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Psychological Approaches to Enhancing Fair Play

John L. Perry

Leeds Trinity University College

Leeds, UK

Peter J. Clough

University of Hull

Hull, UK

Lee Crust

University of Lincoln

Lincoln, UK

Abstract

This article reviews approaches to studying sportpersonship, moral behavior in sport and broader morality theory to offer practical strategies to enhance fair play. By identifying stages and levels of morality and reviewing research supporting the relationship between goal orientations and moral behavior, we propose five practical strategies. Namely, we suggest that developing a mastery climate, developing a moral community, role taking, reflection and power transfer can be effectively used to progress performers from pre-conventional to a conventional level of morality and ultimately, establish principled morality in sport.

Introduction

Modern sport has many famous examples of good and poor sporting behavior. Positive examples include former England cricket captain Andrew Strauss' withdrawn appeal against Sri Lanka after Angelo Matthews collided with an England fielder (Hopps, 2009). In baseball, pitcher Armando Galarraga accepted an incorrect call from the umpire without dissent that cost him a perfect game (Maynard, 2010) and football player Paolo Di Canio elected to catch the ball to stop play when an opposing goalkeeper lay injured (Haylett, 2000). Conversely, one could point to deviance in sport with many examples. The size of public and media response to such incidents underlines the importance of sportpersonship in the popularity of a sport. For a sport to survive and flourish, it must remain popular. In this paper we provide suggestions for coaches to apply the theoretical aspects of sportpersonship and moral behavior to practice. In short, the purpose is to suggest ways of enhancing fair play in performers with reference to psychological theory.

There is a common colloquial understanding of sportsmanship (referred to hereon as sportpersonship, as is common in sport psychology literature). However, this is not easily defined, particularly as sport is largely distinct from everyday life in terms of morality (Bredemeier & Shields, 1984, 1986, 1987). More likely, people offer common examples of

1 good and poor sporting behaviors when asked to define it. Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier,
2 Briere, and Pelletier (1996) and Vallerand, Briere, Blanchard, and Provencher (1997)
3 provided a five-factor definition of sportpersonship. This included one's full commitment to
4 sport, such as training hard, respect for rules and officials, evidenced by not criticizing a
5 referee, true respect and concern for one's opponent, like not taking advantage of an injured
6 opponent and respect for social conventions such as shaking hands after a performance.
7 Finally, Vallerand et al. (1996; 1997) identified the relative absence of a negative approach as
8 a factor, including losing one's temper or making excuses when defeated. While this
9 definition identifies contributors to sportpersonship, McCutcheon (1999) suggests that the
10 inclusion of one's full commitment is not necessarily the sign of good sportpersonship, using
11 John McEnroe's frequent behaviors on a tennis court as an example. There are however, clear
12 established links between this model of sportpersonship and motivational theories such as
13 achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985,
14 1989). Later, we discuss this relationship and consider how this encourages motivational
15 approaches towards sportpersonship orientations and moral behavior. Below, we consider
16 developmental and social-psychological approaches and based on this research, offer
17 strategies to effectively enhance fair play in sport.

18 **Developmental Approach**

19 A developmental approach, such as structural developmental, is essentially studying
20 unique stages that an individual passes through naturally in their development rather than
21 through social learning. Much research in child psychology uses the approach to describe
22 how an individual matures as they reach new stages (e.g., Piaget, 1932, 1954). Away from
23 sport, Kohlberg (1969, 1976, 1981, 1984, 1986) pioneered work on moral development from
24 a structural-developmental perspective further used by Haan (1977, 1978, 1983) (Bredemeier
25 & Shields, 1993). Most notably, Kohlberg (1976) proposed a model of moralization (Table 1)

1 that identified six stages at three levels of morality; pre-conventional, conventional and post-
2 conventional. Pre-conventional morality refers to heteronomous morality and individualism,
3 typically evident in young children when moral reasoning is based on an exchange
4 relationship. For example, a child may act in a moral way to avoid getting into trouble.
5 Conventional morality includes a notion of relationships, interpersonal conformity and an
6 awareness of social systems. This level requires one to acknowledge that their actions have
7 consequences for others with regard to a society. Post-conventional morality includes more
8 individual rights and universal ethical principles. Such morality is described by Kohlberg
9 (1976) as self-chosen ethical principles where the individual understands a broad perspective
10 of others' rights and will follow their own values. A developmental perspective provides us
11 with the notion of age-linked sequential reorganizations of moral attitudes and therefore, it
12 seems logical to consider how individuals can be encouraged to progress through stages and
13 levels of morality. Kohlberg (1976) postulates that progression through moral stages is not
14 defined by internalized rules, but structures of interaction between self and others,
15 specifically identifying environmental influences. Further, he points out that it is the general,
16 everyday quality and consistency of the environment that brings about development, not a
17 single large incident. Therefore, a social perspective is required in order to prescribe positive
18 interactions.

19 **Social-Psychological Approach**

20 A social-psychological approach examines how an individual's thoughts, feelings and
21 behaviors are influenced by the presence of others, such as a society. It enables psychologists
22 to map knowledge of internal processes to observed behaviors. Kavussanu (2008) offers a
23 thorough and insightful review of previous moral behavior research, while Kavussanu and
24 Boardley (2009) distinguish between antisocial and prosocial behavior in sport towards an
25 opponent and towards teammates. This approach follows Bandura (1999) who highlights

1 proactive and inhibitive behaviors. That is, that an individual may act in a morally virtuous
2 way by either refraining from adopting negative behaviors (inhibitive) or by proactively
3 engaging in positive behaviors, such as helping another. It seems logical then, that to
4 proactively engage in behavior that demonstrates the existence of an ethos is a greater level
5 of moral behavior than inhibitive behaviors. For example, a football player refraining from
6 diving to win an undeserved penalty is an example of inhibitive moral behavior and is widely
7 expected. However, informing the official that a penalty should not be awarded for one's
8 team is a form of proactive moral behavior and is widely congratulated. With notable
9 exception (e.g., ice-hockey), it is generally within the interests of a sport to promote virtuous
10 prosocial behaviors and discourage unwanted antisocial behaviors (for a thorough and
11 engaging reflection on why sport thrives in society through prosocial, true competition, as
12 opposed to the more antisocial, "decompetition", see Shields & Bredemeier, 2009).

13 Previous studies have regularly drawn links between theories of motivation and sporting
14 behavior, positively linking task orientation, where a performer judges success based on self-
15 improvement, with sportspersonship (e.g.,Dunn & Causgrove-Dunn, 1999; Gano-Overway,
16 Guivernau, Magyar, Waldron,& Ewing, 2005) and negatively associating task orientation
17 with likelihood to cheat (Stuntz & Weiss, 2003). Vallerand and Losier (1994; 1999)
18 examined the relationship between self-determination and sportspersonship. Self-
19 determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) posits that individuals strive to satisfy three
20 basic needs; competence, autonomy and relatedness (i.e. engaging socially). Deci and Ryan
21 distinguish between intrinsic (participation is an end in itself e.g. enjoyment) and extrinsic
22 motivation (participation is a means to and end e.g. reward) and describe those with high
23 intrinsic motivation as self-determined. Vallerand and Losier (1994) assessed
24 sportspersonship orientations and self-determination in elite male adolescent ice-hockey
25 players at the beginning and end of a five-month season. The results highlighted a

1 bidirectional relationship in which both concepts influenced each other over time, with the
2 influence of self-determination on sportspersonship greater than the influence of
3 sportspersonship on self-determination.

4 There is also significant support relating motivational climate with sportspersonship.
5 Ames and Archer (1988) and Ames (1992) originally made a distinction between two forms
6 of motivation climates while studying student behavior in classrooms before Seifriz, Duda
7 and Chi (1992) related this to a sport setting. This distinction was between mastery and
8 performance climates. Later, Newton, Duda, and Yin (2000) elaborated on the original
9 model, including two higher-level dimensions of task-involving mastery and ego-involving
10 performance climates, which each contain three sub-dimensions. The task-involved
11 dimensions are cooperative learning, effort/improvement and importance role, while the ego-
12 involved dimensions are intra-team member rivalry, unequal recognition and punishment for
13 mistakes. Typically, a task-involved climate will encourage performers to identify success by
14 self-improvement. In contrast, an ego-involved climate uses social comparison as a measure
15 of success. A task-involved mastery climate has been positively associated with
16 sportspersonship (Papaioannou, 1997; Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2004), prosocial
17 behavior (Kavussanu & Spray, 2006, Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009) and negatively
18 associated with antisocial behavior (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010). Specifically, Boardley
19 and Kavussanu (2010) found that male soccer players higher in task orientation were
20 significantly less likely to display antisocial behavior towards their opponents. Therefore, to
21 encourage personal development and fair play, coaches should aim to develop a task-oriented
22 mastery climate, which is a key strategy that we identify below.

23 **Strategies for Developing Fair Play**

24 Moral education can be delivered through specific interventions, formal programs or
25 additional consideration during planning, delivery or reflection on existing sessions. Miller,

1 Bredemeier, and Shields (1997) presented a sociomoral education program that they
2 implemented in elementary schools over a 10-week period for at risk physical education
3 pupils. The program (presented in Table 2) draws on Kohlberg's (1976; 1984) stages of
4 moralization, which Shields and Bredemeier (1995) expanded on in physical activity. Rather
5 than presenting the program as a curriculum for coaches to follow, we have used this to
6 consider a range of potential strategies; developing a mastery climate, developing a moral
7 community, role taking, reflection and power transfer.

8 **Developing a Mastery Climate**

9 Clearly, there is a link between motivation and observed moral behavior (Boardley &
10 Kavussanu, 2010). Therefore, by addressing motivational determinants, we can encourage
11 desired moral behaviors (i.e., fair play). As task orientation appears to discourage antisocial
12 behavior and encourage prosocial behavior, developing a task-involved mastery motivational
13 climate is a possible way to enhance fair play in sport. Epstein (1988; 1989) promoted the use
14 of the TARGET acronym as a practical way to develop a mastery climate. This identified six
15 environmental characteristics; the nature of tasks, locus of authority, recognition, grouping,
16 evaluation practices and the use of time. A representation of how these characteristics foster a
17 motivational climate can be found in Table 3. By varying and introducing new tasks,
18 performers are consistently striving for mastery. This places the focus on personal
19 development rather than social comparison. Leadership roles add responsibility to
20 participants, which could include responsibility for fair play. Recognition should be
21 conducted privately to avoid social comparison and be based on improved mastery of a task.
22 Grouping is a common area for a coach to reflect on. It is important to encourage cooperative
23 learning to provide each individual with the greatest opportunity to develop. When
24 performers are competing for the same prize however (e.g., position on a team or a contract),
25 this can be difficult. It is important to stress to performers in these situations that the best they

1 can do is to improve as much as possible, and cooperative learning, which is a significant part
2 of Miller et al.'s (1997) sociomoral education program, is an effective way to achieve this.
3 Evaluation should be on mastery of skill rather than social comparison. For example, a
4 sprinter running close to a personal best should be evaluated positively regardless of finishing
5 position. To further foster a mastery climate, time should be flexible and adjusted to meet
6 individual task needs. Therefore, training for an individual should only progress once a skill
7 is mastered and not before. By targeting a task-oriented mastery climate, coaches can
8 encourage task orientation and therefore, more prosocial and less antisocial behaviors.

9 **Developing a Moral Community**

10 The value of community and societies can be significant in shaping the behavior of
11 individuals within them. Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg (1989) refer to a synergy that
12 compels members to adopt group shared norms. This value is noted in Kohlberg's (1976;
13 1984) model. Referring again to Table 1, the key difference between pre-conventional and
14 conventional levels of morality is the appreciation of a social system. Pre-conventional
15 morality identifies individualism and the conventional level has a more mutual understanding
16 and a desire to keep the institution going. The development of a moral community therefore
17 is a very effective way to encourage progression in moral maturity. Miller et al. (1997) clarify
18 that all people should refrain from doing bad things simply because they are people. This
19 however, is augmented by membership of a group because members are motivated to avoid
20 moral failings due to the profile, reputation and ethos of the group. A moral community is
21 characterized by shared responsibility, trust, respect and care (Miller et al.). A determinant of
22 much of this is brought about by group decision-making and problem-solving. Consequently,
23 coaches may wish to consider how they can incorporate group dilemmas and problem-solving
24 into their practice. For example, a conditioned game requiring a team to combine an amount
25 of passes or for a set amount of team members to reach an individual target to score points for

1 a team can help to develop the community because performers are working together for the
2 same cause. There is enhanced responsibility to the group rather than individual performance.
3 This is a particularly useful strategy when trying to encourage progression to conventional
4 morality. Further, coaches could encourage groups to work together to solve a problem
5 during practice to build a moral community. For example, by identifying a tactical error in a
6 previous performance, rather than prescribing a solution to players, the coach can ask groups
7 of players to devise their own solutions.

8 **Role Taking**

9 Considering Kohlberg's (1976) stages of moralization identified in Table 1, role-taking is
10 an effective way to encourage progression at a pre-conventional level. By communicating
11 with another from a variety of roles, including heightened and deficient responsibility (i.e.
12 leading and following), participants can develop a greater awareness of the cognitive
13 perspective of others (Hoffman, 1976). The first progression is awareness that everyone has
14 their own interests, which is necessary for stage two of the model. Piaget's (1932; 1954)
15 cognitive development stages suggest that this would typically occur around the ages of
16 seven or eight. To progress to conventional morality requires empathy, which is identified by
17 Miller et al. (1997), who studied a similar age group to Piaget's suggested ages. This can be
18 achieved by taking deficient roles such as being on a weaker team or in a weaker or
19 disadvantaged position. When coaching children in particular, putting participants in weaker
20 roles can encourage empathy for teammates and opponents, which is an important step
21 towards fair play. Consequently, a greater awareness of others' feelings, agreements and
22 expectations develops. Stage four requires enhanced acknowledgement of roles within a
23 social system. Sporting environments in both training and competition provide a distinct
24 social system between and within teams and with officials. A simple way to achieve this
25 could be to swap offensive and defensive players periodically. This can enlighten a performer

1 to the difficulties faced by teammates during play and reduce the potential for one section of
2 a team to place unfair blame on another. As well as performance roles, there are different
3 social roles adopted, particularly within teams, such as a captain, a highly-committed player,
4 and a joker. Post-conventional or principled morality requires social contract, which goes
5 beyond mere compliance to following self-chosen principles. This level of morality requires
6 significant experience, which can be gained more quickly through role taking, as putting
7 oneself in the place of various people exposes the participant to moral conflict from which
8 they can test and refine their principles as they develop. One way of exposing participants to
9 such moral conflict is to ask them to take the role of an official or coach. In these positions
10 there are instances where one must make a decision that they know will bring about a
11 negative response for some while pleasing others. This is good practice for making decisions
12 based on moral principles.

13 **Reflection**

14 To play fairly firstly requires an awareness of one's own approach and behavior. This
15 can be most efficiently achieved through reflection. Structured reflection is used frequently in
16 occupations like nursing (Johns, 1994) and teaching (Gibbs, 1988) and has been advocated
17 for use by all practitioners (Murdoch-Eaton, 2002). Such educational approaches are common
18 in sport psychology, as performance profiling and mental skills training regularly identifies
19 existing and desired behaviors through self-evaluation. It is through post-performance
20 reflection that performers can acquire heightened awareness, by moving from autopilot to
21 critical reflection (van-Aswegen, Brink,&Steyn, 2000). From here, coaches are encouraged to
22 include fair play principles in goal setting, particularly at team level. It is important to realize
23 that principled morality is not something that is naturally obtained; it requires deep reflection
24 and behavior modification. In the next section however we propose several other benefits of
25 achieving this level of moral maturity so it is of significant value to the performer.

1 Consequently, coaches should take opportunities to educate performers in fair play by
2 identifying situations of moral conflict when they arise. For example, if a performer chooses
3 to act in particularly positive or negative way, this can be highlighted to others to encourage
4 reflection. It is through exposure to these moral decision situations that arouses internal
5 contradictions in one's reasoning structure. Therefore, exposure to them and reflection on
6 them is crucial for development.

7 Some coaches may wish to formalize or structure the reflection process, encompassing
8 several or all acts of performance, including fair play. This is a process that could also be
9 adopted in coach education programs, particularly those aimed at coaching children and
10 youth sport. Coaches are encouraged to develop their own reflection templates to meet the
11 reflective ability, time, and need of performers. This may include, for example, reflecting on
12 specific positive and negative points during play, effort and persistence in training, the
13 progress towards set goals, managing concentration, and physical fitness.

14 **Power Transfer**

15 Ultimately, individuals are much more likely to play fairly if it is in their own interest. If
16 fair play becomes one's own responsibility and that person is accountable for deviations
17 away from fair play, they are more likely to uphold the principles of it. Miller et al. (1997)
18 found that heightened responsibility encouraged a greater perspective of long-term group
19 benefits and even self-sacrifice to achieve this. As identified in Kohlberg's (1976) model,
20 post-conventional (or principled) morality adopts a prior-to-society view. That is, that one is
21 guided by their knowledge of right and wrong towards an individual, regardless of societal
22 norms or values. By transferring power, and therefore responsibility to participants, a coach is
23 enabling each participant to develop their own principles and become self-determined. We
24 can then observe a transition from conventional to principled morality when an individual is
25 prepared to follow these newly-acquired, self-chosen principles above adhering to social

1 norms. This could be demonstrated by a performer being prepared to stand apart from others
2 to do what they believe is the right. From a practical perspective, examples of power transfer
3 could include allowing performers to make a choice over training practices, encouraging
4 performers to conduct a post-match/event analysis, or providing performers with the option to
5 take pre-match team talks. There are two important points to consider here; Firstly, power
6 transfer is only appropriate when performers are already functioning at a conventional level
7 of morality. Secondly, it is important that the coach identifies and acknowledges instances of
8 self-chosen principled decisions.

9 Strategies that we have identified here for enhancing fair play are associated with other
10 benefits, such as enhanced intrinsic motivation and reward. While studying work
11 performance, Izadikhah and Jackson (2011) suggest that a mastery approach positively and
12 consistently predicts higher levels of rewarding climates with regard to recognition of effort
13 and enjoyment. Ultimately, reward, including intrinsic rewards, is a key motivator for ones
14 participation in sport. Logically, therefore, such a rewarding climate is one that individuals
15 will strive for. This may have numerous other advantages such as trust, improved mental
16 wellbeing and non-sporting benefits. Though further research is required in this area, a
17 trusted individual may be looked upon favorably by officials and governing bodies. Izadikhah
18 and Jackson's (2011) study supports benefits of a rewarding climate. There may also be non-
19 sporting benefits, as the moral maturity required to reach a principled level demonstrates a
20 healthy perspective. By restructuring ones moral approach within sport to develop heightened
21 moral maturity, this could have significant benefits in everyday life.

22 **Conclusion**

23 Research around morality in sport and sportspersonship will continue over the coming
24 years. As such, the strategies suggested here are not exhaustive. However, there are several
25 clear themes emerging. Firstly, there is significant research support (e.g., Boardley &

1 Kavussanu, 2010) regarding the predictive ability of goal orientations on positive and
2 negative sport behaviors. Consequently, coaches should strive to foster a task-involved
3 mastery climate. As part of this climate, coaches can develop a moral community
4 incorporating role taking to form empathy. These strategies are sufficient to enable
5 performers to progress to a conventional level of morality. Through reflection and empathy,
6 participants develop their own social system and informal social contracts. From here, further
7 reflection is necessary to establish the awareness required before an individual can cultivate
8 their own principles. The greatest challenge for a coach in developing a progressive moral
9 community is to avoid simply telling performers what is right and wrong but to empower
10 them to develop a principled level of morality. In time, and with heightened moral maturity, it
11 is these principles that drive social systems and enables the moral community and mastery
12 climate to flourish.

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4

1 *Table 1.*

2 A contrasting summary of competition and decompetition

	Competition <i>Striving with</i>	Decompetition <i>Striving against</i>
Basic metaphor	Partnership	Battle or war
Motivation	Love of the game Shared enjoyment	Use of game Thrill (at opponents' expense)
Goals	Learning and mastery Pursuit of excellence	Domination and conquest Pursuit of superiority
View of opponent	Partner or enabler	Obstacle or enemy
Regulation	Rules are imperfect guides to fairness and welfare Officials are facilitators	Rules are partially tolerated restraints Officials are opponents
Playing and winning	Focus is on process (contesting)	Focus is on outcome (winning)
Ideal contest	Balanced opposition Tension, drama, story Play and seriousness in balance Positive emotions predominate	Dominated contest Certainty of outcome Seriousness overshadows play Negative emotions predominate

3 Source: Shields & Bredemeier, 2009

4

1 *Table 2.*

2 Moral Action Processes, Sociomoral Education Goals, and Program Intervention Strategies

3

Moral action process	Perception and interpretation	Judgment and deciding	Choice	Implementation
Program goal	Empathy	Moral reasoning	Task orientation	Self responsibility
Intervention	Cooperative learning	Moral community	Mastery climate	Power transfer

4

5 Source: Miller, Bredemeier & Shields, 1997

6

1 *Table 3.*

2 'Targeting' a mastery climate

Mastery		Performance
Challenging and diverse	Tasks	Absence of variety & challenge
Students given choices and leadership roles	Authority	No participation by students in decision making process
Private and based on individual progress	Recognition	Public and based on social comparison
Cooperative learning and peer interaction promoted	Grouping	Groups formed on the basis of ability
Based on mastery of tasks and on individual improvement	Evaluation	Based on winning or outperforming others
Time requirements adjusted to personal capabilities	Time	Time allocated for learning uniform for all students

3 Source: Adapted from Epstein, 1989

4