit of a better world. If international sport based relationships are grounded in Mill's utilitarianism that calls for actions resulting in the most long-term happiness for the most amount of people (Mill, 1863/1969) those relationships are well positioned to transition to the domain of governmental politics, where meaningful attempts to resolve large world issues can be addressed, under the same utilitarian premise. In pursuit of a better world, identifying common ground among the many differences held by people throughout the world is a magnanimous challenge. Beauchamp's (1982) practical suggestion that common sense, habits, and past experience are most helpful when attempting to select actions that will determine long-term happiness. Moving beyond sport and transferring the application of Beauchamp's practical utilitarian approach to larger global conflicts, can help guide governments as they engage in the necessary politics, to move toward improving global problems in the interest of world harmony.

**Keywords:** Ethics, sociology, sport

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## Introduction

Sport can bring divided peoples, states, and nations closer together through the development of collegial relationships that can support diplomacy (Murray, 2012). The commonality of sport, might and has served as a starting point toward a peaceful end, amidst a world of differences, many of which result in a far from current harmonious existence. Socially, culturally and economically, the positive impact of sport in bringing people together, that might ordinarily be divided, cannot be underestimated and can create more positives than any political speech (Seymour, 2006).

Amidst the often conflicting view points across nations throughout the world, sport can act as a positive influence on government perspectives. The positive impact of sport on societies can take place when it is guided by ethics and its participants cooperate to garner the support of governmental leaders as everyone cooperates for a greater societal good across unique societies. Ethics must guide sport if its influence on government is to take place productively. To that end, Mill's (1863/1969) utilitarian moral theory is an effective ethical guide for sport organizations. If utilitarian moral theory is diligently practiced by the sporting community, at best it can help improve world relations, and at worst, help prevent slippage of world relations.

## Leadership's Recognition of Sport's Universality

As stated by former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan: "Sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status" (Playing the game, p.15, 2006). Sport's unique ability to bring together persons of different cultures also offers the potential to also help initiate interactions that bring governments together for the purpose of achieving a greater international good. Culture is "a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artefacts that the members of the society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (Navasaitiene & Perkumiene, p. 322). A beginning step toward world peace is to understand and accept aspects that define different cultures, which begins through dialogue among persons from different cultures.

Societal and political leaders who are in a position to implement international peace supporting policies are best situated to do so if their constituents are willing to support such policies. Policies and law are only effective if they are consistent with the overall beliefs of the populace that makes up the society. Personal choice, in part, is determined by cultural norms, and as pointed out by Arkes (2008) attempts by governments to over-shape cultures through legislation belies personal choice. Governmental leaders, therefore, are well served to allow the personal views of the collective societal groundswell to influence their legislative process.

A focus, however, on ethics must drive all sport or non-sport related change. Moral guidance must determine sport participant actions and leadership actions beyond sport. If moral theory does not drive actions throughout all aspects of sport participation, the undesired result of the souring of relationships across participants can take place, which can detrimentally influence the transitioning of moral good to societies and their governments.

## **Establishing Social Capital through Morally Based International Sporting Events**

Although determining causes of contributions to social capital is a complex assignment, sport indeed makes contributions to social capital (Vermeulen&Verweel, 2009). International sporting events such as the Olympics offers a platform for dialogue across leaders of nations. Sochi's 2014 International Olympic Committee Presidents Dinner saw numerous world leaders come together (World leaders, 2014), which offered a more casual opportunity to interact and establish relationships that could further support productive dialogue in the interest of world improvements.

Brownell (2014), further reinforced that the Olympic Games offers prime opportunities for productive social engagements among world leaders. The Olympic venue can serve as a hosting platform for world leaders to communicate in an informal setting while putting aside formally stated governmental agendas, if only for a brief period. Interacting as sport fans first, and heads of state second, allows for a more relaxed cross cultural bilateral conversation between not only governmental leadership but also the highly powerful corporate leaders, that can support individual friendships leading to mutually agreeable policy (Brownell). Coming together over international sporting events provides an opportunity to temporarily put politics aside and share culturally based rituals that define nations in a friendly global atmosphere in hopes of beginning to establish friendly relationships that support peace among world leaders. Additional international and regional events that, in fact do bring people from different backgrounds together include but are not limited to mega international sporting events such as the World Cup, Tour de France, Asian Athletic Championships, and Ryder Cup Golf.

## **Transfer of Morality in Sport to Larger Global Issues**

Embedding moral values into the global society is necessary if overall global good is to prosper and allow peace a chance (Dalai Lama, 2015). Given sport's widespread presence throughout the world, it can serve as a vehicle where moral values can constantly be rehearsed. Respect, beneficence, and honesty are three moral values that can be rehearsed throughout one's participation in sport, beginning as a youth and extending well into adulthood. If the rehearsal of moral values through sport participation becomes habitual, it is the hope that those same moral values will transfer into all aspects of one's life.

Respecting one's opponent in sport could transfer to respecting differing cultures among various states. Hopefully, treating sport opponents in ways oneself would prefer to be treated will also transfer to mutually good treatment of peoples and governments across societies. The basic value of honesty in adherence to the agreed upon rules in sport could transfer to the honest adherence to agreements among nations. Regardless of cultural differences, mutual respect supports positive bonds that can be helpful in advancing policies that are broadly beneficial to the whole. When morality is the foundation of a society, the groundwork is formed for governments to begin conversations leading to mutual understandings related to resolving world problems.

## **Using Utilitarian Moral Theory as a Guide**

Across sport, societies, and governments, utilitarian moral theory can serve as an effective moral guide to actions. In sport, good moral behavior, from a utilitarian standpoint, can lead to

the greatest amount of happiness to the sporting community, which is the central theme of John Stuart Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle: "*Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness*" (Mill, 1863/1969, p. 36). Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle is equally effective when applied to choices of actions within societies, and across governments. Although, the *strict* adherence to specific moral values is not the central focus of utilitarian moral theory, undoubtedly, acting in ways that bring about the greatest happiness to the most people almost always calls for the overall adherence to moral values.

In the quest for happiness, the consistent practice of moral values is necessary. If Bentham's (1789/1961) statement that "*Nature has placed mankind under two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure...*" (p. 17) is true, one's choice of actions may be more pre-determined by that person's natural expectation of pain or pleasure from a given action than a disciplined selection of actions based on a thoughtful process. In effect, nature would determine one's action based on one's natural personal expectation of the most pleasure and least pain. Still, many people can anticipate the degree of long-term happiness by carefully considering the effect of various actions.

In sport, the ability to anticipate long-term satisfaction and dissatisfaction is an important component of choosing the correct moral action. The same can be said for society driven actions chosen by leadership. According to Hume (1739/1964) passion drives reason and it is passion, sentiments, and feelings that are behind actions; however, reasonable thought must determine the action that will bring about the greatest long-term happiness. National leaders, therefore, must maintain a sense of utilitarian driven moral discipline when arriving at policies that will affect long-term happiness of societies, much in the same way sport leaders should assume a disciplined, thoughtful approach to sport policy. The approach to long-term happiness across nations is one that requires careful thought, prior to creating policy based on predictions of sentiments resulting from actions driven by those policies.

### **Collaborating and Cooperating to Promote Peace through Sport**

International sport, to function effectively requires collaboration and cooperation among persons with differing backgrounds and viewpoints. The universal understanding and acceptance of international rules of sport is just one example of how people with wide differences work together to achieve mutually shared interests associated with sport. Sport brings people from different backgrounds together and can create world harmony but only if participants cooperate and abide by the rules (Sport great for human bonding, 2010). Beyond the participants, respect can also support tolerance to differences across the sporting community, which is defined broadly by Schneider (2010) as "those involved in sport, including but not limited to players, family and friends of players, coaches, fans, athletic directors, and general managers" (p. 96).

Relationship building across cultures is crucial if progress toward world peace is to take place. As an entity that attracts participants from all cultures, sport can develop positive international relationships. Universal aspects of all sports, such as the endless work hours (Ramadas, Serpa, Rosada, Gouveia, & Maroco, 2013), attention to detail, personal sacrifices, and consistent discipline required to succeed in sport, create a strong bond among those who have shared those experiences regardless of race, religion, culture, and other differences. Bonding through

sport can also help support a cooperative approach among societies and world leaders as they aspire to improve the world.

The United Nations (2014) realized the power of sport in the promotion of world peace. Nations must identify common ground if dialogue is to be productive in promoting world peace. Sport can be that common ground. Beginning from the participants' level and ranging through the various managerial levels such as coaching and league management, sport requires cooperative elements to succeed, much in the same way leaders of nations and members of societies making up those nations must cooperate to achieve the most satisfactory living conditions. Cooperative relationships through sport can be formed not only among team members but also among competing team members. If leagues are to prosper, cooperation must take place across teams in areas such as scheduling, uniform player contracts, and recruiting. Without cooperation among teams, the league would fail to function at its maximum capacity. Each team can accomplish more if they are part of a larger cooperative effort. Similarly nations can accomplish more if they are part of a larger global effort where they cooperate through compromise. Solutions to social dilemmas call for cooperation (Berigan & Irwin, 2011).

### **Sport as a Medium for Cultural Tolerance in the Interest of Peace**

Overall, the wide range of reactions by those being discriminated against is negative and includes hostility (Richman & Leary, 2009), which is not supportive of healthy globalization. If societies are to be harmonious, given the vast number of differences across cultures, there must be tolerance to cultural differences within and across societies. Being tolerant to differences across cultures will provide a chance for a globally greater good. It can be learned through sport that differences among participants and teams are acceptable as long as those differences do not impede the best interests of the league and sport. Differences among cultures, societies, nations, and governments are also acceptable but only if those differences do not impede the best interests of the world. Societies and governments must take steps to open lines of communication in the interest of global improvements and sport can serve as one such step.

Over the course of time, cultural perceptions toward other cultures are shaped and those ingrained perceptions are difficult to overcome. The difficulties associated with changing cultural beliefs is reinforced by Politzer and Carles (2001) who refer to epistemic entrenchment as the resistance to give up beliefs that are considered important. Add the violence and conflict that Ami (2012) claims is the cause of closed and separate identities and one begins to understand the challenges associated with being open minded to cultural tolerance.

A willingness to genuinely discuss cultural tolerance is a prerequisite to change and must be supported by mutual trust among those engaged in dialogue. Social relationships influence the emergence of trust (Berigan & Irwin, 2011) and sport, given its abundance of personal interactions, offers a natural environment for the development of social relationships. The sporting environment, however, must be grounded in good moral values, if trust is to be a byproduct of social interaction among members of the sporting community.

Cultures are persistent in maintaining the identity that defines them. Change, if any, is a slow moving process. Therefore, an all or nothing approach that expects person's cultural

perspectives to acquiesce to another's cultural perspectives will not be effective in the long run. Dialogue related to tolerance can only take place if persons choose to be tolerant. Recognizing the legitimacy of the other's standpoint, according to Shady and Larson (2010) is reflective of genuine dialogue. Tolerance to cultural perspectives cannot be legislated or forced on persons; it must be intrinsic, coming from persons choosing to be tolerant.

Competitors in international sport have always represented a broad range of peoples and governments and with the increase in international competitions, the communicative power of international sport has increased dramatically (Pigman, 2014). The result can be the establishment of friendships based on trusts gained through the sporting experience. When sport based friendships are established across societies and cultures, there is a chance for those newly formed friendships to extend beyond sport and include communication that extends beyond sport.

One would be naïve, however, to believe anything, including newly forged international sport relationships, could change cultures that have been formed over millenniums. Long standing differences, culturally or otherwise, cannot expect to be completely overcome (Politzer&Carles, 2001). The goal should not be to change cultures but rather to create a tolerance toward different cultures. Through shared experiences that come from sport, persons of differing cultural perspectives may be inclined to choose to be tolerant of differences of their fellow sports persons. If one chooses to be tolerant because it is his preference to do so, cooperation among persons who are of different cultures is possible.

### **Overcoming Strict Homogeneity through Sport**

Although not the central goal of competitive sport, diversity can naturally take place in the interest of the common goal of winning. In a competitive sport environment, coaches are responsible for winning games. Assuming that all players will put forth equal effort, assembling the most talented athletes will win games (Johnson et al., 2008). Competitive sport's placement of athletic excellence as the top priority over culture, race, or religion allows for a natural diversification of sports teams. Sport, therefore, can help diffuse the strict homogeneity that often finds people joining groups that include 'like' peoples, with little interest in co-mingling with others who are different. As sport diffuses homogeneity at its various stages, the common element of sport supersedes other differences. This temporary blending of persons, regardless of cultural or societal differences, can be the foundation for continued cooperation, despite firmly entrenched views and beliefs on various issues where people hold onto strong differences. Such cooperation is conducive to solving problems beyond sport if it can also take place across states in the form of cultural multiplicity (Navasaitiene&Perkumiene, 2009). If villages, states, and nations can put aside cultural differences, in a way similar to sport, to the extent necessary and without compromising their core beliefs, a more cooperative society that supports an overall higher degree of societal satisfaction has a chance to succeed. Identifying common attributes while maintaining their own identity (Ami, 2012) will allow for a healthy intersection of cultures.

### **National Basketball Association (NBA) Bringing People with Differences Together**

Sport can join persons of different cultures into one collective unit, assembled for the common purpose of engaging in sport. The United States' NBA is an example of sport's

ability to bring together people from various cultures. As an international league, the NBA includes players from across the globe (Hartman, 2011). The only major requirement for entrance into the NBA is that one's skill level must be such that he can successfully compete against the world's best basketball players. Cultural backgrounds, religious affiliations, and most any other unique difference is generally not considered in the process determining who will be a member of an NBA team.

It should be pointed out, however, that sport, itself, is not void from discrimination, as evidenced by the discussion of appropriate methods of researching discrimination in sport related to culture, ethnicity, and race (Fredrick, Fredrick, Kaempfer, &Wobbekind, 2013). Sport does, though, seem to provide the format for a higher degree of tolerance toward differences than many other formats. Even the selection of players, based on their national affiliation is overlooked in the interest of recruiting top players for NBA teams. A review of NBA team rosters, in the United States will often reveal a cosmopolitan collection of players assembled together as one team (National Basketball Association, 2015). The globalization of leagues or teams certainly is a less complicated endeavor than the globalization of nations; however, helpful insights and parallels can be drawn from sport's ability to globalize, as nations seek to work together to reduce preexisting hostilities and form bonds to help resolve mutually beneficial conflicts.

### **Softening of Negative Stereotypes through Sport**

Sport can also help soften stereotypes that divide persons of different cultures. Negative cultural stereotypes can project negative feelings toward ethnic groups for which the negative stereotype is held (Gordijn, Finchilescu, Wijnants, &Koomen, 2008). Sport provides an opportunity to form primary source perceptions of people, regardless of their differing backgrounds. The engagement in a sporting activity offers constant interactions with teammates, coaches, and organizational leaders that eventually define those involved in the interactions. Through sport interaction, negative, subconscious cultural biases will be tested through the engagement of actual experiences with others interacting in sport. Opinions of others involved in sport will be formed based on the direct sporting experiences and may be enough to allow for the softening of negative stereotypes that, prior to sporting interactions, may have been the prevailing perception of those affiliated with the sporting engagement.

### **Grassroots Approach to Cooperation**

A fully effective approach to cooperation calls for a "buy in" at the grassroots level. Social change includes grassroots movement that can be transitioned into broader efforts to initiate change (Kezar, 2012). Ambitious leadership can influence members of society through charisma and persuasion but if solutions are to be achieved to global problems, there needs to be a collective intrinsically driven desire on the part of the populace. Strong armed leadership cannot effectively 'move' societies to productively act together unless a society "buys into" the cause. Some causes, in-and-of-themselves, can bond societies. In many cases though, efforts can and should be made to develop positive relationships among multiple differing members of societies. Sport is one such endeavor that, from the bottom up can bond persons of different cultures, which is a positive step in the broader effort of resolving world problems that require international cooperation.

## **Sport and Cooperative Global Problem Solving**

As pointed out by Foster (2013) nations must be involved and committed to the same objective if progress is to be made in resolving world problems. Given the interconnectedness of international problems, societies across the globe must also become interconnected if global challenges are to be effectively addressed. Sport's unique ability to connect people and societies across nations can be used as a tool to connect nations in a way that supports multi-stakeholder dialogue that can lead to actions toward resolving international problems.

Different people and cultures prioritize most problems differently; however, some problems garner universal agreement regardless of differences across people. Necessities such as food and water are considered human rights (Kortmann et al., 2009), and seemingly supersede cultural differences that sometimes prevent societies from working together in the interest of mutually resolving these problems of scarcity. Still, even though there is universal agreement across all demographics to achieve sufficient supplies of food, and water, leadership across nations must be united in efforts to ensure that progress is made. Basic necessities that everyone, regardless of differences, agree are needed, also require cooperation among leadership, if they are to be achieved. Despite the universality of needs like food and water there will still be challenges to achieve sufficient quantities of both and cooperation among global leaders will be necessary to meet those challenges.

## **Realistic Moral Expectations**

It is not realistic nor should it be a goal to expect wholesale attitude or cultural changes as a result of engaging persons with wide cultural differences in the common endeavor of sport. Extreme changes that pull persons away from their fundamental identities, inevitably will bring about higher degrees of dissatisfaction as opposed to satisfaction. Disingenuous compromise or an acquiescence to pressures to compromise one's fundamental identities will also result in unhappiness, over time. The goal of utilitarianism is to act in ways that will cause the most possible happiness, not absolute happiness (Mill, 1863/1969). People's and leader's consciousness of compromise in the interest of happiness and respect for and the tolerance of differing attitudes, beliefs, customs, and religions can make for a co-existence among people who support global problem resolution and world peace that will never be achieved but can always be improved. Honoring and respecting the widest variety of cultures is representative of multiculturalism and enriches humankind (Parry, 2006). When speaking on world peace, the Dalai Lama voiced an approach to leadership supportive of tolerance to religious choice when he placed a universal emphasis on the moral value of respect regardless of religious choice by stating that, "what we need today is to adopt an approach...that views those with religious faith and those with none with equal respect" (Dalai Lama, 2015, p.7).

## **Result**

In the interest of global cooperation for a greater good, bringing together people, societies, cultures, nations, and other entities that adhere to homogenous views, beliefs, and ideologies can be accomplished ethically through the application of utilitarian moral theory. From a practical standpoint, sport can serve as a beginning to the actual bringing of people together for a greater good, if its action based premise is grounded in utilitarian moral theory. Given that utilitarian moral theory is based on actions that generate long-term happiness among the

most amount of people (Mill, 1863/1969), it is imperative that cultural difference between people be taken into consideration prior to creating action based policies. Respecting cultural differences is a worthy goal, as doing so can create mutual good and can make life in societies that host multiple cultures satisfactory for all. Utopia, however, should not be the goal. Satisfactory or “good enough,” if achieved by all, regardless of differences held by those in different cultures supports Mill’s utilitarian moral theory.

Mutual compromise is essential if peace is to be achieved across societies and nations. Those practicing behaviors specific to their particular cultures must be aware of the effects those behaviors will have on others who are also practicing behaviors expected of their own unique culture. Compromise is the only way to achieve a mutually satisfactory state for all. Trust based dialogue is the path to compromise. The trust must be established through interactions among persons including leaders of different cultures. Building trustful interactions among people from different cultures can take place through a variety of formats, one of which is sport. Using Beauchamp’s (1982) common sense, past experience and good moral habits as a guide to determine sport organization policy and actions that will develop and maintain a strong moral base is prudent. Beauchamp’s practical application of utilitarianism can seamlessly transition from leadership in the sport domain to leadership in the political policy making arena. International sport collaboration helps develop avenues for the building of trustful relationships that can ultimately extend beyond sport to influence national leadership in the interest of making progress toward a more peaceful world.

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