

PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS OF SPORT COMPETITION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The need for a philosophy and ethics of competition was explored. Three main philosophies and Ethics of competition were examined and the implications highlighted. It is suggested that a philosophy and ethics based on sportsmanship should be adapted to harness the manpower and financial resources expended on sport. Suggestions were also proposed that sportsmanship education should be introduced during training sessions to participants as well as supporters club and fans should be educated to instill a right philosophy for sport competitions. These would make sports philosophy relevant to societal needs and vision 2020.

Keywords: *Philosophy, ethics, sport competition, vision 2020, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal in sport competition according to Dodge and Robertson (2004) is to win. Winning is defined as a personal best or securing first place and getting the associated awards and rewards participants expect. Section III of vision 2010 rightly predicted where Nigeria will want to be. It is the aspiration of Nigerians that by 2010, we should be among the best sporting nations of the world. It is also anticipated that Nigeria should host and win major sporting competitions (Vision 2010). From the aforementioned aspirations, it is inferred that we believe in competition as a means of winning or attaining excellence in sport.

It is beneficial for the highly skilled to compete; for the less skilled to compete and for the moderately skilled to compete. A desire to win is good and most benefits occur when extreme effort is made and causal effort does not often result in desirable benefits. The desire to win should be guided by a wholesome philosophy and ethics of competition. When winning is not guided by adequate ethics it might result in national disgrace and counter-productive. To effectively harness our manpower and financial resources in sports, there is need for a consideration of a philosophy and ethic of competition in vision 2020. To guide the implementation of the vision a philosophy of competition which reflects the aspirations of the modern Nigeria should be identified and embodied in the final document of vision 2020.

How sport is structured by the organizing body, administrators and coaches determines the quality and outcome of sport competitions in Nigeria. The emphasis within the sports programme becomes the means by which the participants learn what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour for achieving the objectives

(Gano-Overway, 1999). Josephson (1999) observes that the beliefs of the Olympic movement are the philosophical foundation of organized sport the world over. Embedded in the Olympic vision of competition is the pursuit of victory in the spirit of sportsmanship and according to the rules that define the game. The fundamental principle of international Olympic committee is; Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the quality of body, will and mind. It should blend sport with culture and education. Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on joy found in effort; the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

Sport should promote the most cherished values of the Nigerian people. Some of the significant roles embodied in vision 2010 are: sustenance of good health; development of competitive spirit; promotion of social harmony and national unity; enhancement of international respect and prestige; inculcation of discipline and team spirit in the youth and promotion of sport as a business. These expected roles cannot be achieved in the absence of an articulated and a wholesome philosophy and ethics of competition. In recent times, the news media have availed us with report of national athletes abandoning training preceding crucial competitions for non-payment of match bonuses. The election and appointment of sports administrators is not, left out as such exercises are marred by boycotts and electoral manipulations. These are indication of lack of ethics and philosophy of true sportsmanship among athletes and sports administrators. It is therefore necessary that as forecasts are proposed for vision 2020 due consideration should be given to an ethic and philosophy of competition since competition is the means by which our aspiration in sports is consummated.

EXAMINATION OF THREE CONTEMPORARY ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF SPORT COMPETITIONS

There seems to be three main ethics and philosophies of competition that pervades the sport world. Sport administrators and athletes have based their belief on any of them.

1 **Winning is not everything but the only thing:** Scott (1974) identified a sport competition ethic which says that "winning is not everything but the only thing. Put in another form, Eitzen (1995) calls it a win-at-all-cost philosophy that pervades sport at all levels. This ethic has been around for many years and emphasizes that athlete should be product oriented with excellence of outcome as the first and perhaps the only justifiable goal. This ethic and philosophy has been associated with a rigid structure in which an authoritarian coach has absolute control over every aspect of the activity. Such belief system is consistent with an environment in which self-sacrifice is applauded and often manifested. Participants are encouraged to perform while injured and use of illicit drugs to enhance performance is rampant. Coaches who subscribe to such ethics teach their athletes that opponents should be viewed as

obstacles to be overcome rather persons to be appreciated for necessary and important challenges. In assessing the impact of this product oriented competition ethic, Scott 1974 asserts that it has been associated with great success and responsible for much excellence seen in sport.

Winning is the only thing philosophy of competition is responsible for overemphasis on winning which induces antisocial behaviours. Bundreau and Konzak (1991) observed that ethical problems associated with sport increases when winning is the only thing. Smith and Smoll (1996) reported that a coach secretly injected oranges with amphetamines and then fed them to his unknowing 12 years old football players to get them up for games. The resultant effect of over-emphasis on winning is increased rate of cheating and gamesmanship, which has its foundation in Mertons anomie theory. Merton (1968) posited that deviant methods are used to gain a cultural goal when everyone cannot attain it. It is the combination of cultural emphasis on winning and the social structure, which produces intense pressure for deviation. Given the increased cultural emphasis on winning and given that only one team in a given day will win, the structural conditions are created which should produce a number of cheaters. Winning matters and it is the immediate goal of every competition but when the doctrine of winning is the only thing if practiced it removes the beauty and joy of competitions.

2 *Winning is not everything, it's nothing:* In contrast to the win-at-all-cost belief is a counter cultural ethic, which has just evolved. It stresses the importance of sport as a medium for human development. Leonards (1975) posited that this contrasts the "winning is the only thing" ethic. The believers in this ethic tagged it winning is not everything, it's nothing. This belief stems from the Olympic creed which states that the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to participate. It is consistent with the philosophy that just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle.

The essential thing according to Josephson (1999) is not to have conquered but to have fought well. Within such a framework the most important question put to the individual is how did you feel rather than who won. Since the process is emphasized in contrast to the outcome, there is less rigidity by the coach in decision-making. Within such a framework, players are encouraged to make all decisions (Laughlin 1974). Coaches play the minor role of resource persons in organizing and administering the activity. Advocates of this philosophy believe that sport first and foremost should be self-actualizing, promoting fun, social involvement, psychological and physical well-being. When opponents are part of an activity, cooperation with and an appreciation for them is emphasized.

That winning is not everything is somewhat unrealistic because to ask athletes who train for two or four hours a day to act as though winning is unimportant is meaningless. No committed athlete, whose passion, energy and time are invested in a sport will succumb easily to the rhetoric that claims winning does not matter.

Quality sport programmes should not trivialize the desire to win or the importance of actually winning (Josephson, 2004). Sport is not separate from the world in which it occurs. Sport is a minor of Nigerian life. Nigerian life seems to be based on competition, which permeates all her institutions. Sport should be promoted as a medium through which important cultural values are acquired and perfected.

3 *Winning is not everything but is important with honour:* A third philosophical framework which, Scott (1974) calls the radical ethic is a compromise position between the two ethics discussed earlier. It proposes that nothing is wrong with competition but, that there is need for a balance between the win-at-all-cost mentality and the winning is meaningless belief. This approach brings symmetry to process-product emphasis by promoting the idea that both are linked and that neither is meaningful alone. Victory, which is tainted by violating the rules or exhibiting poor sportsmanship, is tarnished. By the same token playing without striving for victory devalues competition and limits the challenge sought by an opponent. In this instance, competition requires cooperation if both the process and the outcome is to be meaningful. An example of this ethic was illustrated several years ago in a tennis match between Steffie Graf and Monica Seles. Both players struggled for every point in a three set match. Both maintained equanimity throughout, and in the end Graf was victorious. The sense of the crowd was that both had participated in a noble endeavour. Each challenged other to become better.

Given these major ethics and philosophy of competition, what is important is how much emphasis should be placed on competition while pursuing excellence and dedicating oneself to an activity. Certainly achievement becomes meaningful only when a worthwhile challenge is met by employing effective and honourable means. Having examined these philosophies and ethics of competition, the question that follows is what ethic should govern and guide vision 2020 to ensure a qualitative result oriented and excellent performance.

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS OF COMPETITION IN NIGERIA

Nigerian society places a high premium on individual and group excellence. This excellence must be closely supported with a challenging, and competitive environment (Gano-Overway 1999). Competition has long been considered a tool for measuring excellence in our culture whether it is in business, scholastic achievement or in the world of sport. In our quest for excellence, sport administrators should be cautious not to create a competitive atmosphere so highly; charged and intense that it becomes counter-productive for those it is intended to serve.

A philosophy aims at sportsmanship both in the boardroom and playground should be adopted. It should focus on sportsmanlike attitudes and behaviour of coaches and athletes. This philosophy suggests a more thoughtful approach to creating ethical standards within a team or games association. It emphasizes provision of guidelines for appropriate behaviour of sports participants.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sport development and excellence in sport cannot be realistic without a philosophy and ethic of competition. Of paramount importance for leadership in sport is that it should be governed precisely by good ethics. If sport is to reflect the aspirations of Nigerians, it should be piloted by a good ethics, which emphasizes striving for excellence and achieving victory with honour. Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to recommend as follows:

- i) A reward system should be introduced where the best behaved team/clubs are recognized.
- ii) Reward should be put in place for excellent fan behaviour to avoid rascality and violence after competitions.
- iii) Sport skill acquisition centres such as sports academics should be established in various locations of the country to forestall players seeking to win at-all cost.
- iv) Sportsmanship education should be introduced during training sessions.
- v) Supporters club and fans should be educated to instill a right philosophy for sport competitions.

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