AGGRESSION IN SPORTS

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INTRODUCTION

The use of the word aggression is somewhat confusing. The term aggression is employed to describe angry violent behavior with intent to hurt a person or cause damage to property. Aggression is a behaviour that is intended to cause harm to another person. That harm could be psychological and/or physical.

According to Cratty (1989) aggression is behaviour and actions that usually seek to inflict psychological and/or physical harm, either on another person or on an individual’s possessions or dear ones. Bredemeier (1983) defined aggressive behavior in sport as the intentional initiation of violent and or injurious behavior. 'Violent' means any physical, verbal or nonverbal offense, while 'injurious behaviors' stand for any harmful intentions or actions.

PRECISELY

- Aggression is an act not a cognitive state.
- Aggression is not accidental; it is an intentional act to harm.
- Aggressive acts involve both bodily and psychological harm.
- Aggressive acts involve only living beings; harm to objects does not count as aggression.
- The receiver of aggression does not want to get hurt.
Aggression is classified as Hostile Aggression and Instrumental Aggression.

(A) HOSTILE AGGRESSION

Hostile aggression comprises those acts or behaviours, which really cause physical and psychological harm to the opponent. In hostile aggression the primary aim of the aggressor is to inflict injury on the opponent and make him suffer (Kamlesh, 2002). It can be verbal or physical or both. In this type of aggression, the player is angry and primarily bent on physically harming the opponent. ‘Although such behaviors have been linked to team success’ (Caron et al., 1997; Huang et al., 1999), hostile aggression is particularly controversial. It is not clear if it improves performance by increasing arousal to an optimal level or causes it to deteriorate by distracting the player from the task at hand (Cox, 2002).

(B) INSTRUMENTAL AGGRESSION

Instrumental aggression, on the other hand, denotes actions that reflect simply trying-hard and employing strong tactics without accompanying desire to injure another person (Kamlesh, 2002). Instrumental aggression refers to behaviour that uses aggression to achieve a particular goal and is not used for the purpose of hurting another individual.

The competitive nature of sport ensures that aggressive behaviour will often be seen. However, some aggression is desirable in sport and some is unacceptable. Aggression usually involves an attempt to harm the opponent physically and/or mentally. In sport we can consider an act to be aggressive if the intention is to harm a person outside the laws of the event, such as punching an opponent in football. This is an example of hostile aggression and is totally unacceptable. Another form of aggression occurs when a player uses aggression not primarily to hurt the opponent, but as a means to an end. This is known as instrumental aggression and occurs, for example, when pushing an opponent out of the way in order to receive the ball. Both hostile and instrumental aggression, however, fall outside the accepted rules of most sporting activities and would not be encouraged.

AGGRESSION IN SPORT

There has been increasing evidence in popular sport literature of sport becoming more violent among athletes, coaches, and spectators (Bamberger, 1999; Swift, 1999). Violence has dominated the sport world in recent years from the conspiracy of murder charges against Carolina Panthers football star Rae Carruth in the slaying of his girlfriend and child to the aggressive act of violence administered by Cleveland Browns offensive lineman Orlando Brown when he attacked an official (Bamberger, 1999). One sport in particular that has been plagued by excessive athlete-on-athlete acts of violence and aggression is the sport of ice hockey. Hockey recently has received another ‘black eye,’ when prosecutors in Lake County, Illinois, charged a 15-year-old player with two counts of aggravated battery after he allegedly delivered a crosscheck from behind that left another 15-year-old paralyzed from the chest down (Swift, 1999). Cross-checking from behind in hockey is defined as hostile aggression (e.g. a cheap shot with the intention to harm another). However, in a sport such as hockey, a hard but clean check is considered a desirable or ‘good’ aggressive act, without intention to do harm. Silva (1980), in a
field experiment, found that subjects who exhibited aggressive behavior and were thus behaviorally aroused, showed poorer performance than did subjects who did not exhibit aggressive behavior. This effect was found for performance in a laboratory on a pegboard task and for performance in an actual game of "3 on 3" basketball.

Kerr (1999) studied the role of aggression and violence in sports. His paper is intended as a response to the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) Position Stand on aggression and violence in sport. It challenges several arguments presented in the ISSP Position Stand and offers counter arguments designed to clarify the real nature of aggression and violence in sport. Specific criticisms of the Position Stand include the failure to understand the nature of aggression and violence in sport, the lack of distinction between athletes and spectators, conclusions about the influence of the media, and blaming officials for making errors that provoke aggressive acts. In his conclusions Kerr (1999) suggests that the ISSP recommendations for dramatically reducing the incidence of aggression and violence in sport be radically revised and redrafted.

Kirker et al. (2000) conducted an investigation of the dynamics of aggression by direct observations in ice hockey and basketball. There have been significant problems in the study of sports aggression, and they are linked to how aggression has been defined, measured, and analyzed. Following a review of the whole domain, the study aimed to construct a theoretically coherent and ecologically valid framework for research on processes underlying sports aggression and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the area. An exploratory method using computer observational analysis as the primary research method, along with complementary questionnaires and personal reflections, considered aggression in two sports: ice hockey and basketball. Data were compiled and classified by involved and independent experts relative to factors and behaviors associated with sports aggression derived from a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. Among the study’s main findings were: (a) aggression was instrumental in nature two-third of the times, (b) aggressive acts typically occurred in cluster and varied in frequency according to game circumstances; and (c) multiple variables and aggression theories were related to severely aggressive acts.

Folkesson et al. (2002) examined the circumstances pertaining to threats and aggression during soccer games as experienced by 107 provincial Soccer Association referees. Three sources of aggression were identified as emanating from: (1) soccer players, (2) coaches/trainers, and (3) spectators, and the main questions included threats of physical and verbal aggression. Incidence of threats and aggression had an effect on concentration, performance, and motivation including pre-match worries. Furthermore, the results were found to be affected by age, degree of experience, and life orientation of the referees. Younger referees were shown to be most subjected to threats and aggression. Referees with a generally pessimistic orientation experienced less motivation, worse performance, and greater problems coping with aggressive behaviour from the sports audience compared with referees with a generally optimistic orientation.
FACTORS PROMOTING HOSTILE AGGRESSION

PHYSICAL FACTORS

• HEAT

• NOISE

• CROWDING

• ALCOHOL

These factors seem to be facilitators of aggression. They interact with other variables to produce aggression in situations in which the likelihood of violent behaviors is high.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

• Vicarious Reinforcement and Modeling
  – engaging in behaviors we see others rewarded for

• Vicarious Punishment (Hallo Effect)
  – avoiding behaviors we see others punished for (reflection of consequences)

• Role Models
  – bad person, nice person…

CONTROL OF AGGRESSION

Strategies to limit aggressive acts

• Goal setting is an effective method

• Punish aggressive acts

• Reward non-aggressive acts

• Responsibilities of players pointed out

• Relaxation techniques

HOW CAN OFFICIALS LIMIT AGGRESSION

• Assert control from the start of the game

• Enforce rules correctly
• Be consistent
• Punish aggressive acts immediately

CONTROLLING SPECTATOR AGGRESSION

• Positive role models
• Limit alcohol
• Restricted seating areas
• Reduce levels of rivalry
• Good quality refereeing
• Coaches not encouraging violent acts
• Responsible media coverage

REFERENCES


