

Behavioral Models on the Players' Activities during the Tennis Matches

Rodica Prodan¹, Emilia Florina Grosu²,

¹Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca Romania,

²Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca Romania

Correspondence: Rodica Prodan (e-mail: rodica_prodan2@yahoo.com)

Abstract

The individual sport games—given their characteristics—impose constraints on behavior, constraints in relation to which some actions tend to produce good and other actions harm or at least lesser amounts of good. Therefore, in the last decades there was a lot of discussion whether certain behavior should be considered Fair Play. The dominant paradigm on ethical behavior presented in 1986 by J. Rest (Rest, 1986), despite its age, it is still the leading model for studying ethical behavior (Craft, 2013).

This study is aimed to answer two questions: *How* can we act ethically in sport? And *why* would we want to be ethical competitors in the first place?

The starting point of the study is the conceptualization of the term Fair Play as either “respect for the rules” or “respect for the spirit of the game”, as well as by other determinants.

The author analyzes the act of thinking, followed by a parallel between the tennis games and the stories found in the literature. Next is brought into the discussion the importance of challenges or tests as a result of impediments (hurdles) and objectives (goals). It is emphasized the position of the players as testing collaborators, not necessarily contesting opponents. Instead of *competitiveness* (a commitment to try to surpass) and *sportsmanship* (a commitment to civility, fairness, if not generosity), two other virtues come to mind under the umbrella of testing obligations. One is *determination*; the second is *impartiality* or justice.

The conclusion is that it can't be known if the chaotic-constrained patterns of evolution will continue to produce people who are meaning-seeking, story-telling human-beings, or who will see only the constraints that were visible to human intelligence around the year 2000 AD, or who will think that the connections between themselves and game playing are particularly gratifying ones.

Keywords: Fair Play, sportsmanship, competitiveness, determination, impartiality

Background

The individual sport games from a broader perspective and the tennis matches especially —given their characteristics—impose constraints on the player’s behavior, constraints in relation to which some actions tend to produce good and other actions harm or at least lesser amounts of good (Badminton World Federation, 2012, pp. 2-3). Many analysts ventured to tell us how we ought to act in sport, unfortunately, before analyzing the practice (and thus the uniquely constrained context) in which all these normative actions are to take place. Therefore, in the last decades there was a lot of discussion whether certain behavior should be considered Fair Play (Simon, Torres, Hager, 2015). The dominant paradigm on ethical behavior presented in 1986 by J. Rest, despite its age, it is still the leading model for studying ethical behavior (Cahn, 2008), (Crouch, 2009), (Craft, 2013).

Also, there is an ongoing theoretical discussion on what encompasses Fair Play, but to date the conceptualization has not yet been studied empirically (Butcher & Schneider, 2007). The use of a certain conceptualization when making a moral judgment on Fair Play is, however, a necessary condition to investigate what triggers unethical behavior (i.e., the lack of Fair Play) on the sport fields (Lincoln & Holmes, 2011).

Purpose of study

This study is aimed to answer two questions: *How* can we act ethically in sport? And *why* would we want to be ethical competitors in the first place?

Sources of Evidence

The starting point is the conceptualization of the term Fair Play as either “*respect for the rules*” or “*respect for the spirit of the game*”, as well as by other determinants.

UNESCO states that Fair Play is defined as *a way of thinking, not a way of behaving. It incorporates issues concerned with the elimination of cheating, gamesmanship, doping, violence (both physical and verbal), the sexual harassment and abuse of children, young people and women, exploitation, unequal opportunities, excessive commercialization and corruption.*

Rather than giving a definition of Fair Play, there are described some related virtues. It is possible that tennis players use such a list of related virtues to come to a moral judgement, but UNESCO neither gives no criteria for inclusion or exclusion of a certain virtue, nor gives no guideline for dealing with rivaling virtues (McNamee, 2014).

Another view of Fair Play is to see it as an implicit contract or agreement, to which the players agree by entering the game. In this view, fairness is seen as doing what one has agreed he would do and nothing more or less. But the ambiguous interpretation of the contract or agreement could generate some problems in defining Fair Play as similar to a contract. Another ambiguity is generated by this view, where fairness is merely the absence of unfairness. The negative concept of not breaking the contract ignores the positive attitude of honoring the spirit of the game (Butcher & Schneider, 2007).

The result is a generic brand of ethical guidance that produces players who may be *'nice'* (Moffatt, 1989), *'charming'* (MacIntyre, 1984) or *'professional'* (Bellah *et al.*, 1991), but who ultimately are confused.

One possibility to separate *'is'* conditions (e.g. what the tennis match is) from *'ought'* recommendations (e.g. how players ought to act during the match) is to sever ties with important sources of information. It is to try to behave ethically *in vacuum* and thereby to court moral confusion.

Feldman's (1986) errant criticism of MacIntyre's practice virtues is a case in point. She argued that the twin virtues of sportsmanship and competitiveness would place players in a moral stalemate when deciding whether to call an opponent's ambiguous tennis shot *'in'* or *'out.'* The competitive sportsperson, she argued, should call

the ball ‘*out*’ (in order to take the point and presumably meet his obligations as a competitor), while the sportsmanlike player should call the ball ‘*in*’ (so as to give the point to the opponent and thus supposedly meet his obligations as a sportsperson).

Because sport in general can have almost any purpose according to Feldman, and thus because sporting practices have no fundamental structures and offer no constraints (these are the ‘*is*’ conditions), she cannot know which virtue should take precedence. (These are the ‘*ought*’ recommendations). It depends, she thinks, on what one takes sport to be. And assuming that no agreement could ever be reached on this matter, she cannot tell tennis players to be either competitive or sportsmanlike. She would have to recommend, it seems, that they would be charming while making what, for her, is essentially an arbitrary decision regarding the shot in question (Zimniuch, 2009).

Further is described this middle ground between a blind optimism about the player’s ability to understand reality, on the one hand, and an unnecessarily pessimistic view, on the other. All human thinking involves three elements: a) an ego, the person who does the thinking, b) an act like seeing, wondering about, or valuing, and c) an object like a tennis racket, and thus the racket as seen, wondered about, or valued, depending on which act intends it.

The first element, the ego, is a language-influenced, historical, and otherwise limited source of thinking. Therefore it must fight for more or less objective views of reality without ever gaining—or having any chance of gaining—a pure or absolute perspective. Nevertheless, degrees of objectivity vary, not all stances are equally effective in thinking accurately about objects of interest, and consequently, efforts to gain better vantage points are not, in principle, misguided. In short, epistemological relativism is true, whereas judgmental relativism is not (Bhaskar, 1991).

The act of thinking, the second element, ranges from direct perceptions of things like seeing tennis matches, to any number of indirect or reflective perspectives, such as admiring or doubting tennis, or perhaps comparing tennis to other activities. In each case the character of the act affects the way we ‘*have*’ the object in ques-

tion. Relative to the examples above, we have the tennis match alternately as seen (perhaps in terms of some spatial characteristics), as admired (possibly in relation to its tendency to require the player stamina and courage), as doubted (as, e.g. a thing that raises questions about the merits of the coaching involved in contemporary tennis matches), and as compared (as distinct, for instance, from badminton or table tennis).

The third element, the object, exists independently of persons who may or may not think about them. Atoms, and tennis, and love continue to exist when we are thinking of them or when we are thinking of something else, and they would exist even had nobody ever reflected on them. However, both physical objects (like tennis courts) and intangible things (like competitive drive or sportsmanship) are not composed of Platonic forms (absolute, unchanging ideals that somehow stand behind experienced objects), or always of neat chunks of reality with clear dividing lines between them (e.g. white and black kinds of distinctions), or of fixed, closed systems (things that only reproduce perfect copies of themselves).

Because of the complex, open, sometimes continuous, and evolving nature of the object in acts of knowing, it is more accurate to say that reality constrains thinking rather than determines it. When we perceive sport, for example, the nature of sport (as distinctive but not fixed) limits the ways in which we can sensibly describe it. We can say that it is an activity that requires the passage of time. But we cannot intelligibly say that it can only be experienced in the presence of music, or that it requires only five participants, or that only children can play it. The correspondence theory of knowledge is accurate only in the sense that recognizing, describing, wondering about, and all other intentional acts (tacit or explicit, theoretical or practical, sedentary-reflective or motor active) must heed such constraints.

Given difficulties on both the side of things known (complex, variable objects like tennis rackets) and perspectives from which to know them (the historical ego, the tennis player), it is not correct to picture these investigations as scientific in nature and any outcomes as conclusive and sufficient, though they may still be right as far

as they go. It is to be expected that all conclusions will be replaced with more sophisticated analyses or filled out with alternative and complementary descriptions as time passes.

Main Argument

Much can be learned about tennis matches by looking at them as stories, defined here as narratives that have a beginning, middle, and end and whose events cohere through the presence of one or more plots and sub-plots that typically involve conflict. This conflict is important because stories spring to life when problems that need solutions confront us and when, as a consequence, we are uncertain about how things will come out. In the rich soil of '*maybe we can*' (solve the problem) and '*maybe we cannot*', stories spring to life and grow.

Challenges or tests are produced by hurdles and goals. Both of them—the impediments (hurdles) and objectives (goals)—can be either found or manufactured, but in no case can they be too high or too low for hurdles or too near or too far for the goals. Tests, it was noticed, live in the middle ground between tasks that are too easy, on one hand, and those that are simply impossible to solve, on the other. The proposed hypothesis can then be restated as follows: when and where tests (oppositions by cut) are experienced, uncertainties will appear about how things might come out and thus, so too will develop stories about how the player prepared yesterday, what strategies he is using now, and what kinds of success he hopes for the future.

The structure that appears to describe tests is an opposition by cut—a lived '*maybe I can,*' '*perhaps I cannot*'. When the test is too easy or too hard, and thus, the possibility for change/achievement is reduced or eliminated, a storyline becomes a story point and essentially no story at all.

Tests play a central role in practices like tennis matches (and thus too the narrative development of the players' lives), it stands to reason that fundamental moral obligations and virtues will be related to the creation, preservation, and validation of tests and test

results. This is instructive when one revisits the moral dilemma posed by Feldman on the ambiguous tennis shot. Remember that she saw no way to choose between being virtuously competitive (and thus taking the point) and virtuously sportsmanlike (and thus giving the point).

The findings of Miller et al. (2005) show a connection between high-performance contexts and lower moral judgment, as well as a relationship between high-performance contexts and the legitimization of using intimidation in sports. It could be possible that subjects apply different conceptualizations of Fair Play in recreational, national, or Olympic tournaments and that they would engage differently in transgressive behavior if more is at stake.

Feldman, it would appear, has not seen the difference between tennis players' duties as testing collaborators and contesting opponents. She appears to be focusing on the latter, whereas important clues about right actions may come from the former. Instead of competitiveness (a commitment to try to surpass) and sportsmanship (a commitment to civility, fairness, if not generosity), two other virtues come to mind under the umbrella of testing obligations. One is determination; the second, impartiality or justice.

Determination is needed if a good test is to be provided consistently for opponents. As tennis players interact with the ball, racket, distances, court shapes, and net heights to produce a good test for opponents, determination is needed to weather disappointment, injury, fatigue, slumps, extrinsic temptations, and any number of other test-making pitfalls.

In the face of these problems, the mutual obligation in any tennis match is to keep a good test alive for the other side. Consequently, as the serve in the Feldman tennis match is about to be hit, the receiving player must be attentive, well-positioned, menacing, prepared, whatever adds to the richness of the service test—that of getting a small round ball into a modestly sized rectangle with such speed, spin, and location that it either will not be legally returned or returned only weakly. (Schönborn, 2008). While, in this case, much of the test is provided by the sheer architecture of the court *vis-a-vis* the constitutive rules of the game, the receiver is still part of this tennis test. The virtue of determination is required now as a

'*returner-of-service*' and later in other testing roles if tennis players are to be relied upon as faithful test makers for one another.

Spectator behavior was considered an important factor in ethical decision making by Shields et al. (2007). Their approval or repulsion to the behavior and perceived attitude of the badminton and tennis players was shown to influence the moral judgments that are made and possibly the concept of Fair Play that is applied.

Conclusion

The judgment on Fair Play is a combination of the judgments on respect for the rules and the judgments of respect for the spirit of the game, where the latter contributes more to the final evaluation. This study clearly shows that when Fair Play is studied, it is important to incorporate at least these two aspects of this more sophisticated concept.

In the literature, there is an ongoing debate on whether the presence of an ethical code in sports organizations has an influence on the moral judgment. The availability of guidelines on Fair Play, even if they are not made concrete, could possibly affect the outcome of Fair Play and therefore are put to the test.

One cannot know if the chaotic-constrained patterns of evolution will continue to produce people who are meaning-seeking, story-telling human-beings, or who will see only the constraints that were visible to human intelligence around the year 2000 AD, or who will think that the connections between themselves and game playing are particularly gratifying ones. But all of us are called upon to act as ethical agents today and make our decisions based on what we can see now and who we are in this time and place.

References

1. Badminton World Federation. (2012): *Players' code of conduct*. Section 1B, Appendix 4 (pp. 2–3). Laws of Badminton and

- General Competition Regulations 2012–2013. Retrieved from www.bwfbadminton.org
2. Bhaskar, R. (1991): *Philosophy and the idea of freedom*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
 3. Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., *et al.* (1991): *The good society*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
 4. Butcher, R., & Schneider, A. (2007): *Fair play as respect for the game*. In W. J. Morgan (Ed.), *Ethics in sport* (2nd ed., p. 119). The Ohio State University.
 5. Cahn, S. M. and Markie, P. (2008): *Ethics: History, Theory and Contemporary Issues*. (4th ed.), New-York, Oxford University Press.
 6. Craft, J. L. (2013): *A review of the empirical ethical decision-making literature: 2004–2011*. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 117, pp. 221–259.
 7. Crouch, J. B. (2009): *Gender, Sports and the Ethics of Teammates: Toward an Outline of a Philosophy of Sport in the American Grain*. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy, New Series*, 23, no.2, pp. 118-127.
 8. Feldman, S. (1986): *Objectivity, Pluralism and Relativism: A Critique of MacIntyre's Theory of Virtue*. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3:307.
 9. Lincoln, S. H., & Holmes, E. K. (2011): *Ethical decision making: A process influenced by moral intensity*. *Journal of Health-care, Science and the Humanities*, 1, pp. 55–69.
 10. MacIntyre, A. (1984): *After virtue* (2nd ed.). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
 11. McNamee, M. (2014): *Ethics and fair play*. Olympia, Greece: International Olympic Academy, Postgraduate Seminar.
 12. Miller, B. W., Roberts, G. C., & Ommundsen, Y. (2005): *Effect of perceived motivational climate on moral functioning, team*

- moral atmosphere perceptions, and the legitimacy of intentionally injurious acts among competitive youth football players.* *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 6, pp. 461–477.
13. Moffatt, M. (1989): *Coming of age in New Jersey: College and American culture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
 14. Rest, J. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory.* New York, NY: Praeger.
 15. Schönborn, R. (2008): *Tennis. Techniktraining.* Meyer&Meyer Verlag, Aachen.
 16. Shields, D. L., LaVoi, N. M., Bredemeier, D. L., & Power, F. C. (2007): *Predictors of poor sportpersonship in youth sports: Personal attitudes and social influences.* *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 29, pp. 747–762.
 17. Simon, R. L., Torres, C. R., Hager, P. F. (2015): *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport.* (4th ed.), Boulder, CO, Westview Press.
 18. UNESCO. (n.d.). *Education: Physical education and sport.* Retrieved from http://portal.UNESCO.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2223&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201
 19. Zimniuch, F. (2009): *Crooked: A History of Cheating in Sports.* New-York, Taylor Trade Publishing.