Sports Violence Essay, Research Paper

Sports violence

The Growing Problem of Violence in Sports

Bench clearing brawls in baseball, bloody hockey fights, soccer mobs, post-game

sports riots, and increasing injuries are all images of today s sports that are familiar to

us. In recent years players and fans alike have shown increased aggression when it

comes to sporting events. One of the most disturbing trends in sports is the increasing

frequency and severity of violence. Injuries and deaths among participants are on

the rise, as are injuries and deaths among fans and spectators. Violence in sports is an

important issue because sports themselves are an important aspect in our lives and the

society we live in. Their importance, however, should not be greater than our concern

about preserving the values and aspects of our society. The problem of sports

violence has become a worldwide phenomenon, that is an unacceptable, growing social

problem.

Sports violence can be defined as behavior by a player, coach, or fan that is

intended to inflict pain or cause injury (Berger 8). Sports violence causes harm, breaks

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

Leonard identifies two forms of aggression in sports: Instrumental aggression, which is

non-emotional and task-oriented and reactive aggression, which has an underlying

emotional component, with harm as its goal (165). Violence is the outcome of reactive

aggression. There are three major theories of aggression in sports: The biological theory,

psychological theory, and the social learning theory (Leonard 170-171). The biological

theory sees aggression as a basic, innate human characteristic, in which sports is seen as

a socially acceptable way to discharge built-up aggression (170). The psychological

theory states that aggression is caused by frustration and is situational (170). In sports,

frustration can be caused by questionable calls by officials, failure to make a certain

play, injuries , heckling from spectators, or taunts by coaches and players. The social

learning theory maintains that aggressive behavior is learned through modeling and

reinforced by rewards and punishments (171). Each of these theories could play a role

in the increasing violence in sports. Athletes may be seeing sports as an outlet to vent

there frustration and anger. Young athletes often take sports heroes as role models and

imitate their behavior, which may lead to children imitating such aggressive behavior in

their own sporting activities.

Many continue to argue that sports have always been violent and that today

things are no better or worse than they were years ago. However, according to Berger,

evidence contradicts this and sources show there are more serious injuries and violent

acts on and off the field in today s sports than there were in the past(9-10). Violence in

sports is not a new concept, but it is more prevalent and harmful today than it was in

the past (Yeager 126). There has been an increase in the frequency and seriousness of

acts of violence, which is most prevalent in team contact sports, such as ice hockey,

football, soccer, rugby, and even basketball. This is likely due to the increased

competitiveness in sports. The strive for competitiveness starts in youth sports and

only escalates in college and professional sports (Berger 12). The greater the importance

placed on winning, the more violent the play is likely to become. Emotion is another

element of sports that can easily turn into violence. Competitive sports are emotional

events and when emotions get out of control violence is inevitable. According to Aaseng,

most of the violence in modern sports happens not because of the nature of sports, but

because society does not value the control of emotions held by the code of sportsmanship

(35). In sports, as in other aspects of our lives, the problem is not so much that we have

lost respect for authority, but that we have lost respect for each other. Our society s

preoccupation with winning has caused sports stars to play with the intensity of emotion,

which leads to violence.

While most occurrences of violence come from players, others, including coaches,

parents, fans, and the media, also contribute to the increasing violence in sports today.

Fans seem to emulate the violence they watch in sports and spectator violence is

increasing as participant injuries rise (Yeager 11). Mass media contributes to the

acceptability of sports. It provides exposure to sports-related violence via television,

magazines, newspapers, and radio, which provides many examples to children who may

imitate such behavior. Also it often glamorizes players who are controversial and

aggressive. However, the exposure given to sports violence by the media sometimes

stimulates increased efforts to control and prevent such behavior.

Soccer is a sport known for its spectator violence. In soccer there is more

violence among the fans before, during, and after the game than there is among the

players on the field (Berger 106). Soccer matches attract huge crowds and there is a

threat of violence that officials must prepare for in advance, in order to try and control

it. Soccer mob violence has become so dangerous that authorities often use mounted

police, helicopters, and video monitors to try and control the spectators (106). One

cause of this mob violence may be due to the increased competitiveness in soccer, which

has led to more participant injuries and more aggressive spectators. Hockey also inspires

violence among its spectators. Spectators at soccer and hockey games often fight each

other and throw objects onto the field or ice. Sometimes even the players are the target of

fan violence. Hockey has developed a reputation for being more violent than needed to

play and win the game. A study conducted by the Texas Youth Commission shows that

teams playing with more violence are not more likely to win; in fact the opposite is true

(Study 1).

Some experts say spectator violence has little to do with events on the ice or

field. Genevieve Rail, a sports sociologist, believes these are global problems that

require global intervention (qtd. Dying 2). Sports psychologists and sociologists are

concerned about mob violence, because it does not only involve criminals. Instead it is

a sad reflection of society as a whole. These mobs are often composed of young males

who see events, like soccer and hockey games, as a chance to act out and not get caught

(2-3). Sociologists believe these acts cannot be blamed on the sporting events

themselves, but are incited by aspects of society that cause frustration and also by extreme

crowding, and media hype at sporting events (3).

In sports, there is an increasing acceptance of violent acts directed towards others

that some view may translate into greater violence in society. Aaseng states that sports

do not promote violence in society, but rather society promotes violence in sports

(38). Reducing violence in sports is far easier than reducing violence in our

society because the rules of sports are easier to enforce (38). Sports have become more

violent because society views retaliation as manliness and society enjoys violence as

entertainment. However, it seems violence goes both ways. Violence in sports sets a

negative example as well as being a reflection of societal problems. In our society there

is an urge to be number one and sports mirror this, including the violence that can result.

Within sports, the highest level of professional sports sets the example for all the other

levels. The increased violence at the professional level has led to imitation of their

aggression by lower levels of sports. Fighting and spectator violence is now becoming

more common in youth sports.

Some people think we should not be worried by aggression and violence in sports.

They believe that sports serve as a positive outlet for aggressive behavior and that without

competitive sports we would have an even more violent society. However, aggression in

sports increases the competitiveness and violence in our society. Competitive sports

contribute to our violent society. Sports are teaching players that aggression is acceptable

behavior for getting back at someone, helping to win, and seeing that justice is done.

These suggest that violence is permitted and necessary. Violent acts lead to further

aggression and a lowering of control. Sports violence is a serious problem in our society.

Research provides proof that most competitive sports increase anger and aggression in

both players and viewers. Fair play is not taken seriously because most people believe

winning is all that matters. The pressure to win starts early in sports and increases

considerably by the time an athlete reaches the college and professional level. Athletes are

often encouraged to play while injured, which could possibly lead to more serious

problems. Players are also taught to regard their opponents as enemies and to play the

game with vengeance towards them. The media does not help the situation by

emphasizing particularly brutal or violent incidents that occur in sports. Conflicts between

players and rough plays are often given the most attention in sports coverage. Viewers

are becoming more desensitized to violence and are seeking high levels of violence in

sporting events. The promotion of sports violence conveniently overlooks these harmful

effects. By reducing aggression and violence competitive sports can become safer to play

and more enjoyable to watch.

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