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## CORRELATIVE STUDY ON THE FAIR PLAY BEHAVIOUR OF ATHLETES, BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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### Abstract

**Objective.** The purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of education in the behaviour of athletes practicing performance sports. Ethics in sport means everything related to an athlete's behaviour during competitions and in social life and it reflects in the fair play attitude of athletes. Fair play does not entail only the observance of play rules, but it transcribes the attitude an athlete must have: respect for the opponent and the preservation of his physical and mental integrity, respect for the team-mates, for coaches, supporters, etc. An athlete will behave according to the spirit of fair play when he thinks about the others, too. Fair play is not only an ethical behaviour or a fortuitous behaviour; it *represents an entire code of morals, a psychology, a code of unwritten laws.*

**Methods.** Our research comprised 60 athletes practicing individual and collective sports (track and field, handball, rugby, soccer, volleyball) and whose behaviour was observed throughout a competitive year. The research methods used within our study were the literature review method, the observation method, the investigation method, the statistical-mathematical method. In order to highlight the relevance of education in the manifestation of fair play, we have used *The Fair Play Questionnaire* that had the purpose of measuring the way athletes think and act during competitions and in social life. The questionnaire includes 28 items structured on two subscales of 14 items each: fair play in competitions and fair play in society.

**Results.** Subscales may be used both separately (each subscale individually) and combined in a total score. The hypothesis is confirmed for all the three dimensions. The ANOVA value obtained for *fair play in competitions* is  $F = 3.525$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.017$ ), for *fair play in society* is  $F = 4.141$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.008$ ), while for *general fair play* is  $F = 4.556$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.004$ ) (Table 3). Consequently, there are statistically significant differences between the groups by the variable of education level.

**Conclusions.** The analysis conducted has confirmed that the level of education is important and that it influences the fair play behaviour of athletes both in competitions and in society.

**Keywords:** Ethics – Sport – Fair play – Education.

### Introduction

Sports competition represents the activity and place within which the physical, mental and functional potential of an athlete is valued. Due to the wish of athletes to attain the sporting performance objectives, the “competitive pressure” emerges, manifested in the expectations by coaches, team-mates, supporters, friends, family, etc. In order for the athletes to have a constructive attitude in competitions and to obtain the expected performance results must have a great self-control capacity highlighted through behaviour and attitude. The factors contributing to sports performances are biological, psychological, intellectual and they are

inter-conditioned with the technical, tactical, physical, etc. Within sports training, the coach *builds* the future champion by *harmonisation* of action means and methods throughout a competitive year, with a previous rigorous planning. Within the training of an athlete, the increase in his physical and mental potential is the purpose, meant to achieve adjustment to intense physical, functional and mental demands. The physical component is achieved through a continual adaptation process through a gradual increase of stimuli demands during practices. The education of athletes represents an important factor in obtaining sports performances and it has a determining role in overcoming certain difficult

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situations that may emerge throughout competitions, such as rapid decision-making during competition when applying technical and tactical procedures in different sports (team sports, judo, tennis, etc), hostile gallery, attainment of performance objectives, etc. The behaviour of athletes in competitions and trainings reflects most of the times in social life and private life. Hence, to acquire moral values and principles, we need a certain level of education. The constructive attitude and fair play of athletes represents an essential feature that *tops* sports performance and the spectacle provided by the contests within competitions. Unsportsmanlike behaviour is combated by applying sports regulations involving respect for team-mates and opponents, for coaches, play rules, decisions taken by referees and by training athletes from the perspective of three essential qualities: physical, moral and intellectual. In order to achieve the education of athletes for obtaining assumed and self-determined behaviour, the participation of several factors is necessary, such as: family, school and the coach to achieve the *education specific to athletes*. Hence, sports pedagogy emerges as a reaction to a social necessity imposed by sports phenomenon – of guiding and advising the educational content of practices and of sports competitions (Ceașescu, 2002, p. 167). The need to know the requirements of the sports phenomenon, to explain and generalise the experience accumulated in practicing sports, determined the emergence and the development of pedagogical thought, then of pedagogical theory, with the role of ensuring a complex professional training of coaches, necessary for the training of athletes. Sports pedagogy ensures means and methods to guide and cultivate the staff employed in the attainment of sports performances (Ceașescu, 2002).

The education of future performance athletes is based on the principles of sports pedagogy leading to a sizing of behaviour methods in training and in competition, regarding both athletes and coaches. The components defining sports phenomenon and imposing a study of sports pedagogy specialists, are stated through the requirements provided by training, competition, motivation and level of performance attained. The coach, within practices, besides the “physical modelling” of athletes, also ensure their education. Literature in the field of sport has noted that coaches can be major contributors to the moral tone held in the sport environment and athletes are receptive to the moral frame provided by the coach (Sandra Peláez, Mark Wesley Aulls, Simon Louis

Bacon, 2016). Thus, ethics and morals regulate human relations and are dependent on the type of society, ideology, conception of the world and life (Șchiopu, 1997, p. 274). Education is a will of generous love for the soul of another in order to develop its full receptivity to values and ability to achieve values (Spranger, 1930, pp. 341-344).

The education of athletes is not a process separated from general education; it is a long-term activity starting in the first days of life and with a lifelong duration and it has as objective behavioural and attitudinal improvement and self-improvement, as well as the improvement of individual performances in all fields of activity.

Fair play represents the most complex formula defining educated athletes. Fair play encompasses an array of athletes’ features, consolidated through education; loyal competition of athletes (without using prohibited / doping substances), respect for the team-mates, the opponents, the gallery, the referee’s decision, the unconditioned help from a competition partner – all of them represent aspects characterising educated athletes (Dragnea, Teodorescu, 2002, p. 61). According to a different interpretation, fair play is not only an ethical behaviour or a fortuitous behaviour; it *represents an entire code of morals, a psychology, a code of unwritten laws, both cavalier and traditional*. The scientific literature across the Globe provides a better insight into the phrase fair play, used most of the times with the meaning ascribed by the English sports ethics of the post-Shakespearean centuries. It represents a notion of multiple significations, thus expressing fair fight, an observance of written and unwritten rules, respect of the opponent, in other words, sports behaviour (Țopescu, 2003, p.10).

Upon delimiting the notion of fair play, “fair” means correctness, which may be cold, pragmatically accepted through education or deriving from spiritual, spontaneous impulses, which confers warmth and sympathy upon cavalier gestures. The first meaning of sports is sportsmanship; it accompanies athletes throughout their years of activity on the field and afterwards, beyond these years, for the rest of a person’s life. *Fairness* means first of all adopting a decent behaviour in daily life – though the term has been used more and more restrictively to the field of sports. Sports campaigns in favour of fair play are numerous. “*Fairness*” – as featured in the encyclopaedia of sports ethics – “shows that during sports competitions, people respect the rules consistently and consciously, despite all difficulties.” (Țopescu, 2003, p.11).



The philosopher Hans Lenk and the sports sociologist Gunter A. Pilz highlight that education according to the spirit of fair play should not be neglected in a society prone to becoming exclusively success-oriented. Education in the spirit of fair play encourages people to learn how to be calmer, more relaxed and more correct. Most of the times, sport is the same as life. The painter Vincent Van Gogh used to say, *you can find a spark of sun without pushing others in the shadows* (Hans-Albrecht Pflasterer, 6 / 2000, p. 30-31).

Besides the aforementioned features of fair play, it may be stated that it also focuses on observing the rules, on giving up on wrongfully obtained advantages, equal opportunities, preventive behaviour, respect for sports opponents and acceptance of others. However, fair play – as a fundamental sporting and moral attitude – is threatened today, (not only in sport, but also in other fields of social cohabitation). However, it must be taken into account that fair play provides authentic possibilities for a better orientation in a world full of competitive elements. Fair play is characterised by simple gestures and it does not entail only the observance of play rules, but it transcribes the attitude an athlete must have: respect for the opponent and the preservation of his physical and mental integrity, respect for the referees and the spectators, attitudes such as helping out an opponent fallen on the field, admitting a deviation, siding for an action, fighting against doping, etc. Athletes will behave according to the spirit of fair play when he thinks about the others, too. (Adaptation from the “Declaration of the International Committee for Fair Play”) Consequently, fair play is the word fully characterising sports behaviour and identifying with the notion of discipline, fair attitude, self-respect, respect for the others, including for occasional partners during a sports competition (DEX, 1998, p. 1012).

According to the theoretical argumentation presented above, fair play in competitions is largely dependent on the athletes' education level, an aspect which we propose to demonstrate in this study.

### Methods

The research methods used within our study were the literature review method, the observation method, the investigation method and the statistical-mathematical method. Upon analysing the scientific literature, it may be stated that nationwide, relatively few documents support scientifically the process of forming the fair play attitude of athletes. Sports

pedagogy may provide an important source of action means and methods through which one may teach behavioural skills and aptitudes to athletes. The literature review method was used in order to assess the level of documentation in the sports field and to highlight the research directions for solving the matters presented. The observation method was used throughout the study, both directly and indirectly. Through this method, we appraised the behaviour of athletes in competitions and in social life, by recording their evolution in terms of behaviour, in different settings, athletes interacted with various situations. Through the investigation method, we have designed, processed and applied the Fair Play Questionnaire, which had the purpose of measuring the way athletes think and act during competitions and in social life. The questionnaire includes 28 items structured on two subscales of 14 items each: fair play in competitions and fair play in society. Subscales may be used both separately (each subscale individually) and combined in a total score. Through the statistical-mathematical method, we have assessed the items of the Fair Play Questionnaire and we have analysed the results obtained.

### The research methodology

Our research comprised 60 athletes practicing individual and collective sports (track and field, handball, rugby, soccer, volleyball) and whose behaviour was observed throughout a competitive year.

The investigated sample is characterised by the following independent variables: gender; age (17 and 35 years old); sports branch (track and field, basketball, rowing, handball, volleyball); the number of years old where they practiced performance sport (4-20 years old); sports performance level (National Division, Division A, Division B, seniors, juniors); the level of education (middle school, secondary school, high school, higher education studies, postgraduate studies).

The dependent variables followed within our study are the fair play attitude in competitions and the fair play in society of athletes.

The study hypothesis. The fair play of athletes varies by their education level, namely that the athletes with high education level will obtain higher scores in this variable compared to those with a lower level of the training.

In order to assess this hypothesis, we applied ANOVA One-way upon assessing whether the means obtained by the 5 groups by the variable of education level differ significantly in what concerns *fair play*.

## Results

The application of the Fair Play Questionnaire

Fair play was measured through the Fair Play Questionnaire.

The Fair Play Questionnaire is meant to measure the way athletes think and act during competitions and in social life from the perspective of the aforementioned concept of fair play. The questionnaire includes 28 items, being structured on two subscales of 14 items each: fair play in competitions and fair play in society. Subscales may be used both separately (each subscale individually) and combined in a total score.

FPQ comprises 28 items; the subject had to choose a number from a 5-point Likert scale, a number corresponding to the extent to which the subject agrees with the said statement. Scoring is done for each subscale individually or for the entire scale, with the mention that some items are reversed.

When pre-testing this instrument, on the same sample of 60 subjects, we have obtained Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients overall 0.87,

while for the subscale 0.79 for fair play in competitions and 0.77 for fair play in society. Likewise, a test-retest correlation was not possible in order to assess the stability of results. Cronbach's alpha coefficients show good fidelity, high reliability of the tool, thus proving that the items of the scale measure diverse aspects of the same variable.

The analysis and interpretation of results was conducted using the specialised psychological software program SPSS. We have performed the statistical analysis of ANOVA one-way to compare the means by the variable *education level*

The hypothesis is confirmed for all the three dimensions. The ANOVA value obtained for fair play in competitions is  $F = 3.525$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.017$ ), for fair play in society is  $F = 4.141$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.008$ ), while for general fair play is  $F = 4.556$ , significant for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.004$ ) (Table 1). Consequently there are statistically significant differences between the groups by the variable of education level.

**Table 1.** Main statistics – ANOVA One-way for the dimensions fair play in competitions, fair play in society, general fair play, by the variable education level

### ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Fair-play in competitii	Between Groups	815,495	3	271,832	3,525	,017
	Within Groups	11257,998	146	77,110		
	Total	12073,493	149			
Fair-play in societate	Between Groups	623,118	3	207,706	4,141	,008
	Within Groups	7322,855	146	50,157		
	Total	7945,973	149			
fair-play general	Between Groups	2853,401	3	951,134	4,556	,004
	Within Groups	30478,092	146	208,754		
	Total	33331,493	149			

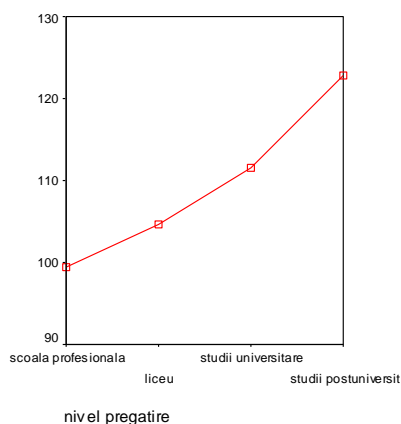
## Discussion

For the three dimensions for which the hypothesis was confirmed, we have tried to determine for which of the three groups – by the variable of education level – there are significant differences. To this end, we have applied the Bonferroni test.

There are statistically significant differences for the threshold  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $p = 0.031$ ) in what concerns only *general fair play* between the athletes who graduated from higher education studies and those who graduated from high school. Hence, the athletes which a high school degree obtain significantly lower scores in the dimension *general*

*fair play* ( $M_1 = 104.61$ ) compared to those with higher education studies ( $M_2 = 111.54$ ).

The results obtained are illustrated in Graph 1



The statistical data obtained show that there are statistically significant differences (overall) for all the variables analysed. Statistically significant differences between the groups by the variable of education level (only for subjects with a high school degree and higher education studies) were found only for the dimension *general fair play*. The existence of these significant differences overall may be due to other factors and less to the variable in question, education level, but also to the small number of subjects within the groups of subjects with middle school studies, secondary school and postgraduate studies. For *general fair play*, there are differences between subjects with a high school degree and those with higher education studies, meaning that those with higher education level have higher levels of morals/fair play development than subjects with lower levels of education. In other words, those with higher education studies observe the social and behavioural standards to a higher extent, because they act on their personality under the form of regulating principles for their social and moral behaviour, while this occurs to a lower extent for subjects with lower education levels.

In what concerns the identification of potential significant differences due to socio-demographic variables, it may be stated that they exist as follows:

- for *general fair play* by education level, there are differences between subjects with a high school degree and those with higher education studies, meaning that those with higher education level have higher levels of morals/fair play development than subjects with lower levels of education, because they act on their personality under the form of regulating principles for their social and moral behaviour, while this occurs to a lower extent for subjects with lower education levels.
- fair play, as moral dimension of athletes, is featured to a higher extent among the athletes involved in team sports than those involved in individual sports. According to the data obtained, the scores of athletes are lower than any of the scores obtained by athletes within other sports branches. It may be pinpointed that team sports favour an interiorisation of standards, rules, desirable behavioural methods, self-respect and respect for the others, to a higher extent than individual sports. It may be stated that, when the education level of athletes increases, their fair play level also increases.

The correlations found between the variables fair play in competitions, fair play in society and general fair play enable us to state that the athletes who display fair play behaviour in sports competitions will manifest the same type of behaviour in social life, too. The sports standards, rules and regulations, as well as the social norms and the social cohabitation rules put their mark on the behaviour of athletes, who interiorise them and who behave in this spirit of fair play.

### Conclusions

Due to the complexity and multi-laterality of the training of athletes, sport has a great educational value. Sport forms characters by acting insistently on the main educational dimensions – intellectual and moral. Any physical trait emerges in close connection with the mental activity, as an expression of the thought and will of athletes. Sports training has become an instructive-educative process with particular physical and mental formative features, with the goal of valuing as much as possible the human skills in order to obtain sports performance, which involves important morale and intellectual traits.

The training of conscience and moral behaviour is based on continuity in the formation of notions,



beliefs and moral behaviour, thus observing the action unity of educations factors (school, family, culture units), as well as the unity between the instructive and the educative process. The behavioural manifestation of athletes within his formation (training, competitions and social life) reflects his level of education / moral-volitional formation. We refer here to the moral component that emerges in the fair play spirit of athletes, in the perception and the application of this concept popularised and supported by all the competent bodies. The volitional component reflects in the results obtained in high-level competitions, by activating the willpower efforts in limit-situations, (overcoming physiological obstacles, accepting the decisions taken by referees, injuries, etc). Research studies have highlighted that the athletes *above* average level display tenacity, responsibility, stability in attitude, as well as ambition. For the athletes *below* average, as psychological manifestations, we note a narrow sphere of concerns, with a realistic, practical and formal character.

The analysis conducted has confirmed that the level of education is important and that it influences the fair play behaviour of athletes both in competitions and in society.

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