Can contemporary sport do without its ethics? – a need for systematic education

ABSTRACT

The aim of the survey was to establish the views of athletes (professional 38% and recreational 62%) on the ethics of contemporary sport. For the purpose of the survey, a questionnaire “Ethics of Sport” has been constructed. The survey has been carried out from April to June 2009 in two Croatian cities: Rijeka and Zagreb. The significant results obtained through adequate statistical methods confirm the recognition of ethical moments in sport in a sense of what is and what is not moral, and at the same time show the incapability of defining and inability of recognizing ethical dilemmas in sport, nor the way of their quality and systematic solving. This speaks in favor of necessity of systematic education in the ethics of sport (ethics in sport) and its implementation into the curriculums of the Faculties of Kinesiology in Croatia.

Key words: sport, ethic of contemporary sport, education

Introduction

There are historical and social periods in which particular burning human issues become the focus of scientific interest because of their social, humane and general relevance and urgency. So the modern society faces the bioethical issues, i.e. moral re-
flections and behavior regarding life in general (bios) in the conditions of fast technological and general development (Skledar, 2007). Considering that, it might be said that the time has come for bioethics and sport to meet in the sense of bioethical issues in sport.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy which studies the issues of morality. Its comprehensiveness led to the development of bioethics. More simply put, bioethics is a relatively new discipline which studies ethical issues arising from the development of medicine and biotechnology, as well as science in general. Its father, a biochemist and cancerologist, Van Rensselaer Potter II (Šegota, 2000) came up with the term "bioethics" combining the two words: "bio" and "ethics". He wanted to emphasize the expansion of biological knowledge with "bio" and emphasize the system of human values with "ethics". (Potter, 2007). In combination with ethics, believes Potter, biology leads into the future, and without the biological ethics, which also includes sport, natural order is disturbed and it leads into a world conflict with unimaginable dangers (Potter, 1971).

Although, as previously stated, V.R. Potter II was unquestionably considered to be the father of bioethics, since four years ago, more precisely since 2007, there have been certain indications that bioethics has its older European father. It is a German Protestant theologian from Halle an der Saale, Fritz Jahr, who is mentioned by a distinguished German bioethicist Hans-Martin Sass in his scientific work, and who is a founder and the first president of Bochum Center for Medical Ethics, as well as a co-author of the famous Bochum Protocol for Ethical Medical Practice (Sass 2007).

Ethics, and also bioethics, study the topic of social well-being i.e. the well-being of both soul and body, from particular aspects of values and norms. When defining the aspects of values and norms in sport, we can emphasize that sport is an activity of gaining power over one’s own body, i.e. the integration of body into the human project of play, creativity, expression, freedom, peace, exploration of motivational and accepted interpersonal relations. Ethical values are offered with having in mind that they are a prerequisite for good sports practice. Sport will not by itself generate ethical values (Aramini, 2009). Moral autonomy of sport is based on the idea of "free assembling" – voluntary contributions of the members of civil society – but is at the same time entrapped in the structure of the game which is by itself unacceptable or it has to be understood in the context of differentiating between the ethics of sport and sports ethics. Since we are concerned with ethical pluralism, we cannot in advance promise the expected power of persuasion of ethical reasoning. Sport is not a monotonous, uniform phenomenon so such a requirement would be pretentious. However, says Hosta, as physical education teachers (kinesiology) and sports coach-
es we must stand firmly on the ground of ethical principles, or we should at least be aware of the slippery ground we are standing on (Hosta, 2009).

When terms ethics and sports are mentioned and combined, or more precisely ethics in sport or ethics in contemporary sport, usually negative (unethical) aspects of contemporary sport are reflected upon. We are witnessing numerous unethical elements related to sport, such as: doping, bribery and corruption, games which are "sold" before having even been played, buying and selling of top players whose transfers are worth up to several million Euros, dominance of particular sports and at the same time insufficient investments into less attractive (read: less profitable) sports, insults on various grounds (nationality, gender, religion...) (Brkljačić, 2007).

When evaluating the significance of sport in politics, there are sports clubs in which athletes are there for the sport, i.e. physical culture, but there are also clubs which have a large influence on ideas and politics. So, nowadays, there are two types of sports clubs: those that most frequently do not have the necessary material base for their activities, and those elite clubs that have authorities behind their back which, through a patron, ensure them necessary material base for work and development. Such activities additionally emphasize the differences between mass and elite sports.

We are witnessing that sport meeting violence (non ethics) has continually proved to be socially and scientifically important. This mostly concerns fans’ aggression – hooliganism. There are numerous scientific and research papers dedicated to that topic, including a book *Sport and Violence in Europe* (Bodin, Robene & Heas, 2007), which assembles the most important topics relevant to the sport-violence relationship. Once established, the hooligan subculture does not remain unaltered. Particular participants and parts of symbolism change and some basic elements remain, such as masculinity, competition, rivalry, ritualistic intolerance, alcohol, territorialism, city, regional and national identifications. Thus far mentioned facts are only a part of the proof of the inadequacy of the education in ethics in sport which must be developed into a scientific but primarily educational guideline for children, young people, and foremost young athletes (Perasović & Bartoluci, 2007).

The change of political systems, peaceful and active co-existence, competition, national, religious and race discrimination are without a doubt political issues which necessarily reflect on sport, as well. Developments in sport, both in our country and throughout the world, confirm that. Nowadays, sport has become a means of propaganda in international politics. This can be seen in numerous developments concerning hosting world championships, Olympic, Paralympics and so on. It is also seen in the example of the Olympic Games which remind more of a series of numbers with a lot of results and financial reports than of a grand sports event (Simonić, 2001). Participants in the Olympics, just like athletes in general, have become fight-
ers for their country-nation's reputation. Sport has become a trial ground in which world blocks test their strength. Sports world is divided into sports major powers and "small" countries. It should not be neglected that achieving internationally recognized results represents a country in the world, i.e. top sports success has its specific product price in the developed world. This is the question of so called sports and cultural diplomacy, and developing the image of a country (Selhanović, 2007).

Even though it has already been written in the Second Epistle to Timothy (2,5): And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully (Novak, 2008) in the past decades we have witnessed the ousting of basic sports postulations concerning friendship, fair play, non lying and ethics which is speaks in favor of the crisis of sports ethics/ethics in sport, and primarily the crisis of an athlete as its subject.

With the aim of exploring the athletes' views on the ethics of today's sport in general, the focus of this paper has been on some basic questions and thoughts in the field of sports ethics.

**Method**

The survey has been carried out by means of an anonymous questionnaire "Ethics and Sport".

Respondents have been chosen randomly in the category of recreational athletes and respondents in the category of professional athletes were surveyed by purposely visiting their clubs.

The survey has been done personally, in direct contact with the respondents.

The first part of the questionnaire consists of socio-demographic information on gender, age, sport played: a) professionally, b) recreationally, number of years in sport and the years of education.

The second part consists of 14 questions. For the purpose of this paper, 4 relevant questions have been selected and analyzed. Respondent expressed their opinions on each question using a five-point Likert item:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

All collected responses were analyzed using adequate statistic methods of interpretation.
Respondents

The survey was carried out in the area of two cities in Croatia: Rijeka and Zagreb in the period from April until June 2009. The total of 100 respondents have participated, 34 (34%) women and 66 (66%) men, out of which 38 respondents (38%) are professionals athletes and 62 (62%) are recreational athletes. The average age was 29 (SD=11.96). The age range was from 15 to 58 years of age. The average numbers of years in sport was 12 years (SD=8.47), ranging from 2 to 38 years.

Statistics

For the purpose of this survey, average value, standard deviation and minimum and maximum were used. Kruskall-Wallis analysis, a non-parametric method, was used to analyze the data. Collected data are presented by graphs.

Ethical aspects of the survey

Anonymous participation in the questionnaire was voluntary which implies respondents’ consent. Informed consent as a core doctrine of bioethics was thus respected.

Results

For the purpose of the analysis, the respondents were divided into two groups: professional athletes and recreational athletes.

Statistical analysis confirmed the recognition of ethical moments in sport, as well the estimation of sports referees, coaches and athletes’ ethics.

When asked about the ethics of today’s sports referees, the respondents feel as following: 2% of the respondents strongly agree that today’s sports referees are ethical, 16.2% of the respondents agree and 32.3% respondents neither agree nor disagree. 37.4% of the respondents disagree that they are ethical, while 12.1% completely disagree with the statement that the sports referees are ethical. Question Do you agree that sports referees are ethical? has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes (χ²=0.49  P= 0.461). (Picture 1)

When asked about the ethics of today’s coaches, these are the results: 8.1% of the respondents strongly agree and 32.3% of the respondents agree with the statement that the coaches are ethical. 39.4% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree,
while 16.2% disagree and 4% strongly disagree that today’s coaches are ethical. Question *Do you agree that coaches are ethical?* has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=2.50\ P=0.095$). (Picture 2)

Respondents views on ethics of today’s athletes are as follows: 6.1% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement that athletes are ethical, while 37.4% agree that athletes are ethical. A high 44.4% neither agree nor disagree on the statement. 11.1% of the respondents disagree, while 1% strongly disagree with the statement that the athletes are ethical. Question *Do you agree that athletes are ethical?* has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=0.50\ P=0.441$). (Picture 3)

Considering the fact that the politics has entered the world of sport, there was a question regarding political involvement of the athletes. 3% of the respondents strongly agree while 13.1% agree with the political involvement of the athletes. 15.2% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. 33.3% of the respondents disagree, and 35.4% of the respondents completely disagree with the political involvement of the athletes. Question *Do you agree with the political involvement of the athletes?* has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of men and women ($\chi^2=0.22\ P=0.625$). (Picture 4)

Question *Do you believe that money is an incentive for better sports results?* was answered as follows: 48.5% of the respondents agree, while 21.2% of the respondents strongly agree that money is an incentive for better sports results. 8.1% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree on the statement. 17.2% of the respondents disagree, while 5.1% strongly disagree with the statement that money is an incentive for better sports results. This question has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=2.49\ P=0.090$). (Picture 5)

With the purpose of surveying the leading motivation of doing sports, the following replies were offered: *money, national colors, one’s own result, self-presentation*. 3% of the respondents strongly agree that money motivates engaging in sports activities, while 13.1% respondents agree. 15.2% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with this statement. 33.3% disagree, while 35.4% strongly disagree that money motivates them for engaging in sports activities.

Statement: *My motivation for engaging in sports activities is money* has shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=4.83\ P=0.021$). (Picture 6)
21.2% strongly agree that national colors are an incentive for doing sport, while 34.3% agree. 9.1% neither agree nor disagree. 20.2% strongly disagree, which means that 15.2% of the respondents disagree. Statement: *Defending national colors is my motivation for engaging in sports activities* has shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=6.66\; P=0.007$). (Picture 7)

57.6% of the respondents strongly agree that one’s own result is a motivation for doing sport, while 35.4% agree. 4% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree, 3% disagree, and 0% strongly disagree with the statement that one’s own result is a motivation for engaging in sports activities. Statement *My motivation for engaging in sports activities is my own result* has shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=4.04\; P=0.021$). (Picture 8)

10.1% of the respondents strongly agree that *self-presentation* (public appearance) is a motivation for doing sport, while 18.2% agree. 16.2% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. 28.3% of the respondents disagree and 27.3% of the respondents disagree that *self-presentation* is their motivation for pursuing sports activities. Statement *My motivation for engaging in sports activities is my self-presentation* has shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=5.74\; P=0.014$). (Picture 9)

Question *Do you agree with the ranking and privileged status of certain sports; such as: football is the second most important thing in the world?*, has shown the following views: 4% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement, and 22.2% agree. 2% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. 30.3% of the respondents disagree, while 41.4% of the respondents strongly disagree with the ranking and privileged status of certain sports, such as football.

This question has not shown statistically relevant difference between the responses of professional and recreational athletes ($\chi^2=4.83\; P=0.021$), neither between men and women ($\chi^2=4.83\; P=0.021$) (Picture 10)

**Discussion**

Growing concern about scandals and misuse of sport is reflected in everyday questions about its moral status.

Consequences of living in the world of profit, global moral crisis and penetration of politics into every aspect of life have undoubtedly reflected on sport, as well. Devel-
oping awareness regarding morality has become recognized as a necessity and obligation.

Sport, the example of the nucleus of moral values in the aspect of fair-play, has recently found itself in the center of immoral issues: success and prestige at any cost, even the cost of health; winning the first place because it is the only one that counts, doping scandals, contracts with mind-blowing figures; small and great sports, as well as small and great sports powers.

The following question arises: are we teaching our athletes and future athletes ethics, moral behavior, moral responsibility and moral values in general? The core question should be: can education significantly correct the consequences of morally sick society? Ethics education; ethics of sport should be conditio sine qua non of sport, but is there even one hour of training dedicated to it?

Unfortunately very little, with only a few honorable exceptions, even worldwide.

Although ethics in sport or sports ethics are seldom discussed in the sense of prevention, and frequently in the sense of consequences (negative aspects of sport: doping, bribery and corruption, sold games), both athletes and persons working in sports field can recognize unethical moments in contemporary sport very well. Views in the survey related to the ethics of referees, coaches and athletes best exemplify the abovementioned. 49.5% of the respondents agree that today’s referees are unethical, and only 2% agree that they are completely ethical. This is the consequence of many sports events in which referees, and not athletes, have ruled and determined (or better said selected) the winner.

40.4% of the respondents agree that coaches are ethical, while 20.2 believe that coaches are not ethical. It is interesting that 39.4% of the respondents have no stand regarding their coaches’ ethics, which indicates their reflections on the ethics of sport and ethics in general and raises a question: are today’s athletes even able to recognize ethical moments in contemporary sport. 43.5% of the respondents believe that today’s athletes are ethical. Also, 44.4% do not have the opinion on the ethics of today’s athletes, which also confirms that ethical (bioethical) moments and ethical dilemmas in sport remain unrecognized. The question is whether the respondents truly do not have an opinion or they never considered the ethical aspects of sport, what is and what is not ethical or dilemmas that are predominantly ethical, but they are not educated which is why they have been unable to recognize an ethical problem/dilemma in sport and sports surroundings.
More precisely put, the ability to recognize ethical moments may be defined through three types of ethical issues which an athlete or a person working in the field of sport may face:

- Moral insecurity – (s)he cannot place the problem in the context of social values, ethical theories, principles and rules
- Moral dilemmas – doubt because of several moral approaches
- Moral difficulty – (s)he can analyze the problem in the context of values, theories, principles find solution, but "higher powers obstruct them" (Merton, 1979)

Implications arising from the ideology of the material profit world can be seen through affirmative responses to the statement that money is an incentive for better sports results. 69.7% of the respondents agree, predominantly recreational athletes, while only 1% of the respondents is of the opinion that money is not an incentive for better sports results. However, at the same time more than one half of recreational athletes who participated in the survey do not list money as a motivation for sport.

In last years sport has been influenced by individual and business interests, as well as politics, so it has lost a significant part of its original nobility. Political engagement of athletes, or use of athletes for the interests of particular political parties are not rare nowadays. Political engagements of athletes are supported by 16.1% of the respondents, while 68.7% of the respondents do not support it. This confirms the moment of recognizing the transposition of authority in the sense of athlete-politician.

Omnipresence of politics in a certain way divides both the world and sport into "small" and "great" countries or "powers". Accordingly, there are great and small sports, or more exactly, unprofitable, profitable and ultra profitable sports, as well as athletes involved in those sports. This mandates the appearance of the ranking of sports, which is most certainly not the leading idea of sport. Unfortunately, it is the reality!

Ranking and privileged status of particular sports is not supported by 77.1% percent of the respondents, while almost a third of the respondents (26.2%) agree with the statement, predominantly men.

Research of the motivation to engage in sports activities show that in the end one's own result is the most important and main incentive for playing sports for 93% of the respondents.
Awareness about the necessity to implement the education related to moral values and ethics in sport, as well as the sports ethics, can be seen from examples throughout the world. For example, The Higher Education Academy, Liverpool John Moores University started project called: "Sports Ethics and Anti-Doping Education within UK Higher Education Sport –related Degree Programmes" with the purpose of efficient education on anti-doping measures and ethics related to sport. The imperative of this project is reflected in the purpose which is to inform sports workers, coaches, physical education teacher about all negative sides of doping and apply and implement "ethical sport". This would cultivate the future of our sport through implementation of physical activities void of all unethical moments which are destroying the core meaning of sport (Chester, 2008).

In the USA, for instance in Ohio University: The Institute for Applied & Professional Ethics there is a course "Sport Governance and Ethics" whose Learning Outcomes list Recognize Ethical Situations, and some of the topics include: hazing in sport, salaries in professional sport, violence in sport and pressure to win and the impact on ethics (Reese, 2002).

The USA treat sport in a special way and give it the role of a status symbol on the one hand, and an economic giant on the other hand. However, they also recognize the necessity of the ethics of sport.

Ethical dilemmas are as old as sport itself. As individuals we typically rather lose ourselves in the arrogance of the issues than identify them and resolve them with the help of rules and principles imposed by ethics in sports or ethics of sport. A sports ethics professor from one American college says: "In practice, some people learn about the ethics of sport and research it without additional, concrete cases and their sports analysis or, as students would say, case studies" (Stoll & Beller, 2006).

Quoting ethical principles: benefaction, harmlessness, autonomy and justice in sport, seem very simple, but is it truly so? (Brkljačić, 2009). Doing good and not harming oneself as an athlete, one’s club, team and sports co-player should be the meaning of playing sport. Autonomy and justice lead us into a more complicated sphere of ethics and sports relations.

Autonomy of each person, athletes as well, is his or her human right and the base of human life (Murray, 2004). Autonomy of an athlete is respected without exception. However, is an athlete going to make a moral decision each and every time? Sometimes, even at the risk of his or her own life – no! We have witnessed numerous athletes’ decisions such as going back to the field while recovering, training despite physician’s prohibition, doping with all its negative influence on health and its amoral consequences, and many more. Justice, on the other hand, has become more
and more questionable: are the 11 players selected for the football match really the best ones or is the selection defined by family ties, parents' financial status, political views? Is the starting point the same for the famous coach's son and an unknown boy from the outskirts? Is a doping control skipped on a "suspicious" athlete and the honest one is sacrificed? Why do small sports always remain small and will never become Olympic sports?

Out of numerous problems contemporary sport faces, ethically, doping is surely the biggest. Use of doping substances breaks all four ethical principles which form the foundation of sports competition (Murray, 2004). Established on loyal competition, sport is a school of loyalty, and ethics as well. Forfeiting loyalty destroys the foundation and strikes a death blow to sport, and this opens up the possibility that it becomes the meaning of popularity and material profit (Aramini, 2009).

Athletes using doping substances are in a position of unfair advantage in comparison with others. There is an atmosphere of lying among competitors (Morgan, 2007). This reduces sport, which expresses a *homo ludens* dimension (Huizing, 1938) and reduces it to utilitarian tool and interpersonal relationship are seriously impoverished.

**Limitations of the carried out survey**

One of the greatest limitations of the survey that has been carried out is the number of respondents, as well the fact that it has been carried out only in two Croatian cities. There is a possibility that the selection of different cities and participation of the larger number of respondents would give different results and opinions.

**Conclusion**

Ethics of sport has nowadays been characterized by the sense of loss and search for its own identity, which is also a great opportunity because it clearly shows the need for this science and enables learning on mistakes made. Ethics of sports should provide the exit from the crisis based on individuals in sport, including athletes, referees, coaches, or simply friends of sport and regulate the true spirit of sport thus making it possible to fulfill itself completely as in the saying *mens sana in corpore sano*, and not turning into an object.

Tendency of turning a human body into an object is supported by the narcissoid culture which has slowly begun to prevail in societies. This type of culture is characteristic for those who feel blackmailed and almost pressed by the insecurity the fu-
ture brings and want to fulfill their wishes now, achieving the best results in shortest periods possible. The consequence of falling into the ethics of narcissoid culture is an effort to present as good all that is possible and wanted. Everything becomes possible, even altering a human body which results in using doping substances as something normal, i.e. in the concept of sport as mere professional activity which is used to achieve technical and economic results.

Narcissoid culture and its ethics has spread throughout sport, thus imposing itself as the global sports issue, and global problems need global solutions which are impossible without building and establishing new network of global institutions (elementary and high schools, faculties of kinesiology, sports staffs) with moral norms and ethical principles which shall require reaching global consensus.

Although necessary, the ethics of sports or the ethics of physical education is rarely present in systems of education so in the outlines of public systems of education and their structure in certain European countries from the aspect of physical education (Leibinger, Hamar & Dancs Szegner, 2007) and it is not listed as a guideline in education. Although it has been stated that the changes have begun taking place in European educational systems which view physical education (the first encounter of the young future athlete with sport) and sport as a means of conveying desirable life functions (Green & Hardman, 2003). The principle of including such policy, which shall unite dual purposes of sports activities programs, is educating qualified coaches, the possibility of inclusion in periods after actively playing sports and promoting sports ethics from elementary school to levels of scientific research and its findings on appropriate level (Green & Hardman, 2003).

American sports sociologist Jay Coakley believes that sport is an important part of our social life whose significance and influence surpass the statistics of results and performance (Coakley, 2007). If it is true that sport is not much different from the society whose part it is, it is necessary to concentrate on researching its "deeper meaning" within the broader social context where the education related to sports moral values is absolutely necessary. This raises the questions why do people in a particular society give so much attention to creating top athletes following the principle of "faster, higher, stronger", what does that say about the system of values of a particular society, how does sport influence spreading the patterns of patriarchy, social classes, race, ethnicity, (un)equal opportunities, fair-play, violence and aggression (Perasović& Bartoluci, 2007)?

Elements which indicate that it is necessary to discuss the implementation of education in ethics in sport or sports ethics at the lower levels of education and particularly in the curriculum of institutions of higher education, such as faculties of kine-
siology, are apparent from the research part of this paper: recognizing ethical moments in sports (what is and what is not ethical), and at the same time the inability to define and recognize ethical dilemmas in sport nor the way of their quality and systematical solutions speak in favor of the aforementioned.

The relationship between sport and science which was established a long time ago is now undergoing intensive development (Milanović, 2009). Numerous issues arising from that relationship have found their place in the discussions in the relatively new pluri-perspective approach to challenges of biotechnological age – (bio)ethics.

Ethics and bioethics offer a platform for a dialogue regarding important issues of contemporary sport; dialogue which surpasses disciplinary, professional, historical and cultural positions.

Scientific contribution of this paper and its research is in pointing out the issues which, in sport, confirm the inadequacy of education in ethics of sport/ethics in sport and at the same time indicate the fragility of ethical positions given in the concept "mens sana in corpore sano".

The time has come to start evaluating the educational task of sport which brings to efficient acceptance of the priority of a person and his/her body. The best way of reaching that acceptance is through ethics. The moment of the necessity for education and establishing a course Ethics of Sport at the faculties of kinesiology is obvious.

The aim of this paper was to emphasize the following:

• to learn, apply and implement ethical principles in sport rather than carry out unethical sports practices which result in grave consequences

• more quality ethical education for all sports workers, coaches, referees, athletes and managers of sports clubs, sports committees, sports federations, etc.

REFERENCES:


Picture 1. Do you agree that sports referees are ethical?

Picture 2: Do you agree that coaches are ethical?
Picture 3: Do you agree that athletes are ethical?

Picture 4: Do you agree with the political involvement of the athletes?

Picture 5: Do you believe that money is an incentive for better sports results?
**Picture 6:** Responses to a statement: My motivation for engaging in sports activities is money

**Picture 7:** Responses to a statement: Defending national colors is my motivation for engaging in sports activities

**Picture 8:** Responses to a statement: My motivation for engaging in sports activities is my own result
Picture 9: Responses to a statement: My motivation for engaging in sports activities is my self-presentation

Picture 10. Do you agree with the ranking and privileged status of certain sports?