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## Sports Violence

By Jonathon Hardcastle

In ancient societies, athletics and especially competitive contact games always have been rough,

but aggression in the past was tempered by an insistence that playing hard, playing to win, did not countenance playing to cheat and to hurt. One of the very first nations that expressed athletic ideals, were the Greeks. As enunciated by Pindar, the athletic ideal incorporated courage and endurance with modesty, dignity, and fair-mindedness, those elusive qualities the Greeks called Aidos. As sports became more specialized, the general populace increasingly withdrew into spectatorship. Sports history reveals that although Greek sports had increasingly marred by corruption and bribes, nonetheless they flourished in an era which witnessed the rapid expansion of stadiums and arenas under the Roman Empire. During the Roman Empire, violence in sports became the generally accepted principle and spectators not only endorsed it, but also embraced it as a social norm.

In recent years sports violence has become to be perceived as a social problem. Commissions have been appointed in Canada and England to investigate violence among hockey players and soccer fans. Numerous examples of violence in professional sports exist today, as counties like the United States, Canada, Greece, Italy and Germany, report court cases have been heard which concern the victims of violence perpetrators. Newspapers, magazines and television programs portray bloodied athletes and riotous fans at hockey, boxing, football, soccer, baseball, and basketball games with what appears to be increasing regularity. But are sports violence incidents actually increasing, and if so, what is the reason of such a negative increase? Or does the heightened public attention and media focus on sports violence reflect not an increase in the incidence or severity of aggression, but greater public concern with moral issues and political discourse?

Contrary to popular belief, there appears to be growing dissatisfaction with sports violence. Changes in sports rules, developments in the design of equipment, and even the physical characteristics of modern sports arenas evolved in an effort to reduce violence or its consequences. But still, among athletic management teams, government officials, fans and athletes themselves, there is an ambivalence attitude towards sports violence. The ambivalence takes the form of justifying the existence of violence in sports, but not taking personal responsibility for it. Coaches and managers tend to blame fans, saying that violence is what attracts people into stadiums, as the risk entailed makes the game more "interesting". Athletes frequently admit that they are opposed to violence, but it

## Sports Violence

is expected of them by coaches. Fans justify it by attributing aggressiveness to athletes and to situational aspects of the game. Spectators view violence as an inherent part of some sports as one cannot play games like hockey or football, without accepting the necessity of violent action.

Nevertheless, public opinion tends to focus more and more on sports violence as major advances in the technologies used have increased media coverage making information available to a vast global audience. Thus, contemporary critics tend to consider sports violence as a worldwide phenomenon with highly disturbing future course and social outcomes.

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### **Aggression And Violence In Sports**

#### **By Jonathon Hardcastle**

For anyone living in the American society, it does not take a sociologist or a political scientist to call attention to which extend sports has permeated the American way of life. Newspapers devote an entire section of their daily editions to the coverage of sports such as golf , football, soccer, and more. Newsprint about sport surpasses even that given to economy, politics, or any other single topic of interest. Television brings into contemporary households over 1,200 hours of live and taped sporting events every year, sometimes disrupting the usual family life and other times it provides a collective focus to a family's attention.

Whether involved as spectators, participants, or sponsors, sport has been given an ideological foundation through the development of a belief system that outlines the supposed merits of sport. Sociologists support that sports open the door for the formation of amicable relationships between players, communities, racial groups, and even nations. Although sport has emerged as a relatively important element of people's dominant value system and has received unquestionable support from the vast majority over the globe, sports violence has not been accepted as a necessary ingredient of athletic societies. Since it is popularly believed that sports build character and provide outlet for aggressive energy, scholars have studied the implications of sport violence and scientists have come up with a number of theories to explain how human aggression brings violence into the sphere of sports.

## Sports Violence

Although the terms "aggression" and "violence" are frequently coupled in psychological reviews and books, an overt distinction between them is rarely drawn. According to Gerda Siann, a behavioral scientist, who attempts to separate the two terms, "Aggression involves the intention to hurt or emerge superior to others, does not necessarily involve physical injury (violence) and may or may not be regarded as being underpinned by different kinds of motives" (Siann, 1985).

In other words, violence may occur as a result of aggressive intent. This leads to another question; is violence always a result of aggressive intent? If violence is to be defined as the use of greater physical force or intent, is it possible to cite instances where such physical force is used to injure others without aggression being involved? If aggression is seen as the intentional infliction of injury to others, then any violence act must, if intended, be regarded as aggressive, according to the summative description Siann has proposed for aggression. This hypothesis, directly relates the issue to the theory of motivation. Sports are based on motivation theories since the core of athletic competition is linked to the human compulsion towards excellence and superiority. Thus, it seems logical to accept that sports are based on human motives (e.g. compulsion to win), which if not adequately fulfilled, can elicit extreme behavioral patterns (e.g. violent acts), which in turn are the byproducts of repressed aggression.

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