

Grounding Sport in Universal Moral Values to Support International Peace

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Abstract

A focus on improving peace throughout the world is admirable, dutiful, and realistic. The long history of war throughout human kind serves as evidence that the eradication of major conflict in the present or future is naïve. Efforts, however, to support the progress toward peace should be continual and pursued through multiple mediums including sport. Sport's natural battle-like competition driven environment seems counter-supportive of a peace promoting medium unless there is a genuine commitment from sport managers to manage sport in a way that allows it to serve as a common harmonizing bond between all human beings. The success of sport as an effective medium to promote world peace calls for the focus on excellence over winning-at-all-costs, moral values that support actions to make the most amount of people happy, and establishing a trust through sport that can be transferred to larger dialogue supporting peace.

Keywords: Moral values, peace, international relations, sport

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Ideological differences commonly found in the form of religion, culture, politics, and traditions have consistently been the root of war throughout history (Paez et al., 2016). The persistence of global discord, grounded in deeply seated ideological differences as pointed out by Strath (2006) supports the notion that the eradication of global conflict is unrealistic even under the best present day aspirations to achieve peace. An approach toward peace that, in fact, is possible is one that endeavors to consistently support progress toward peace. Regardless of the pace of progress toward peace or the intensity of its perceived regression, achieving progress toward peace is always realistic. Sport offers a platform that can support such progress toward international peace (Kidd, 2011). In knowing that sport is not an absolute solution but rather a platform that can improve peace, it can serve as a useful tool to support the long-term peace process between nations. Central to the potential of sport to support the peace process, is the fact that it includes myriad interactions across various hierarchies and demographics of peoples, culminating in a sporting competition that further expands interactions. The effectiveness of sport as a platform to support peace is dependent on its grounding in moral values. Essential to the morality of sport is an intrinsic commitment to peace through sport, first and foremost by senior sport officials followed by a similar commitment by sporting participants and support personnel. Equally essential, and not to be confused with aggressive competition, is the need to diminish the not uncommon winning-at-all-costs approach to competitive sport, which is not supported by universal moral values. Utilitarian moral theory's greatest happiness principal's (Mill, 1863/1969) and sport share a universality that when applied appropriately can support progress toward peace between nations. Key words: sport management, ideological differences, international peace, utilitarian moral theory

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Sport, as a platform to help support international peace is a worthy one. In a world filled with conflict, platforms to help reduce serious conflict should be considered. Circumstances contradicting peace may range from argumentative disagreements to physically violent wars. If sport can improve the lives of people by helping diminish circumstances that do not support peace, strategies to use it as such should be considered.

Identifying causes of conflict, whether it be a decline of moral values or otherwise, the fact exists that the ultimate form of conflict, war, has persisted over time. Warfare, according to O'Connell, (1989) has taken place from prehistoric to modern times and thus represents the generational timelessness of war.

Any decline in societal morality is one, and only one, possible explanation for disharmony and war in the world today. Whether or not societal moral values across the globe have eroded to a point unmatched in history is debatable. Not debatable is the fact that actions void of morality have always existed and continue to exist throughout societies.

Affirming the comparative state of moral values of the present and the past requires agreed upon opinions across generations and societies relative to the status of societal values then and now, which is difficult to attain. Most all can agree, however, that current immoral human behavior leading to violent conflict is reflective of a state of moral values across the world that has wide room for improvement. Regardless of the current state of global moral values

and how it may relate to the present state of violence throughout the world when compared to the past, if sport can be used to improve peace, efforts should be put forth to use it to do so.

Global Conflict and Realities of Absolute Peace

The eradication of global conflict across the world is unrealistic under any approach.

War has a long history of consistently taking place across the world (Oyos, 2017). Historically the root of war can be found in ideological differences including but not limited to religion, culture, politics, and traditions (Paez et al., 2006).

Although major global wars reflect the most extreme disharmony, minor interpersonal conflict is omnipresent and can grow into larger conflict. Regardless of the enormity of a conflict, its intensity, duration, and type is in a constant state of change. Advances in technology, serves as just one example that has offered new temptations, which have resulted in a modern day global decline of humanity (Christen et al., 2017). Unfortunately, global conflict is always present in some form.

Acknowledging the inevitability of conflict throughout the world, might be the first step in coming to terms with an approach toward peace. Even under the best present day intentions to achieve peace, one would be naïve to assume that peace can exist in complete absence of conflict across the world. However, one would be equally naïve to believe efforts to achieve peace cannot lead to a more peaceful world.

Even though achieving absolute piece through sport or any medium is unrealistic, progressing toward peace is realistic when endeavoring to improve the state of peace throughout the world. Knowing that the complete removal of global conflict is unrealistic under any approach to peace establishes a realistic understanding of the challenge at hand: to place a steady stream of efforts toward the improvement of peaceful relations across the world. Achieving progress toward peace is always realistic regardless of the intensity or pace at which progress is taking place. Engaging in efforts to prevent conflict from beginning and deescalating current conflicts is realistic and admirable in the name of improving peaceful relations across the world. Sport is just one of many mediums that can be helpful in achieving the realistic goal of improving peace and helping diminish the wide range of discord in the world today.

Sport as a Positive Interpersonal Experience

If channeled appropriately, positive interactions can create a beginning to help support further peace related communications (Amusa et al., 2013). Sport, according to Amusa et al. (2013) bridges relationships across social, economic and cultural divides and can help prevent international conflict. Sport's value, in part, to help support peace across nations, lies in its wide range of interpersonal interactions that are inherent to not only the actual sporting contests, but also the extensive organizing required to arrange sporting contests. Sport offers the potential for many positive interactions with people involved in the sporting process that includes the sporting community. The sporting community, as defined by Schneider (2010) are "those involved in sport, including but not limited to players, family and friends of players, coaches, fans, athletic directors, and general managers" (p. 96). An overall goal of creating myriad interpersonal interactions allows for healthy impressions and experiences through the platform of sport. If sport is to effectively serve as a platform to improve

international peace, it must resonate feelings of satisfaction and happiness across the sporting community.

Apparent Irony of Sport's Ability to Promote Peace

Given competitive sport's less than peaceful reputation, the apparent irony of it as a platform for peace is understandable. By its very nature, competitive sport centers on conflict. Opposing teams are guided by leaders who develop sophisticated strategies to overcome their opponents in contests that pit one team against another. Victorious teams, reign superior until they are overthrown by another opponent.

It is often the rogue behaviors of some involved in sport that result in a perception that sport is unhealthy and immoral. When those involved in sport are directed to engage in win-at-all-cost tactics, regardless of their morality, the perception of sport can become one associated with immorality that can include violent behaviors. However, actions not within the parameters of the rules of sport, are not endorsed by governing bodies, and therefore, cannot be considered characteristics of organized sport.

Sport, as governing bodies have framed it, does not support genuine intent to harm an opponent for the express purpose to harm them. An express purpose of war, however, is to harm the opponent until one side surrenders and submits to the control of the victor across most all facets of life. Therefore the sometimes perceived similarities of sport and war are far from similar. Sport is a game that includes conflict within an agreed set of rules by a governing body and war is a conflict with the purpose of destroying the enemy until it surrenders and has no choice but to allow its entire society to be ruled by the victorious nation.

Three-Component Foundation for Sport as a Platform to Improve Peace

Sport must be received favorably across nations if it is to function effectively as a vehicle to improve international peace. To that end, if sport managers are to successfully utilize sport as a platform for the progress toward international peace of which Kidd (2011) speaks, they must assume the role of creating and implementing practices that support universal favor across the globe.

The likelihood of sport, through its organizations, serving as a medium to support peace between nations is good if the following three interrelated components can be met: (a) intrinsic commitment to peace by sport officials and participants, (b) developing sport as a moral values centered entity, and (c) establishing trust through sport.

Intrinsic Commitment to Peace by Sport Officials and Participants

A sport manager who is fully committed to creating a sporting experience that supports peace is necessary if sport is to serve as a medium for the improvement of peace. The sport manager can consciously include participants in the sporting process that supports the ideals of peace through sport. Those ideals must be practiced by persons nearest the core product of sport, i.e., league commissioners, team managers, coaches, participants, and support staff such as athletic trainers, and office personnel. The core product of sport, if grounded in the ideals

supporting sport to promote peace, will further expand sport's reach, as a medium to promote peace, to those less directly involved in its production such as fans.

Contrary to peace promoting behaviors by sporting officials, entrapment in an immoral system is bound to elicit moral behaviors from its members (Yunxiang, 2014). An immoral approach to sport, does not support the use of sport as an effective medium to advance peace.

It is the sport leader who must establish the morality of a sport organization. As pointed out by Makela (2007) control relevant to moral responsibility is possessed by individuals. Organizational leaders need to know that their standards and behaviors are what most affect the organization's ethical culture and employees' behavior (Beeri et al., 2013). Leadership has been identified to be a precursor to morality in organizations (Pitcher-Verdorfer et al., 2015). It is the leaders of sport organizations and the participants in sporting competitions who define a sporting organization as moral or immoral. When leadership establishes the expectation of actions that represent morality within a sporting organization, the sporting organization earns the reputation of one that is moral. Ethical leadership is an active civilizing force that encourages employees' ethical actions (Lee et al., 2017).

Sport in and of itself cannot be assumed to be a promoter of peace. There must be a genuine conscientious commitment on the part of sport managers to promote peace through sport. Sport is merely a tool that can be manipulated by its managers to progress toward a range of outcomes, only one of which is peace.

The morality of sport is dependent on the intrinsic commitment to peace, first and foremost by senior sport officials followed by a similar commitment to peace by sporting participants and support personnel. An active commitment by participants to use sport to promote peace is also necessary if sport is to be fully effective in promoting peace beyond arbitrary positive outcomes resulting from sporting competitions. Without an intrinsic commitment to promoting peace through sport by sport managers, sport will merely take place as a competition without the larger vision of using it to promote peace.

Winning at All Costs

A "winning at all costs" approach to sport does not support promoting peace through sport. Interpreted literally, "winning at all costs" includes actions that support winning irrespective of the morality of that action. Competing fiercely but always with respect for one's opponents is vastly different than a "winning at all costs" approach to sport. The former can support peace through sport, whereas the latter can promote peace through sport but only per happenstance on random occasions that do not support a consistent long-term support of peace through sport.

Although short term extrinsic gain might be realized through immoral behaviors, e.g., circumventing rules of sport or blatantly cheating to win, if a purpose of sport is to bring together persons of differing views and ideologies, sport as a domain that consists of immoral behaviors will not succeed in unifying those who already hold differing world views. The need to diminish the not uncommon winning-at-all-cost approach to competitive sport is also essential if sport is to serve as a medium to support progress toward peace. Not to be confused with aggressively competing to the fullest to win under the framework of the rules, winning-at-all-costs is not supported by universal moral values.

Aggressive Competition and Focus on Excellence

Excellence centered competition begins with sport managers who understand how to fiercely compete, yet do so in a way that is unifying across competitors and not dividing. An expectation of sportsmanship includes adhering to established rules (Cleek and Leonard, 1998). Fierce competition, is not uncommon, and when taking place within the framework of the rules of a game is appropriate and moral. Intense and relentless competition within the framework of the rules of a sporting contest, that for example include violent-like actions, are not to be considered inappropriate. Arguments against the use of sport as a platform to promote peace because of selected sports' violent participant behaviors are dismissed if those actions are within the framework of the stated and agreed upon rules of the sport. The violence in sports like boxing, mixed martial arts, and American football, does not disqualify the use of those, or other violent sports to be used as a platform to promote peace across nations. It is not the actual participant behaviors of any one sport that qualifies it to serve as a platform for peace but rather abiding by the rule surrounding the whole process governing the sporting competition.

Developing Sport as a Moral Values Centered Entity

If sport is to serve as a bonafide platform to support peace, it must be grounded in universal moral values. Peace requires a moral foundation if it is to exist. If a platform such as sport is intended to be used as a platform to support peace, it too must be grounded in morality. Sport can promote peace by helping people 'rehumanize each other through its ethics of fair play' and sportsmanship (Amusa et al., 2013). Unifying through universal moral values, inherent to all humans regardless of differences can help achieve the universal 'want' of peace by all. As such, Mill's utilitarian moral theory can serve as a universal guide to morality.

The Universality of Mill's Utilitarianism

Prior to applying John Stuart Mill's utilitarian moral theory to a sport setting, a brief understanding of its ability to span across differences in human beings is in order. The interest in all humankind, regardless of differences, to be happy supports Mill's utilitarianism and serves as an adequate premise supporting happiness across differing national populations. The interest of humans to gain happiness is shared by all humans regardless of variations of background and beliefs. The greatest happiness principle, which represents the foundation of Mill's utilitarian moral theory (Mill, 1863/1969) supports the interest of all humans to attain happiness, and therefore, is an appropriate guide from which to base actions across all human beings regardless of their differences.

Utilitarianism moral theory calls for acting in ways that support happiness across human kind, which is effective regardless of the size of a structure as long as human beings are a part of the structure. From large national governments consisting of complex hierarchies of people to individual persons living out their daily lives, using utilitarianism as a moral guide yields the same action based outcome of happiness. Whether utilitarianism guides large scale policy legislating structures such as national governments, small scale day-to-day actions of individual people, or intermediate size structures such as sport organizations that include leaders and participants who are committed to moral behaviors grounded in actions eliciting happiness, utilitarianism can connect with all of human kind. Competitive sport and its

respective organizations will also yield the outcome of overall happiness if guided by utilitarian moral theory.

Applying Mill's Utilitarianism to a Sport Setting

In terms of ensuring that utilitarian moral theory is helpful in supporting the peace process, the sport manager's role is to oversee its implementation within the sport organization. Centering the administration of sport on utilitarian moral theory can support the peace-related emotions of satisfaction and happiness. Given that happiness is a common interest held by all human beings, utilitarianism can be used by sport managers to exploit the common human interest of happiness by ensuring that those involved in sport realize happiness as an outcome of sport.

When using sport as the medium to help support peace across nations, utilitarianism endeavors to guide sport managers in establishing sport policy, which elicits actions generating the most amount of happiness across those involved in sport. All who are involved in sport can potentially achieve a degree of happiness through sport if sport managers assume a utilitarian approach to the management of the sport organization.

Establishing Trust through Sport

Happiness generated from sport can serve to help build trust across persons from different nations, which can begin efforts to support progress toward peace. The peace process requires trust across those of differing ideologies who aspire to improve progress toward peace. Distrust reduces the likelihood of agreements (Naquin, 2000). When a degree of trust exists across people with differing perspectives, it can serve as a starting point for dialogue that can lead to actions supporting progress toward peace.

Trust, according to Uslaner (2003), is a moral value that does not depend on past interactions with people. Unfortunately, however, the world seems to be filled with distrust and more often than not, the Russian proverb of "trust but verify" discussed by Daniloff (2016) seems to be the norm when it comes to leaders of nations trusting one another. Trust can also be formed between leaders who develop a history of acting in accordance with their stated agreements. Whereas the establishment of trust requires multiple trust-building interactions between leaders, it only takes one dishonest interaction to dismantle the foundation of trust. "Without trust, cooperation never gets off the ground; without trustworthiness, the potential gains from cooperation cannot be realized" (Simpson et al., 2013, p. 1531). Distrust between nations is dangerous because it is essential for communication and effective cooperation (Govier, 1992).

Sport can play a role in helping establish trust between participants. Even though the interactions that take place between sporting participants are not politically driven, trust can be established and subsequently transferred to a political domain, supporting meaningful political discussions (Kartakoullis et al., 2009). Trust is a prerequisite to meaningful dialogue among persons who are interested in progressing toward peace. Without trust, dialogue may be exchanged but it will not result in actions that help change impediments toward peace. Long-term planning based on action-oriented discussions can take place when participants trust one another.

More broadly, developing a reputation that is of morality supports trust. Establishing a moral reputation as a sport organization is accomplished through a consistent history of moral actions by individuals in the organization. When a sport organization, over time, has earned the reputation of being moral, the platform for trusting dialogue between or from those affiliated with the organization is established.

A moral sport organization is one that when the moral value of trust is assessed across its members, a collective organizational trust is determined to be present. Thus, when a sport organization is deemed to be of high moral standing, it offers a platform to help provide the trust necessary to serve as an instrument for participants who come from varying ideologies to begin dialogue that can help progress toward peace.

Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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