Sports Violence Essay, Research Paper

Abstract

This report will briefly examine violence in sports. It will give possible

reasons for the increase in violence, why violence seems to be growing and what

we can do to curb this disturbing tend. While not all theories can we examined

here, the most relevant to the topic will be examined and discussed.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to bring into light one of the most talked

about problem in sports today, violence. Many people, spectators, coaches,

players and referees, of nearly all contact sports, have noted that there is

been a large increase in the number of violent encounters. Some believe that

this is a reflection of the problems with society today as a whole; that our

aggressions are simply let out on the playing field. Other people believe that

violence stems from the breakdown of basic family values at home. Whatever

philosophy you are inclined to believe, it is obvious that this is a growing,

and alarming problem. This is a problem that must be dealt with, to not only

protect players and referees, but to find out why we seem to be such an angry

society today. This topic is very close me, because I am a professional soccer

referee. I have dealt with numerous violence situations over the past eleven

years. In some cases, I have merely been a witness. In other cases, I was the

one whom the violence was committed upon.

Hypothesis

My goal here is to determine why violence starting to take over our once, fun

and enjoyable sporting events. I believe that this outpouring of violence is

directly related to society. I believe it all comes down to a lack of respect;

Lack of respect for authority, for each other and for ourselves. I expect to

find out also, that our up bringing, and those that influence us, will have a

direct impact upon whether or not we become involved in violence in sports.

Method

The type of research used primarily was observational and literature

investigations. I used many of my own experiences and knowledge to compose

several of my ideas. Also, I wanted to find as many outside sources as possible

to either support with claim to disprove it. Given the time period given to

complete endeavor, I believe that not all theories will be investigated.

However, all data collected is impartial and objective.

Analysis of Results

Sports violence can be defined as behavior which causes harm, occurs outside

of the rules of the sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of the

sport (Terry and Jackson, p.2).( Leonard p. 165) identifies two forms of

aggression in sports. Instrumental aggression is non-emotional and

task-oriented. Reactive aggression has an underlying emotional component, with

harm as its goal. Violence is an outcome of reactive aggression.

An increase in both frequency and seriousness of acts of violence has been

well documented. Violence is most prevalent in team contact sports, such as ice

hockey, football, and rugby. While most occurrences of violence emanate from

players, others, including coaches, parents, fans, and the media, also

contribute to what has been described as an epidemic of violence in sports today

(Leonard, p. 166).

Considerable research has been done on spectator violence. A central issue is

whether fans incite player violence or reflect it (Debenedotte, p. 207). The

evidence is inconclusive. Spectators do take cues from players, coaches,

cheerleaders, and one another. Spectators often derive a sense of social

identity and self-esteem from a team. Emulation of favorite players is an

element of this identification. Group solidarity with players and coaches leads

to a view of opposing teams as enemies and fosters hostility towards the "outgroup"

and, by extension, its supporters, geographical locale, ethnic group, and

perceived social class (Lee, p. 45).

Mass media also contribute to the acceptability of sports. (Leonard p. 166)

maintains that the media occupies a paradoxical position. On the one hand it

affords ample exposure to sports-related violence via television, magazines,

newspapers, and radio, thus providing numerous examples to children who may

imitate such behavior. It glamorizes players, often the most controversial and

aggressive ones. Its commentary is laced with descriptions suggestive of

combat, linking excitement to violent action. On the other hand, the exposure

given to sports violence by the media has stimulated increased efforts to

control and prevent such behavior.

There are several leading theories about sport violence. The following are

the best examples that I encountered.

There are three major theories that seek to explain violent aggression in

sports (Terry and Jackson, p. 27; Leonard, pp. 170-71). The biological theory,

proposed most notably by Nobel Prize winner Konrad Lorenz, sees aggression as a

basic, inherent human characteristic. Within this context, sports are seen as a

socially acceptable way to discharge built-up aggression, a safety valve.

The psychological theory states that aggression is caused by frustration; it

is situational. Frustration results when one’s efforts to reach a particular

goal are blocked (Leonard, p. 170). In sports, frustration can be caused by

questionable calls by officials, failure to make a particular play, injuries

that interfere with optimum performance, heckling from spectators, or taunts by

coaches or players.

The social learning theory has received the most empirical verification

(Leonard, p. 171) and maintains that aggressive behavior is learned through

modeling and reinforced by rewards and punishments. Young athletes take sports

heroes as role models and imitate their behavior. Parents, coaches and teammates

are also models that may demonstrate support for an aggressive style of play.

According to Terry and Jackson (p. 30), reinforcement for acts of violence

may come from three sources: (a) the athlete’s immediate reference

group–coaches, teammates, family, friends; (b) structure of the game and

implementation of rules by officials and governing bodies; (c) attitudes of

fans, media, courts, and society. Reinforcement may take the form of rewards,

such as praise, trophies, starting position, respect of friends and family.

Vicarious reinforcement may be derived from seeing professional players lionized

and paid huge salaries, in spite of, or because of, their aggressive style of

play (Leonard, p. 171). Players who don’t display the desired degree of

aggressiveness may receive negative reinforcement through criticism from parents

and coaches, lack of playing time, harassment by teammates, opponents, or

spectators.

These theories provide a basis for interventions that may curb excessive

aggression, especially among young athletes. Terry and Jackson (p. 35), suggest

that socialization forces, particularly reinforcement, offer the best focus for

intervention. In addition, psychological forces can be addressed by modifying or

controlling situations that produce frustration.

What is the impact of children participating in sport?

Ideally children’s participation in team sports should be fun, contribute to

their physical development and well being, help to develop social skills, and

promote a desire for continued involvement with physical activity. The objective

of physical

education in schools should be to encourage development of appropriate

exercise habits, with emphasis on the recreational aspects of physical

activities (Roskosz, p. 7).

Unfortunately, compelling evidence suggests that, for many children, the

pressures associated with sports produce low self-esteem, excessive anxiety, and

aggressive behavior. Children may eventually experience "sports

burnout" and develop a lifelong avoidance of physical activity (Hellstedt,

p. 60, 62).

In Hellstedt’s opinion (p. 62), these negative outcomes of sports involvement

are caused by adults, particularly parents and coaches. Lip service is paid to

sportsmanship and having fun, but rewards are reserved for winning. Often,

encouragement to pursue victory is accompanied by direct and indirect signals

that aggressive behavior is acceptable to achieve it. Hellstedt also suggests

that anxiety about winning impedes performance and makes players more

susceptible to injury. Physicians have noticed an increase in sports-related

injuries in children (Hellstedt, p. 59).

What can be done to curb the outpouring of violence in sports?

Physical educators and coaches are in a key position to lay the groundwork

for positive attitudes in sports. Guidelines for teaching children to shun

violent behavior in sports include:

(a) Put sports in perspective. Coaches should not emphasize winning at all

cost. Enjoyment and the development of individual skills should be the

objective. Coaches should be alert to and praise improvement. Athletic

performance should not be equated with personal worth (Coakley, p. 106). Players

should not be encouraged or allowed to play when injured or ill, as a

demonstration of stoic virtue.

(b) Stress participation. Hellstedt (p.70) cites studies that show that many

children ages 9-14 drop out of sports because they spend too much time on the

bench and not enough on the field. They perceive themselves as unsuccessful

because their level of performance doesn’t earn them more playing time. A study

of young male athletes indicated that 90% would rather have an opportunity to

play on a losing team than sit on the bench of a winning team.

(c) Present positive role models. Sports violence is most prevalent in

professional sports. Coaches should avoid symbolic associations with

professional teams–e.g. names, logos. They should not model their own coaching

techniques on those of professional coaches (Coakley, pp. 107-8). Weiser and

Love (p. 5) recommend that school coaches implement strategies to foster

feelings of team ownership among players, replacing the traditional

hierarchy–authoritarian coach, submissive players–that governs the

coach-player relationship in professional sports. Encourage input, permit

participation in decision-making, and listen to player feedback. Feelings of

team ownership foster team cohesiveness, which in turn leads to better

performance.

(d) Integrate values-oriented intervention strategies into the curriculum.

Waldzilak cites a number of intervention strategies, utilizing Kohlberg’s moral

development model and social learning theories, which have been shown to produce

improvement or modification of behavior, moral reasoning and perceptions of

sportsmanship (Wandzilak et al., p. 14). Teachers and coaches should commit

themselves to actively teaching positive sports-related values, and devise

curricula that do so.

(e) Involve parents. As the earliest and potentially the most influential

role models, parents can have a critical impact on a child’s attitudes towards

sports. Physical educators and coaches should inform parents of curricular

activities and goals, alert them to signs of anxiety or aggressive behavior,

encourage positive attitudes toward competition and physical activity, and

promote realistic expectations for performance (Hellstedt, pp. 69-70)

Conclusion

An analysis of all this information suggests that this problem can be solved.

While there is not an easy solution to the problem, there is hope. While Leonard

suggests that the violence in sports is part due to media coverage and the

violent events get the publics attention. Lee submits that the aggression

towards even a single person, either on or off the field, may lead to hostility

towards that person ethnic group, supporters, fans and even their perceived

social class.

While there seems to be three central theoretical explanations to violence in

sports, the social learning theory has the most empirical support, according to

Leonard. Do we really reward people for aggressive behavior? Have we created

this problem by supporting it? I believe that we have.

The only true conclusion is that we are all partly responsible for the

violence we witness in sports today. We reward winning; we only pay lip service

to sportsmanship, which to many is a lost art. Sports were at one time about the

enjoyment of the game, learning the game and having fun. Now the message we send

to children is, win at all costs. If you lose, you are a failure. No one wants

to watch a failure.

Until we as I society like the error of our ways, and acknowledge that we

have a serious problem on our hands, little will change. Until be remember why

we have sports, entertainment and for fun, I fear that this problem will only

grow worse in the future.

Discussion

I wrote this report because I am interested in this problem. As a

professional soccer referee, I see this problem virtually every time I step on

the pitch. I see children of ten years be told that winning is everything; you

only have fun if you win, winning is the only thing. I see professional players

not only disrespecting others, but themselves as well. Professionals are

supposed to be the examples for young people to look up to. What do they see?

They see players fighting, players following spectators into the stands to

fight. They see player spitting at referees. And what happens to these players?

Nothing. They blame everyone else for there actions. The referee was terrible,

the fans are stupid. Whatever their excuses are, that is just what they are,

excuses. Only when people take responsibility for their actions will this

problem start to fix itself. I would not want my children, or anyone for that

matter, see me spitting at a referee. But that is the problem; people don?t

care. We have become a society of people that take no responsibility for our

actions, the blame others for our stupidity. It is becoming a very sad state of

affairs. These sports used to be fun and enjoyable. Now, if you don?t win, you

are nothing. What a great message to send to that six year old watching the

game. What are we teaching our children? I am afraid to ask.

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