



THE COMPARISON OF AGGRESSION OF FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN DIFFERENT POSITIONS

DEGHANI MAHROKH¹, BEHTAJ AYOUB¹

Abstract

Purpose. Aggression is a negative personality trait that has been associated with sport participation. From a psychological perspective, aggression has been defined according to Baron's (1977) conceptualization of aggression as any physical, mental or verbal behavior driven by the intent to harm someone who is motivated to avoid such treatment. Because of the impact of aggressive behavior on athletic performance, the purpose of this study was the comparison of aggression of football players in different positions.

Methods. A total of 138 male football players completed the surveys. Two kind of personal information and Bredmeier Athletic Aggression Inventory were used to collect the information. In order to analyse the data was used ANOVA.

Results. There was a significant differences between different positions for the hostile aggression.

Conclusions. These results could be useful in any future attempts to predict and control aggressive behavior by coaches and sports psychologists.

Key words: Aggression, Football player, Position.

Introduction

Aggression is perhaps one of the most important problems in sports today (D.N. Sacks, Y. Petscher, C.T. Stanley, G. Tenenbaum, 2003). Much research has looked at aggressive behaviors in sport, trying to understand the processes underlying such an unethical behavior (B. Kirker, G. Tenenbaum, J. Mattson, 2000; D.E. Stephens, 2001; G. Tenenbaum, E. Stewart, R.N. Singer, J. Duda, 1997).

Aggression is a negative personality trait that has been associated with sport participation (L.A. Keler, 2007). The term aggression has been defined by R.A. Baron and D.R. Richardson (1994) as —any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment“ (p.7). Aggression is physical or verbal behavior; it is not an attitude or emotion (M.A. Mattesi, 2002).

According to a number of theorists (B.J. Bredemeier, 1985; J.M. Silva, 1980), aggression is divided between instrumental and reactive aggression. Instrumental aggression consists in causing a strategic nuisance to an opponent in a desire to hinder one's performance, such as a box out in basketball or a legal body check in hockey. Contrary, reactive aggression usually involves frustration or anger along with the intent to harm or injure another.

The primary goal is the resultant pain or suffering of the victim. Therefore, the focus of reactive aggression is to hurt one's opponent even to the point where the injured athlete must be removed from the game. A similar definition was adopted by

R.A. Baron and D.R. Richardson (1994) who operationally defined aggression in sport as ‘. any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment (p.0.7)’.

According to this definition, behavior may be verbal or physical and must be directed at another person rather than an inanimate object, for example throwing one's racket to the floor or kicking one's chair on his way to the bench would not be categorized as aggressive behavior, rather, they would be signs of frustration and anger (G. Eric, 2009).

Aggression in sport is commonplace (Bredmeier & Shields, 1986). Sports such as ice hockey, boxing, and football usually tend to be socially acceptable channels for aggression (M.A. Mattesi, 2002).

A large number of studies have been conducted examining aggressive behavior in the sporting context.

Although the results have been equivocal, the view of sport psychologists has been that aggressive behavior is negative, morally unacceptable, and may lead to decreased performance (M.D. Smith, 1983; J.C.H. Jones, D.G. Ferguson, K.G. Stewart, 1993).

The majority of these studies have found inconsistent results due to differences in definitions of aggression and various methodological approaches such as using archival data, self-report instruments, or direct observation (N.J. Brown, 2000).

There have been several theories proposed to explain

¹College of Physical Education and Sport, Gazi University, TURKEY

Email: mahrokh.deghani@yahoo.com

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the phenomenon of human aggression. The majority of these theories can fall into one of four categories: catharsis theory, instinct theory, frustration-aggression theory, and social learning theory (N.J. Brown, 2000).

A popular theory explaining aggression is the Revised Frustration-Aggression Theory (Berkowitz, 1965). This theory consists of aspects from A. Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory and Smith's (1972) theory on frustration and aggression. Berkowitz proposed that either frustration or another stimulus (e.g., threat) increases a person's arousal and anger levels, which increases one's readiness to aggress.

However, aggression will only occur if the person has learned the appropriateness of such behavior in that specific situation. In other words, aggression not only depends on the strength of the association between the situation and aggressive behavior, but also the degree of readiness to aggress and the presence of aggressive cues (Berkowitz).

This easily generalizes to the sport socialization process.

During an athletic contest, the potential for a frustrating situation is unlimited. Combine that with aggressive behavior that is rewarded by teammates, coaches, and parents, or vicariously learned from role models on television or during live contests, and the potential for aggression in sport rises exponentially (L.A. Keler, 2007).

Player position is a variable that has received very little empirical attention (W.N. Widmeyer, J.S. Birch, 1979). Little or no research has examined the relationship between field position and the occurrence of aggressive acts, and none specifically the sport of football. Again from a frustration-aggression theory standpoint, it would be acceptable to predict that aggressive acts would be more likely to occur when teams are either in their offensive or defensive zones, as opposed to the neutral zone of the field.

When attacking or defending their goal line, frustration could be at its highest as the team tries to score or stop the opposition scoring, as both situations involve the opposition trying to deny the team the goal of winning (through preventing the team scoring, or by the opposition scoring themselves).

This frustration combined with the close proximity of the goal line would serve to heighten emotions and possibly increase the chance of aggressive behavior occurring (N.J. Brown, 2000).

The general view of sport psychologists and a large number of the general public is that aggressive behavior in sport is morally unacceptable and should be eliminated. When considering the relationship between aggression and performance, there are several factors to consider (N.J. Brown, 2000).

On an individual basis, aggressive behavior, according to the cathartic theory, may result in decreased tension, which possibly could lead to improved performance. Similarly the heightened physiological arousal associated with aggressive behavior has the potential to either be beneficial or detrimental to performance, based on the individuals interpretation of this arousal. In the team sport context, aggressive behavior can act as a double-edged sword (N.J. Brown, 2000).

Aggressive behavior may cause a disruption to the thoughts and actions of teammates, and if the act is punished by officials, can result in a disruption in play (affecting the focus and attention of teammates), possible punitive action (receiving a penalty or being scored against), or having to play with one less player if the offender is sent off. Conversely, aggression can act as a rally call for teams. A bench clearing brawl involving all the players on a team could result in increased feelings of group solidarity and cohesiveness among team-mates which could transfer to improved performance on the field (J.P. Brunelle, C.M. Janelle, L.K. Tennant, 1999).

As the majority of research concerning aggression in sport is equivocal, there are no definitive answers relating to the relationship with performance. Further research, involving standardized operational definitions and research methodologies is required to fully explore and understand this area of sport psychology (N.J. Brown).

Because of the impact of aggressive behavior on athletic performance, the purpose of this study was the comparison of aggression of football players in different positions.

Method

A sample of 138 male football players, consisting of males (age 23.75 ± 3.51 years old; body height 177.72 ± 6.73 cm and body weight 74.68 ± 12.77 kg) are selected randomly from the statistical population of in league competition class two in Iran.

Measures:

Demographic variables. Participants completed a demographic information section, which included questions on age, weight, height, field position in football, team ranking in league, weekly hours they engaged in football, and the number of years they had been playing football. Participants were grouped according to their field position: defender ($n=32$), halfback ($n=58$), forward ($n=22$) and goalkeeper ($n=26$).

Sport aggression. The short form, the BAAGI-S (Bredemeier, 1975), has 15 hostile and 15 instrumental items. Items are answered on a 4-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strong agreement" to 4 = "strong disagreement." Lower



scores represent higher levels of aggression for each subscale. However, during the present investigation, scores were reversed so that higher scores would indicate higher levels of aggression.

Also in this study was compared aggression between successful team (top two team) and unsuccessful team (bottom two team in league competition). Demographic data was presented by descriptive statistics. Aggression of players in different field position was compared by ANOVA test.

A independent t-test was applied to compare aggression between successful and unsuccessful teams. Analysis was performed using SPSS 18.

Results

One hundred and thirty-eight football players were grouped according to their field position. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of age, body height and body weight of players in different field positions. Goalkeepers were bigger than other players.

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of hostile aggression and instrumental aggression of players in different field positions. The results of variance analysis of comparing groups in aggression variable (table 3) showed that there was a significant difference among hostile aggression of football players in different positions, but there was not a significant difference among instrumental aggression of football players in relation to play position.

The results of LSD test showed that in the variable "hostile aggression" there was a significant difference between goal keepers and forward players ($P < 0.000$), goal keepers and halfback players ($P < 0.001$), goal keepers and defender players ($P < 0.003$) and also between forward players and halfback players ($P < 0.049$). In other words the rate of "hostile aggression" in the goalkeepers was much more than other groups. After goal keepers the players of defense and at the end there were the players of forward.

Forward < backward = halfback < goal keeper

In this study, for the examining effects of aggression on sport performance, we also compared aggression between successful and unsuccessful teams in league. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of hostile aggression and instrumental aggression of players in successful and unsuccessful teams. The result of t-test analysis showed that there was significant difference between successful and unsuccessful teams in hostile aggression as unsuccessful teams had higher scores in this variable.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the present research was to comparing aggression of football players in

different field positions. Also, In this study we compared aggression between successful and unsuccessful teams.

The results of first study showed that the aggression of goalkeepers is more than others group. There are little reviews concerning aggression in different field position specifically the sport of football. An analysis by Brown of teams competing in the 1999 Rugby World Cup tournament



revealed that aggressive behavior occurred more in the neutral zone of the field, compared to the attacking or defensive zones (N.J. Brown, 2000).

In another study, Secunda, Michael D reported more aggression in players of defense and halfback in football (M. D. Secunda, 1986). With respect to behavioural repertoires, W.N. Widmeyer, J.S. Birch (1979) found that defensemen committed significantly more aggressive penalties than did their offensive counterparts.

C. Gee (2004) indicated no significant difference between the number of aggressive acts committed by defensive and offensive players.

The difference between these studies can be partially explained according to the criteria necessary to illicit a penalty (C. Gee, 2004).

On the other hand the cause of inconsistency can be expressed because of differences in methodology (archival data, self-report instruments, or direct observation), sports, age and the experience of the players.

In this study high rates of hostile aggression in goalkeepers and then defense players can be expressed in being critical situations.

J. Vallance et al (2006) found that Critically situations or situations that are perceived crisis from outcome, are associated with emotional responses (expression of anger and aggression). The other reason could be larger body size of goalkeepers and then players of defense (P. Lemieux, 2002).

The present findings demonstrated that unsuccessful teams had higher scores than successful teams for hostile aggression. This results are consonant with studies of J.M. Silva (1980), E.J. McGuire et al (1992).

Volkamer (1971) found that lower level teams were more aggressive than higher and moderately ranked teams. J.M. 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. J.M. Silva (1980) also noted that subjects who aggressed had lower concentration levels than did those who did not aggress.

The findings of this study is in contrast to N.J. Brown 2000 and M.L. Sachs, 1978. N.J. Brown, 2000, with comparing assertive and aggressive behaviors between successful and unsuccessful teams, found significant differences for assertive acts but not for hostile and instrumental aggressive acts. Successful teams had significantly greater assertive acts (M=145.58) than the unsuccessful teams (M=83.29).

Our study showed that players of unsuccessful team were more aggressive. The reason can be expressed as aggressive behaviors distract the attention of aggressive person and going beyond one's level of arousal from optimal. Therefore arousal, which generally accompanies aggressive behavior, could interfere with performance (J.M. Silva, 1980).

These results could be useful in any future attempts to predict and control aggressive behavior by coaches and sports psychologists. As aggression is result from heightened arousal levels, incorporating some arousal control techniques such as relaxation breathing or centering into **training** may **help** players maintain physiological and psychological arousal at a beneficial level.

Table1- the means and standard deviations of age, body height and body weight of players in different field positions

Field position	N	Age	Body height	Body weight
Goalkeeper	26	23/31 ±3/33	184/31 ±4/48	77/08 ±6/79
Forward	22	24/00 ±3/00	176/20 ±5/75	72/80± 7/37
Halfback	58	23/86 ±3/90	174/55 ±5/89	74/28 ±18/32
defender	32	23/75± 3/51	179/06 ±6/42	74/60± 5/15
total	138	23/75 ±3/51	177/72±6/73	74/68 ±12/77

Table2- The means and standard deviations of hostile aggression and instrumental aggression of players

Field position	N	Hostile aggression	Instrumental aggression
Goalkeeper	26	44/22±9/11	43/44±3/64
Forward	22	29/71±3/73	49/28±5/42
Halfback	58	35/09±5/75	44/57±5/22
defender	32	35/30±4/57	47/70±4/76
total	138	36/08±7/38	45/72±5/18



Table3- the means and standard deviations of hostile aggression and instrumental aggression of players in successful and unsuccessful teams

Aggressionteam ranking	N	mean	Standard deviation
Hostile aggression Successful team	18	34/333	5/606
.....Unsuccessful team	21	39/733	8/224
Instrumental aggression..... Successful team	18	45/867	6/057
.....Unsuccessful team	21	46/761	4/194

Table 4- The result of t-test analysis between successful and unsuccessful teams in hostile aggression and instrumental aggression

Aggression Variable		Leven Test for Variance Equal		T_ Test for Mean Equal			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean difference
Hostile Aggression	Variances Equal is assumed	4.320	0.045	2.346	37	0.025	5.400
	Variances Equal is not assumed			2.2.3	20.906	<u>0.038</u>	5.400
Instrumental Aggression	Variances Equal is assumed	4.895	0.034	-0.525	37	0.603	-0.895
	Variances Equal is not assumed			-0.494	36.192	<u>0.626</u>	-0.895

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