

USE AND ABUSE OF AWARDS AND REWARDS IN NIGERIAN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The review was carried out to assess the use and abuse of awards and rewards in the Nigerian sports system. The study observed that incentives are valuable and that they usually increase effort and performance. However, it highlighted some of the problems of reward and awards to include greed and excessive wage demands, indiscipline amongst sportsmen; perpetuation of inequality and discrimination amongst athletes as well as distraction before and during performance. Conclusively, the study argued that awards and rewards have created more problems due to over emphasis on monetary rewards and its mode of application. Consequently, sports associations/governing bodies should formulate policies and guidelines that determine the mode of application of rewards and awards in different sports, and a focus on sports for love of fatherland.

Keywords: *Use, abuse, awards, rewards, Nigerian sports*

INTRODUCTION

The use of rewards as motivators is as old as the history of sports and physical education. Theorists and practitioners have felt that extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation were addictive; that is, the more the better. Monetary and other rewards have long been used informally to control performance. The utility of rewards and awards includes increased standard of performance and participation, increased manpower for sports, job security of athletes stabilized sports as a profession and attracted sponsorship. The ancient Greece used awards as incentives to encourage participation in sports.

Although it looked plausible to have a simple answer for the question of whether rewards increase or decrease motivation to participate, research evidence indicates that in some situations external rewards increase motivation whereas in other situation it decreased. Bucher (1979) observes that a victor in the ancient Olympic Games did not receive any material reward for his victory; instead a wreath of olive branches was presented. However, he was a hero in any ones eyes and had many receptions given in his honour. Sports psychologists have observed that awards as motivators are involved in the stimulation of action towards the achievement of particular objectives.

In modern times the use of awards has assumed a new dimension. The ancient Greece used shields and wreaths but in recent times other forms of rewards have been introduced. In some leagues, post season banquets in which

awards such as trophies, medals, ribbons, money and jackets are given to athletes. Awards are given for accomplishments ranging from most valuable player to mere participation on a team. The use of awards transcends professional, para-professional and amateurs. The emphasis is now on what psychologists regard as extrinsic motivation. By the term extrinsic motivation, we mean that performance or participation is controlled by external forces (money, trophies, and grades) and that if these forces were not present the individual would stop participating or would participate at a reduced level (Crone, 1999). Pelletier, Tuson, Fortier, Priere and Blais (1995) further defined extrinsic motivation as that which pertains to a wide variety of behaviours that are engaged in as a means to an end but not at the sake of the athlete.

The advocates of extrinsic motivation hold the view that its use increase participation and performance. This view went on unquestioned until recently when some critics argued that giving rewards to athletes for activities in which they are not already interested turn play into work and decreases their desire for future participation (Adler P. and Adler P. A. 1996). The professionals participate because they are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated while the amateurs are purely intrinsically motivated. Some psychologists have argued that in some situations external rewards increase motivation whereas in other situations, external rewards have decreased motivation. Weinberg (1984) observes that although it would be nice to have a simple answer for the question of whether rewards increase or decreases an athlete's motivation to participate, research evidence indicates that there is no simple answer.

The findings of research are equivocal. Travers (1973) in his studies observes that sometimes the rewards have been effective in facilitating the achievement of the desired goals but sometimes they have resulted in a depressed performance. He states that although many operant psychologists write as though the value of material incentives were unquestioned, the data suggest that their use must be considered as controversial and experimental. From the foregoing, it appears that psychologists have not fully come to a consensus on the effect of awards and rewards. The discordant observation of different psychologists form the basis of this paper which is on the use and abuse of awards and rewards on professional and amateur sports in Nigeria.

USE OF AWARDS AND REWARDS IN PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR SPORTS

For years, theorists and practitioners have felt that rewards (extrinsic and intrinsic motivation) were addictive; the more the better (Weinberg, 1984). Motivation helps to increase effort and performance. Affirming this idea, Akpomede (1995) and Fisher (1976) assert that incentives are valuable and usually increase effort and performance. Sports men and women want them as prestige factors. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation does not seem to decrease the joy of intensive sports competition. Rewards often galvanize athletes into increasing their efforts during competitions. Where an athlete would have been

ordinarily fatigued, more effort is generated to reach the set goal. Awards tend to increase performance in sports. In modern times where sponsorship is employed to boost and promote the quality of rewards, most athletes are eager to be record breakers. Knowing this, most sports' organizing bodies and promoters are increasing the category and value of rewards given to athletes as incentives. For example the reward scheme of the confederation of African football as reported by Obayuwana (1999) attests to this.

For a start, each of the eight clubs will receive 150,000 dollars and the chance to earn more than 110,000 dollars per win, 7000 dollars for a draw and 1000 dollars for goals scored. Moreover, the two finalists will go home with 225,000 dollars each. It is expected that this reward scheme will stimulate the footballers into putting up optimum performance to reach the dollar goal. In the past most sportsmen and women were amateurs who were intrinsically motivated. Amateurs participate because of the enjoyment and satisfaction derived. This was accompanied by feelings of competence and self determination (Calder and Straw, 1975). During that era, sports organizers had the problem of scouting for athletes. In fact, they had to go for campaigns to convince qualified athletes who were discouraged by parents and friends. However, with the introduction of improved tangible rewards and awards as incentives, athletes now scramble for jerseys and chances in their state and national teams. There is now abundance of skilled athletes such that coaches have the problem of objective selection. Today, many youth (men and women) have taken up sports as life career.

Awards for coaches and athletes have made converts. This has attracted more manpower for the sports industry. With the present state where it costs a fortune to recruit athletes and coaches, sports is fast becoming one of the most lucrative careers in the world. This development in sports can be attributed to monetary reward and incentives. Sports have assumed a new dimension in the 21st century Nigeria. Rewards motivate athletes and sports clubs to increase their standard of play. Knowing that the more skilled and fit the athlete, the fatter his contract fee. It motives athletes to improve their skills. Now renowned clubs offer fat financial packages for contract to lure skilled players from neighbouring clubs thus creating a competitive atmosphere among clubs. Rewards enable sporting associations to invite outstanding athletes from overseas to visit home teams and take up national assignments. More interstate visits are also encouraged.

Awards and rewards sustain interest and ensure retirement security of athletes and sports men. In the days where amateurism was in vogue, star athletes never reached the peak of their performance before they were retired prematurely and moved to other professions in Nigeria. There was the fear that if their youthful strength was exhausted in sports, they could be laid off without a future career. With the introduction of financial rewards and scholarship, the security of the future of athletes is fairly guaranteed for those

who can utilize them. Therefore, it is argued that the introduction of rewards and awards is a welcome innovation that enhances sports participation and ensures retirement security of athletes. The application of awards and rewards has been adopted as a survival strategy by clubs. Many sports clubs that were facing the threat of folding up have been reactivated by sponsorship a form of award. For example, junior, intermediate, senior amateur, semi-professionals and professional, national and international teams are all indulging in many forms of sponsorship in an endeavour to survive in the sporting milieu.

MISUSE OF AWARDS AND REWARDS IN AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

Some experimental psychologists (Sands and Stewarts, 1979) have stressed that rewards sometimes may not have a straightforward effect. Deci (1971) observes that whether the reward is of a monetary nature or by verbal reinforcement, it affects the degree to which the task is perceived to be intrinsically motivating. The negative repercussions of rewards are examined here. The unbridled use of monetary rewards by some sponsors and sports associations has led to excessive wage demand by sportsmen, women and coaches. Ojo (1999) reports that the national U-23 team refused to go for their scheduled morning training demanding that their bonus be increased by 100%. The players embarked on this action less than 24 hours to their crucial game against Black Meteors of Ghana in the pre-Johannesburg "99" All African Games Qualifier in Accra Ghana. The demand for rewards as a right culminates in acts of indiscipline manifested by some sportsmen.

Solaja (1999) reports that the Shooting Stars of Ibadan abandoned their training session on account of non-payment of match bonuses for ten league games. When the match was played against the Egyptian team, the Shooting Stars lost. The coach observed that evidence of match rustiness was glaring and pointed out fatigue as a cause for the home defeat. Sometimes the sportsmen in an attempt to hold sports associations to ransom make this outrageous demands when they are about to engage in crucial competitions. Such circumstances destabilize the overall arrangement and preparedness of teams thereby affecting performance.

Secondly, the efficiency of coaches and skillfulness of players are partly evaluated in terms of amount of money they are worth. A superstar is a player who is worth millions of dollars. According to Sand and Stewarts (1978), sponsorship as a form of reward has not helped matters but created difficulties for sports association and clubs. For instance while the development of the superstar syndrome might elevate performance, it also encourages excessive wage demands by players. The clubs concerned are easily put in precarious financial positions as transfer fees from club to club in professional and semi-professional team sports are also artificially inflated.

Thirdly, monetary rewards and other rewards have long been used

informally to control performance. Parents commonly offer money to their children for achieving above a specified level. The over-rewarded person is often greedy and highly possessive of rewards he has accumulated. In some cases, the over-rewarded person may become as great an antisocial force as the person who has been excessively punished. When an athlete's behaviour is entirely manipulated by rewards, he becomes a "spoilt athlete". Again, Orlick and Mosher (1978) observe that once extrinsic rewards have been terminated there may no longer be a reason to continue as is the case with the amateur. Under these conditions, a child may totally withdraw from the activity or participate to much lesser extent than would have been the case had the child not been subjected to the extrinsic reward system. Rewards sometimes obey the law of diminishing returns in sports as the strikingly rich athletes may no longer be highly motivated by the sums of money offered as a stimulant.

Over application of rewards undermines team effectiveness as it leads to over-emphasis on some players who are better paid. Zander (1974) asserts that incentive which achieve team goals is reduced by the over application of extrinsic reward to individuals. By singling out individuals and heaping rewards on them, a coach risks undermining team effectiveness. Unless extrinsic motivations are used sparingly and cautiously, they may do more harm than good (Edney 1976). This observation suggests that money in sports also has the unconscious effect of perpetuating inequality and discrimination in the development of attitude of sportsmen. This is most pronounced in the sponsored sports which create "superstars"; most often male superstars and the impression is that they are tough individuals and most wanted.

Athletes from disadvantaged background do not respond to delayed rewards although a middle class athlete may be expected to choose a delayed reward if it is greater than the immediate reward. For example, Senge (1998) reports of a state governor who made flamboyant promises to athletes from his State. The governor promised a N50,000 cash award to gold medalists, N30,000 and N20,000 to silver and bronze medalists respectively. The athletes who appeared not to be pleased with the administrator's gesture described it as "medicine after death". They explained to him that since arrival to the venue most of them have been surviving on a daily allowance of N150 as well as contending with inadequate accommodation. Such shabby treatment of athletes creates mistrust and dampens athlete enthusiasm.

Awards and rewards in monetary term tend to destroy the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. Venkateswarl (1998) comments that the excessive emphasis on money before, during and after competition by Nigerian sportsmen, women and officials is capable of grinding the wheel of progress for the nation in sports. He further observed that everyone now pretends that money is the catalyst for miracles. He suggested that it is time that we reverted to the noble values of regarding the national colour as the ultimate lure. Our sportsmen and women should feel inspired by the green-white-green, not the colour of

the dollar. Athletes now lay emphasis on what they can get from their country and not what they will give. For the professionals, rewards sometimes undermine intrinsic motivation in sport. The issue in question is whether these rewards enhance or undermine subsequent intrinsic motivation. Weiberg (1979) cites two former quarterbacks who were not getting paid. Earvin Magic Johnson Star basketball player for the Los Angeles lakers was asked if he received any outrageous offers while being recruited by various colleges. He responded: "I received my share of offers for cars and money. It immediately turned me off. It was like they were trying to buy me and I did not like anyone trying to buy me". Magic Johnson was really referring to the potential controlling aspect of rewards. He did not like anyone trying to control him through bribes and other extrinsic incentives. These anecdotes imply that rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation in sports.

Rewards may also have the capacity of causing distraction from the actual takes to be performed. Sometimes, the rewards have been effective in facilitating the achievement of the desired goals but at other times, they have resulted in a depressed performance. Marshall (1979) conducted a study in which rewards produced a depression in learning. This suggests that the depression may be caused by distraction from the learning task by the introduction of highly prized rewards. Such distraction may produce a high level of excitement which may also disrupt performance. Over excitement and anxiety to please sponsors resulting from fantastic contract fees can be disturbing and distractive.

Emphasis on extrinsic rewards leads to athletes being treated more like a commodity. This tendency is most vividly demonstrated at the professional level of sport, where millions of dollars are dependent upon which athlete can perform the best and thus produce profit in ticket sales, television, commercials, shoes, uniform numbers, and so on (Alt, 1983; Andrews, (1996); Armstrong (1996); McDonalds, 1996). If the athlete who has performed well for a team begins to slip in performance, we should expect to see this athlete replaced by a better athlete, that is, a better commodity. The athlete who is replaced will be traded or retired just as any other commodity that no longer has value (Marx 1967).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sports psychologists believe that incentives are valuable and usually increase effort and performance, they are often wanted as prestige factors. They do not seem to decrease the joy of intensive sport competition. When the effect of rewards is given a critical analysis, it has to be stressed that rewards has had both positive and negative repercussion at all levels of competitive sports. Rewards and awards, have increased standard of performance/participation, job scarcity, population of athletes all over the world, stabilized sport as a profession and has attracted sponsorship. On the other hand, the problems

associated with rewards include: encouragement of greed and excessive wage demands, indiscipline amongst sportsmen, perpetuation of inequality and discrimination; distraction of athletes and it undermines intrinsic motivation; corrupts athlete and corrodes the spirit of nationalism and patriotism which it is supposed to inculcate. Having seen that the problems created by the use of rewards are overwhelming, it could be concluded that sports organizers and sponsors should review the mode of reward and its application before it gets out of control. Contributing in this direction, the study recommended that:

- The National Sports Commission should set up a standing merit award committee/board. The board should prepare award/reward scheme for athletes for various categories and level of competition in the country.
- The National Sports Commission should go into contract with athlete which compels the commission to fulfill their obligations to sportsmen/coaches.
- Sports associations/governing bodies should formulate policies and guidelines that determine the mode of application of rewards and awards in different sports.

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