
Toward a theory of sport

For the sociology of sport to advance, a theory of sport needs to be developed. To create such a theory, the author combines a number of independent and dependent variables to form a group of interrelated propositions that can be empirically tested. Three independent variables are found to have a substantial influence on sport: the degree of emphasis on winning, the degree of emphasis on extrinsic rewards, and the amount of bureaucratization. Propositions are interrelated based upon these three independent variables. The propositions are tied to more abstract propositions within exchange and conflict theory. These propositions form a foundation upon which a more comprehensive theory of sport can be built.

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The sociology of sport, a relatively new field to sociology, has been in existence long enough to have collected empirical data on a number of propositions between many independent and dependent variables. These propositions are numerous enough so that we can take the next step of beginning to build a theory of sport. Jonathan H. Turner suggests that for the discipline of sociology to continue to advance, we need to create abstract propositions that hypothesize relationships between independent and dependent variables (1991, p. 7). Once these propositions are created, we need to see how they relate to each other where one proposition has an effect upon another proposition and so on. Furthermore, each proposition must be capable of being empirically tested (pp. 22–23). By creating, interrelating, and testing propositions, that is, by creating a theory of sport, we can advance the field of the sociology of sport.

In building a theory of sport, I searched for propositions in the sport literature that were either explicitly stated or implied and focused on how they interrelate. I began to notice that there were three variables that continually acted as independent variables on other dependent variables. These three independent variables are: (a) the degree of emphasis on winning, (b) the degree of emphasis on extrinsic rewards (e.g., money, power, and prestige), and (c) the amount of bureaucratization.

The change in these three independent variables promotes a change in many other variables that, in turn, causes other variables to change. See Table 1 for the overall theoretical framework. Notice that the three main independent variables are represented under the first three Roman numerals of the table where a number of dependent variables are affected by these three variables. Also, notice that Roman numeral four shows how the three independent variables are interrelated.

Discussion of Propositions

The Emphasis on Winning

For athletes. The propositions presented in Table 1 are not meant to suggest that an exhaustive theory is being presented here, but rather certain key variables are presented to act as a foundation on which to build a theory of sport. Consequently, as we continue to develop a theory of sport, we may, and probably will, come to see other independent variables as being crucial to the creation of a comprehensive theory of sport. The variables and propositions presented in this article provide a start.

I will elaborate on each of the three independent variables and their accompanying dependent variables to provide a fuller understanding of the theory. Concerning the first independent variable, the more the emphasis on winning, the dependent variables are grouped under the subheadings: for athletes, for coaches, and for the sport (see Table 1). As I extracted propositions from the sports literature, I began to realize that the emphasis on winning had numerous consequences on athletes, many of which were not intended but nevertheless affected athletes (DeFrancesco and Johnson, 1997). One of the consequences is the increasing pressure the athletes will feel to win (see proposition I–1). The emphasis on winning occurs in various parts of our culture, e.g., in business, in school such as in grades, debates, band contests, and so on. With such an emphasis on winning, there should follow a pressure on people to win. Accompanying this greater pressure to win will also be a greater fear of failure (see proposition I–2). Ball (1976) focuses on how, in professional baseball

Table 1

A Theory of Sport

I. Independent Variable:

The more the emphasis on winning,

Dependent Variables:

For Athletes:

1. The more the athletes will feel pressure to win.
2. The more the athletes will fear failure.
3. The more the playing time among teammates will be unequal (i.e., the more qualified athletes will get more playing time in a game while the less qualified athletes will get less playing time).
4. The more the athletes will focus on playing one sport.
5. The more the athletes will specialize at one position within a sport.
6. The more the athletes will experience injury.
7. The more the athletes will play while still injured.
8. The more likely the athletes will cheat in order to win (e.g., more violence, more breaking of game rules, and the greater the illegal use of steroids and amphetamines).
9. The more the athletes will experience role conflict in their daily lives.
10. The more time the athletes will spend at practice.

For Coaches:

11. The more the coaches will feel pressure to win.
12. The more the coaches will fear failure.
13. The greater the rate of firing of coaches.
14. The more the coaches will become authoritarian toward their athletes.
15. The more the coaches will invest time and effort in their position as coach.
16. The more the coaches will experience role conflict in their daily lives.
17. The greater the likelihood that coaches will cheat.
18. The greater the likelihood that coaches will exploit their athletes.

For the Sport:

19. The more the outcome takes on increasing importance while playing for fun and enjoyment takes on decreasing importance.
20. The less the sportsmanship.
21. The more that sport becomes like work rather than like play.
22. The greater the likelihood that coaches will teach or allow violence and athletes and spectators will act violently.

II. Independent Variable:

The more the emphasis on extrinsic rewards (such as money, power, and prestige),

Dependent Variables:

1. The more that innovative deviance will occur in sport.
2. The more the mass media affect sport (e.g., generating income, changing schedules, and creating high visibility for athletes, coaches, and teams).

3. The more that people affiliated with sport - such as athletes, coaches, team owners, and businesses producing sport related merchandise - will be connected to sport as a means to attain extrinsic rewards.
4. The less the athletes and coaches will participate in sport solely for the mere fun and enjoyment of playing and coaching.
5. The more the athletes and coaches will feel that participating in sport is more like work.
6. The more the athletes will be treated as a commodity to be recruited, bought and sold, and traded to obtain more extrinsic rewards.
7. The more the fans become an integral part of the game.

III. Independent Variable:

The greater the bureaucratization in sport (e.g., from informal and spontaneous backyard play groups by children to organized leagues and organized teams for youth to organized professional teams and leagues),

Dependent Variables:

1. The less the athletes control the game.
2. The more the adults or owners control the game.
3. The more the fans become a part of the game.
4. The more the keeping of records and emphasis on breaking of existing records.

IV. Interrelation of the Three Independent Variables:

1. The more that extrinsic rewards are introduced into sport and increase over time, the more there will be an emphasis on winning.
2. The more that extrinsic rewards become a part of sport and the more that there is an emphasis on winning, the more bureaucratization will occur in sport.
3. The more bureaucratization occurs in sport, the more that sport becomes a part of the larger process of modern rationalization.
4. The more that these three variables are interrelated to each other (i.e., extrinsic rewards, winning, and bureaucratization), the more that each promotes and perpetuates the other.

and football, there are degradation ceremonies and cooling-out procedures that athletes experience if they do not win or do not perform at expected levels (p. 728) and that they experience uncertainty and anxiety and therefore search for signs of how well they are doing (pp. 732–733).

Also, as there is more emphasis on winning, the more qualified athletes will play more, with the result that the less qualified athletes will end up, as is popularly said, “sitting the bench” (see proposition I–3). There will be ideologies created to justify the differential in playing time. Even with these ideologies socialized into athletes, there will still be dissatisfaction by many athletes who “have to ride the bench” instead of getting to play (Wankel and Kreisel, 1985).

Another consequence of emphasizing winning involves specialization. As the emphasis on winning increases, athletes will be more likely to play one sport (see proposition I–4) because the pressure to win will mean that there will be greater pressure on the athlete to become better and better at his or her sport. It

will be in the vested interests of coaches to have players who focus only on one sport throughout the year so that the athletes can further perfect their skills in that sport and also not get injured playing another sport. Moreover, once a particular sport is chosen, the athletes will be more likely to specialize at a certain position within the sport they play (see proposition I-5). For example, in the sport of football, they will not play quarterback in one game and center in another game. Rather, in order to win, coaches will assign athletes to certain positions so that the athletes become highly proficient at their respective positions. Higher proficiency means a greater probability of winning.

The emphasis on winning will also increase the number of injuries by athletes (see proposition I-6). With the pressure to win, athletes will exert an extra amount of effort to win. The extra effort on muscles and bones is likely to lead to more injuries (Alt, 1983, p. 104). Also, due to the increased pressure to win, we should see more athletes playing while they are still injured (see proposition I-7) because, if possible, they do not want to lose playing time by sitting on the bench. Until the quality of their performance drops below that of the less qualified players on the team, they may continue to play.

As there is more emphasis on winning, there will be a higher rate of cheating among athletes (see proposition I-8). There are a number of dimensions of cheating we can measure. For example, we should observe more violence where athletes will attempt to hurt their competitors in order to have a better chance of winning the game (Alt, 1983, p. 97; Bloom and Smith, 1996, p. 74; Klein, 1990, p. 176; Pilz, 1995, p. 391; Shields et al., 1995, pp. 333-334; Smith, 1975, p. 73). Smith, in his empirical study on Canadian hockey players, asserts that:

Players' normative groups' sanctions for assault are contingent upon a host of circumstances, many of which have to do with winning and losing. Violence is commonly seen as justified if it is a means to a desired end: and winning in athletics is one terminal value that underpins the use of violent tactics. For instance, when illegal violence enhances victory, as often appears to be the case, then the greater the importance of winning, the greater the legitimation of violent means (pp. 74-75).

Second, we should observe more illegal holding, pushing, hitting, and other actions that go against the rules of the game. Third, we should observe the increased use of illegal drugs that enhance the athletes' performances such as steroids and amphetamines (Anshel, 1991, p. 292; Frey, 1994, p. 112). Such increased rate of cheating supports Merton's anomie theory (1968), where deviant methods are used in order to gain a cultural goal when not everyone can attain the goal. As Merton notes, "It is the combination of the cultural emphasis and the social structure which produces intense pressure for deviation" (p. 199). Consequently, given the increased cultural emphasis on winning and given that only one half of the teams on a given day will win, the structural conditions are created which should produce a number of cheaters or what Merton calls innovators (Merton, pp. 195-203).

Moreover, as winning is increasingly emphasized, we should observe more aggression, confrontation, intimidation, and other

unsportsmanlike conduct as means to win even though these actions are not technically against the rules (Alt, 1983, pp. 103-105). The greater emphasis on winning will increasingly mean to win at any price, resulting in the decrease of sportsmanship (Pilz, 1995, p. 391). In his empirical study of 12-14 year old football players, Pilz concludes that "fair play is embarrassing in a success-oriented action" (p. 393). Consequently, he says what has developed in recent years is the "fair foul," that is, "the knowledge on the one hand of the necessity of foul play in the interest of success and becoming conscious of it; and on the other hand, not being ready to completely give up the idea of fair play, the juvenile football players establish the auxiliary construct of 'fair foul'" (pp. 393-394). In other words, cheating in some form in the interest of winning the game is more and more becoming accepted as what is defined as fair play (Eitzen, 1988, p. 20). Hence, the definition of fair play is in the process of being socially reconstructed in modern sport (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Smith (1975) concludes his study by stating that:

Seen in the light of the concept of legitimation, much of the legal and illegal violence in sport is in no way aberrant; rather, it is socially acquired normative behavior (p. 79).

Shields et al. (1995) conclude similarly as they found "a socialization process in sport that is supportive of an increased acceptance of aggression" (p. 333). Probably, the extreme degree of this process is when an athlete intends to foul and also physically and psychologically hurt an athlete of the other team in order to win. As winning is increasingly emphasized, another consequence we will observe, especially for athletes who are students, is the increase in role conflict (see proposition I-9). Ewing and Seefeldt (1987) found that two of the reasons why youths drop out of sports are due to role conflict: (a) sport was taking too much time in general and (b) sport was taking too much study time in particular (p. 66). Martin (1997) came to a similar conclusion where role conflict due to time demands in other activities led to athletes dropping out of sport (pp. 96-97). Martin also found that some athletes dropped out of sport as a direct result of "the emphasis placed on winning" (p. 98). As winning is increasingly emphasized, coaches will expect players to practice more. Hence, greater emphasis on winning will mean more and longer practice sessions for athletes (see proposition I-10). Other statuses that the players occupy will end up receiving less time, whether it is less study time, less sleep time, less recreation time, or less time from other statuses that the athletes occupy (Ellickson, 1990, pp. 12-13). For example, in Brown's (1985) research on why former female swimmers withdrew from competitive swimming, she found that three of the five reasons given were related to role conflict: (a) "the desire to spend more time with friends" (p. 117), (b) "the desire to participate in other activities" (p. 117), and (3) "the need to choose between available alternatives" (p. 117). Johns, Lindner, and Wolko (1990) also found that the major reason why female gymnasts dropped out of their sport was due to time demands (p. 159). We should therefore predict that as winning is increasingly emphasized, athletes will spend a

greater amount of time in their status as athlete and will experience more role conflict in their daily lives.

For Coaches

Table 1 also hypothesizes that coaches are influenced in numerous ways by the increasing emphasis on winning (see propositions I-11 through I-18). Like athletes, as there is more emphasis on winning in sport, coaches, too, will experience more pressure to win (proposition I-11) and will feel like failures if they do not win (proposition I-12). Where there is more emphasis on winning, coaches realize that they are judged largely on their won-loss record. They therefore know that they should be ready to look for another job (proposition I-13) if they do not win (Adler and Adler, 1996, p. 234; Eitzen & Sage, 1997, p. 49).

It appears that in contemporary American society, certain social situations are more likely to produce greater emphasis on winning, e.g., the coaches and athletes of football and basketball teams, the size of schools, and schools that offer athletic scholarships. Coaches, in turn, will usually know ahead of time how much emphasis on winning there is before they accept a particular coaching position.

Given such pressure to win and given the ruinous consequences of not doing so, coaches will want to control as many variables as is possible that go into winning. This means controlling the actions of their athletes, e.g., diets, consumption of alcohol, use of nicotine, what athletes wear, their hair length and facial hair (in male athletes), and practice sessions (how many practices there are in a week, when practices start and stop, and what happens in practices). Consequently, we should observe that coaches who have more pressure on them to win will tend to be more authoritarian, i.e., attempt to control a number of aspects of their athletes' lives (see proposition I-14). Eitzen and Sage assert that "Coaches typically structure coach-athlete relationships along authoritarian lines...they endeavor to control player behavior not only throughout practice and contest periods but also on a round-the-clock basis" (1997, p. 53).

Given these pressures on coaches to win, we should predict that they will spend increasing amounts of time and effort in their status as coach (proposition I-15). Their extrinsic rewards such as salary and other benefits, their prestige received from the community, and much of their self-esteem will be dependent on how they perform—that is, whether they win or lose. So, it behooves coaches who are expected to win to expend great amounts of time and effort in their status as coach (versus other statuses they might concurrently occupy such as spouse, parent, teacher, civic leader, etc.). We should therefore expect coaches to experience considerable role conflict with other statuses they occupy (see proposition I-16).

As there is more likely to be more cheating by athletes as winning is increasingly emphasized, we should find that similar conditions prevail for coaches (see proposition I-17). Increasing pressures to win will increase the likelihood that coaches will use such deviant actions as changing grades on transcripts, giving unearned grades, teaching athletes how to cheat in a game without being detected, resorting to illegal or

questionable methods of recruiting, and expecting or at least allowing athletes to use performance enhancing drugs as winning becomes more important (Pilz, 1995, p. 395; Smith, 1975, p. 74). To the degree that coaches use various methods of cheating in order to win and to the degree that some of these methods will involve athletes, the athletes are in a social situation where they can be exploited (see proposition I-18).

For the Sport

Not only will increased emphasis on winning affect both athletes and coaches in specific ways, but it will also affect the nature of sport in general. For example, there will be a tendency to place greater emphasis on the end result of the game, i.e., the win, while placing less emphasis on the process of the game, i.e., the act of participating and having fun (see proposition I-19). Likewise, with greater emphasis placed on winning and a corresponding increase in cheating by athletes (see proposition I-8) and coaches (see proposition I-17), we should observe a corresponding decrease in sportsmanship or fair play (see proposition I-20). The de-emphasis on process with an increased emphasis on outcome should also lead to less sportsmanship.

Also, the increased emphasis on outcome should make sport more like work than like play (see proposition I-21). That is, as winning becomes disproportionately important, both practice sessions and games will take on a more worklike atmosphere versus play atmosphere. Players will go over and over drills and plays until each player gets it right. There will be greater attention paid to details of the game. Game tapes will be viewed over and over to see how each play and each player can improve. Scouting reports of the other team will be painstakingly analyzed. Working out for hours at weight lifting may be another added role. Running conditioning drills until the athletes are exhausted will be added to practice sessions. Clocking in and out at practice and receiving negative sanctions if the athlete shows up late for practice (work) will be instituted. When taken to a great degree, the athletes may feel some of the same alienation that Marx suggests factory workers of the 1800's felt (1964, pp. 106-119). For example, the players (worker) can be in a monotonous work process; the players (worker) are in an extremely competitive situation with other players (workers), which results in estrangement from their fellow players; the players are not living up to their species being because they are putting a substantial amount of time, energy, and concern into their sport versus other activities, e.g., their studies, recreational activities, friendship activities, and family functions.

As winning is increasingly emphasized, violence will also become more a part of sport (see proposition I-22). Besides this tendency occurring in athletes (see proposition I-8), we should also expect to observe more violence by spectators (Pilz, 1995, p. 398). Pilz asserts that:

there is no doubt that the violence on the playing-field promotes heightened emotions and aggressiveness, and a readiness for violence in the stands...Rule violations in the interest of the team are thus legitimized and expected by the fans. A dangerous cycle which is

difficult to interrupt is starting here. Athletes commit fouls in the interest of success [winning]. The spectators expect the athletes to commit fouls, and by doing this, the athletes are once again reinforcing the violent attitudes and behavior expectations of the spectators which consequently leads to a dangerous heightening of emotions on the playing-field and in the stands (p. 398).

Bloom and Smith (1996) found that a sample of hockey athletes exhibited a spillover of violence from on the field to off of the field (p. 74). Such a spillover effect also appears to support the idea of athlete violence to fan violence. Yearly, we hear and read about rivalries between teams, cities, or countries that turn into some sort of violence among fans. Winning, under these circumstances, seems to translate into the idea that one team, school, city, or country is better than the opponent. Thus, individual as well as collective self-esteems are at stake.

The Emphasis on Extrinsic Rewards

The second key independent variable (see part II of Table 1) is the increasing emphasis on extrinsic rewards such as money, power (authority), and prestige (see Weber, 1968, pp. 212-301 for a discussion of authority and pp. 926-940 for a discussion of all three concepts). People are socialized to want these resources. Yet, these resources are in limited supply. Hence, there is competition for and even conflict over the attainment of these resources.

As all three of these resources become more and more a part of sport, people will seek after these resources via sport as they do in other areas of their lives. When there is a greater emphasis on attaining resources in limited supply, we should expect to observe various forms of innovative deviance (see proposition II-1). Innovative deviance occurs when the society emphasizes certain goals, e.g., money, power, and prestige, but creates structural conditions that do not allow for everyone to attain these goals (Merton, 1968, p. 200). In sport, we should observe the following kinds of innovative deviance in order to gain extrinsic rewards: the use of violence, the breaking of rules of the game such as holding and pushing, and the increasing illegal use of performance enhancing drugs such as steroids and amphetamines.

When extrinsic rewards are introduced into sport, the mass media, i.e., radio, television, newspapers, and magazines, will begin to play a more prominent role (see proposition II-2). McChesney (1989) suggests that sport and the mass media “enjoy a very symbiotic relationship” (p. 49) in that each is functional for the survival of the other. For example, mass media advertises sport and keeps the attention and interest of the public on sport (Denzin, 1996, p. 319; Sage, 1996, p. 4) while sport helps mass media by being a money-maker through the selling of more newspapers or more radio and television commercials (Andrews, 1996, p. 315).

As extrinsic rewards become a larger part of sport, athletes and coaches will concentrate more and more on attaining these rewards and hence will not focus solely on the intrinsic reward

of participating in sport for fun (see propositions II-3 and II-4). Especially if the sport becomes a means of financial survival, we should observe the participants directly and indirectly related to sport (athletes, coaches, owners, administrators, and businesses producing sport related merchandise) focusing more on extrinsic rewards (Alt, 1983, p. 98; Klein, 1990, p. 176; Sage, 1996, pp. 7-8). The introduction of and emphasis on extrinsic rewards, in turn, set up the conditions for sport becoming more like work than play (see proposition II-5). Even at the big-time college level of sports, Adler and Adler (1996) found this tendency of feeling that sport has become more like work. The college athletes began to realize that they were “no longer playing for enjoyment” (p. 233). Rather, playing the sport “changed from recreation to an occupation” (p. 234). Thus, both independent variables we have discussed so far, increasing emphasis on winning and increasing emphasis on extrinsic rewards, appear to alter the nature of sport from a process mode of participation and fun to an outcome mode of winning and receiving consequent, extrinsic rewards.

As extrinsic rewards play a greater role in the game, we should see athletes being treated more like a commodity (see proposition II-6). This tendency is most vividly demonstrated at the professional level of sport, where millions of dollars are dependent upon which athlete can perform the best and thus produce profit in ticket sales, television commercials, shoes, uniform numbers, and so on (Alt, 1983, p. 97; Andrews, 1996, p. 316; Armstrong, 1996, p. 325-343; McDonald, 1996, 344-365). If the athlete who has performed well for a team begins to slip in performance, we should expect to see this athlete replaced by a better athlete, i.e., a better commodity. The athlete who is replaced will be traded or retired just as any other commodity that no longer has use value (Marx, 1967, pp. 35-41 and Marx, 1964, pp. 106-119).

Fans play an increasingly integral part in sport as extrinsic rewards are added to the sport (see proposition II-7). For example, as there is more emphasis on making money via sport, fans are needed to pay for tickets and the concessions at the ball park, to buy newspapers to read about sports, to watch television commercials, and to buy sports merchandise such as athletic shoes and shirts. Without fans, money would not be made via the avenue of sports.

Likewise, fans play an integral part in whether or not athletes, coaches, and teams gain the extrinsic reward of prestige. Fans help promote and perpetuate sports heroes. They like to recall great moments in sports. They like to compare which athlete, team, or coach was better. They remember watching a memorable game and enjoy recounting the play-by-play events that occurred in the game and thus carry on an oral tradition passed down from one generation to another. So, for athletes, coaches, and teams to receive prestige (or glory and fame), they need to have fans.

Bureaucratization and Rationalization

The third independent variable that has numerous consequences on sport is the degree to which sport increasingly becomes bureaucratic and rationalized (Alt, 1983, p. 98;

Berryman, 1988, p. 14; Edwards, 1973, pp. 58–59; Sewart, 1981, p. 46). One of the effects of this greater amount of organization in sport will be the loss of control by the athletes (Alt, 1983, p. 103; Edwards, 1973, p. 58) and the gain in control by adults or owners (see propositions III-1 and III-2). For example, in the back yard, the children themselves will make practically all the decisions (Coakley, 1978). They will choose what game they will play, what rules they will observe given the physical conditions of the back yard (“that tree will be one goal and that bush will be out-of-bounds”), who will be on what teams, how long they will play, and so on. When problems and disagreements arise, they will typically work them out among themselves rather than appeal to some higher authority (p. 59). Thus, whatever organizing there is, the children do themselves.

As sport becomes more organized such as little league teams of various kinds and teams and leagues in elementary, middle, and high schools, adults (proposition III-2) begin to make more of the decisions and take over control of the sport (Berryman, 1988; Coakley, 1978; McPherson, 1982). With increasing organization, there are coaches or sources outside the youthful participants who make many, if not all, of the decisions—when practice will be, how long it will be, what will occur in practice, and who gets to play in a game and for how long, what are the rules, who enforces the rules, and so on. As Coakley notes,

It is a rare adult coach who allows youngsters to make many decisions on how the game should be organized and played. In fact, most decisions have been made for the coach; the availability of the practice field has been decided, the roles defined, the rules made, the sanctions outlined, the team colors picked, the games scheduled, etc. (p. 56)

Thus, the characteristics of bureaucracy such as specialization, rules, documents, offices, and hierarchy of authority (Weber, 1968, pp. 956–958) begin to appear and influence the nature of sport.

As bureaucratization increases in sport, fans become more of an integral part of sport (see proposition III-3). Seats are built to accommodate the fans. Schedules are published to let fans know when the games will be played. Services are provided for fans, e.g., concessions, rest rooms, and parking. Loyalties are developed as the fans root for “their hometown team.” Not far behind the creation of fan loyalty will come the development of rivalries—rivalries between fans of two competing teams and rivalries between the two teams. The addition of fans may even increase the level of violence expected of athletes (Smith, 1975, p. 79). As we can see with the example of the addition of fans, the increase in bureaucratization of sport changes the nature of sport enormously. Moreover, it is highly probable that people who take sport out of the backyard into the realm of bureaucratized sport have little or no realization of the many consequences they will create.

As sport becomes more bureaucratized, Edwards (1973, p. 59) asserts that there is more keeping of records (see proposition III-4). Won-loss records are published in newspapers. League championships are remembered. The moments of outstanding indi-

vidual and team achievements are recalled. With the keeping of records, individual and team performances can be compared, with ensuing, and many times heated, discussions on who was better. With such records to refer to and to use as a standard of excellence, future athletes have a goal to reach for and even surpass. Especially in a culture where people learn not to rest on their laurels and are expected to constantly improve, the breaking of records will become an integral part of organized sport (Eitzen and Sage, 1997). For example, Eitzen and Sage assert:

Coaches, athletes, and fans place a central value on progress. Continued improvement (in mastering new techniques, in winning more games, or in setting new records) is the aim of all athletes and teams (p. 52).

Relationship of the Three Independent Variables

In terms of which independent variable affected which other variable first, it is hard to determine exactly. However, I would tentatively suggest that as extrinsic rewards of money, power, and prestige are introduced into sport and increase over time, these rewards will get tied to winning (see proposition IV-1). That is, one or a combination of these rewards will be given in exchange for and as a result of winning—winning a conference, winning a state or national championship, having a winning record, and so on. As these rewards become tied to winning, the incentive for winning will increase (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989, p. 109). Besides the self-satisfaction of winning, the addition of extrinsic rewards will further increase the incentive to win. Hence, knowingly or unknowingly, as the independent variable of extrinsic rewards is added to sport, one of the consequences will be the increase in the emphasis on winning.

Moreover, the combination of extrinsic rewards and the increased emphasis on winning will lead to the increasing bureaucratization of sport (see proposition IV-2). Organizations will be created and expanded to increase the probability that a team will win in order to gain extrinsic rewards (Whitson and Macintosh, 1988, p. 87). Creating and expanding an organization will be seen as a rational process (see proposition IV-3) from the perspective of those working within the organization because they will see the need to be more instrumentally rational (Weber, 1968, p. 24) as a “‘means’ for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends” (P-24).

Once these three variables become interrelated, I would suggest that they feed upon each other and promote the increase of each other (see proposition IV-4). For example, once a bureaucratic organization is in place, there is self interest by the members within the organization to perpetuate the statuses within the organization and the money, power, and prestige these statuses provide. Once created, a large bureaucratic, athletic organization such as at a major university or in a professional franchise will want to perpetuate its existence in order to win more and more in order to gain increasing amounts of extrinsic rewards. Consequently, once these three variables are closely tied together, they promote and perpetuate each other.

Tie to Exchange and Conflict Theory

The question arises as to why these three variables promote and perpetuate each other. Probably, one of the key factors is the creation of many new exchange relationships (Alt, 1983; Johns, Lindner, & Wolko, 1990; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989) as these three variables converge.

There are a number of exchange relationships that are formed between athletes, fans, coaches, and team owners. As Snyder and Spreitzer note:

In theoretical terms we find that exchange theory is useful in focusing on these forms of reward—extrinsic and intrinsic. Thus, we find that sport participation often is based on the form and amount of satisfaction received from the sport. In general, people will not participate in an activity if they fail to receive some form of payoff. Conversely, if one receives little satisfaction from the skillful performance of a sports activity, and if one receives no social rewards and feels only a sense of embarrassment, then one will soon conclude that this form of sports involvement is ‘not worth it.’ In other words, persons expect a sense of balance between investments and returns (p. 37).

For example, they point out that athletes subordinate themselves “in order to experience gratifications that otherwise could not be achieved” (p. 26). As fans develop loyalties, new norms will emerge (Turner and Killian, 1972) which will place greater expectations on coaches and players to win the league or win over a particular rival. Fans are putting their time and money into following a team. They want something in return, namely a winning team (Tutko & Bruns, 1976, p. 9–10). Hence, what emerges is a new exchange relationship within sport (Blau, 1964; Turner, 1991, pp. 331–339). Likewise, coaches are putting their time and effort into improving the team (Weiss & Sisley, 1984, p. 345). They, too, want something in return, namely a winning team. Over time, fans and coaches will vary on how much winning they expect but almost all fans and coaches would like to see their teams win some of the time and probably a substantial minority of fans and coaches expect their teams to win most of the time.

To the extent that sport becomes organized professionally, an additional set of exchange relationships emerges among owners and players, coaches, and fans. Owners want their teams to win not only because of the cultural emphasis on winning but also because of their vested interest in making more money (Nack, 1990). Professional players and coaches want to win more because they will receive higher salaries from owners. Likewise, fans pay money to the owners to see their favorite teams win.

To the degree that we become aware of exchange relationships within sport, we can begin to incorporate our empirical findings and theoretical propositions within existing exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Turner, 1991; Weiss and Stevens, 1993). For example, we can subsume the exchange relationships dis-

cussed above under the following propositions created by Turner [re configured from Blau’s work (1964)]:

The more profit people expect from one another in emitting a particular activity, the more likely they are to emit that activity (Turner, 1991, p. 331).

The more people have exchanged rewards with one another, the more likely are reciprocal obligations to emerge and guide subsequent exchanges among these persons (p. 331)

These two propositions may be a key to understanding why the three independent variables promote and perpetuate each other. That is, once these three variables are connected, there are numerous exchange relationships developed that work to the gain of many people: athletes, coaches, teams, team owners, fans, newspapers, corporations, television networks—all direct recipients. Add to these recipients the economic rewards that hotels, restaurants, bars, and taxicab drivers receive. Taken together, there are many constituents who gain from the confluence of extrinsic rewards, winning, and the bureaucratization of sport.

Moreover, if any of these exchange relationships are broken, we should predict certain actions that will occur in sport under the following proposition:

The more the reciprocal obligations of an exchange relationship are violated, the more disposed are deprived parties to sanction negatively those violating the norm of reciprocity (Turner, 1991, p. 331).

There are numerous examples of the breaking of the norm of reciprocity in sport: player strikes because they feel they are not getting paid enough, fans staying away from the ball park because they feel their team is not winning enough, athletes quitting because they feel they are not playing enough, athletes in professional sports wanting to be traded because they feel they are not being paid enough, owners firing coaches because they feel their coaches have not produced enough winning, and so on. Probably, many of the problems that arise in sport are tied to the above proposition where, given some type of exchange relationship, the norm of reciprocity has been broken.

Out of breaking the norm of reciprocity comes the potential for conflict, thus connecting principles of exchange to those of conflict (Turner, 1991, p. 339). For example, Turner demonstrates in two propositions how the breaking of the norm of reciprocity leads to an imbalance in an exchange relationship that, in turn, increases the probability of conflict (p. 339). Sport is rife with exchange relationships and therefore with the potential for conflict whenever the norms of reciprocity are broken.

Turner (1991, p. 188) creates three other propositions from the works of Marx that help us see what can happen in sport once there is the potential for conflict:

The more unequal the distribution of scarce resources in a system, the greater the conflict of interest between

dominant and subordinate segments in a system (p. 188).

The more subordinate segments become aware of their true collective interests, the more likely they are to question the legitimacy of the existing pattern of distribution of scarce resources (p. 188).

The more subordinate segments of a system are aware of their collective interests and the greater their questioning of the legitimacy of the distribution of scarce resources, the more likely they are to join in overt conflict against dominant segments of a system (p. 188; also similar to a re configuration of Weber's ideas by Turner, p. 198).

Scarce resources in the case of sport would be what I have been discussing as extrinsic rewards, i.e., money, power, and prestige. Given the validity of the above three propositions, that is, once people become aware that the norm of reciprocity has been broken, those who do not receive the expected reward can begin to question the legitimacy of the system. The next step would be for those questioning the legitimacy of the system to band together into a conflict group and seek social change in terms of a redistribution of resources via some form of conflict, e.g., strikes, not playing to full capacity, firing players and coaches, fans refusing to attend games, and so on.

Hence, the confluence of the three variables of extrinsic rewards, winning, and bureaucratization and subsequent consequences can be more clearly explained theoretically by subsuming these three variables and their relationships under principles of exchange and conflict theory.

Conclusion

There are at least three key independent variables in sport (the emphasis on winning, the emphasis on extrinsic rewards, and the amount of bureaucratization) that affect many dependent variables and therefore highly influence the world of sport. When these independent and dependent variables are combined in the form of interrelated propositions, we have the beginnings of a theory of sport.

Some of the propositions in Table 1 have already been partially validated through empirical testing. More empirical testing needs to be done in order to validate the untested propositions and to gain increased confidence in the tested ones. Also, further empirical testing will specify the social conditions under which each proposition is valid, hence helping us confirm, qualify, and elaborate on our propositions (Homans, 1950).

As to how the three independent variables are related, it appears that the increased emphasis on extrinsic rewards in sport will intensify the emphasis on winning which will, in turn, increase the bureaucratization of sport. However, once, these three variables begin to be tied to each other, they will tend to promote and perpetuate each other due to the numerous exchange relationships that have been created which results in a number of people gaining in some type of resource (Blau, 1964;

Turner, 1991). I do not doubt that other key independent variables will be found to exert substantial influence on the nature of sport. However, with the three independent variables and propositions developed in this paper, we have a foundation upon which to build a comprehensive theory of sport.

Finally, as we become more conscious of the key propositions within sport, we can begin to subsume these propositions within more abstract theory that encompasses much broader social phenomena, e.g., exchange and conflict theory. By incorporating our sport propositions within more abstract sociological theory, we can more fully integrate the social action that occurs in sport with the social action that occurs in other social contexts.

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