

SPORT AS PART OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: *Although the issues and concerns highlighted throughout the paper are the most challenging features in sports, it is also equally mentioned that this physical activity can help us overcome injustice, prejudice and oppression. Structured and reinforced with appropriate social values, the sport experience can instill people the ability, responsibility and courage to make important and long-lasting contributions to society. Another area in which sport confronted society's ills, thus becoming a catalyst for significant change is represented by the turbulent 60's. In the early 90's, sport and a famous sport figure challenged existing stereotypes, helping therefore to transform society.*

Sport sociology has a number of implications for sport managers. We have already discussed how individuals face challenges, regarding both self-esteem and power. We have also examined broader social issues like the various ways in which mainstream media portray female athletes, how racism is perpetuated throughout the sport world, and how homophobic stereotypes put coaches and athletes at great risk, personally and professionally.

Keywords: *sport, social values, social dedication.*

Although the issues and concerns highlighted throughout this paper are the most problematic features in sports, it is also equally pointed out that this physical activity can help us overcome injustice, prejudice and oppression. Structured and reinforced with appropriate social values, the sport experience can instill people the capacity, responsibility and courage to

make important and long-lasting contributions to society.

Although most of the times we don't perceive sport in this manner, its substantial popularity associated with its ability to integrate into social, political and economical problems of society, offers this activity the label of one of the important institution serving as a supporter of change. It is likely that one of the proofs

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enforcing this affirmation to be represented by the events that took place in 1947, during the Baseball League, when Jackie Robinson destroyed the barrier of racial prejudice and opened the gate of possibilities for all black sportsmen to participate in every sport category. We can only imagine how sport and society would look like without the significant contributions of Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Serena Williams, Venus Williams and Tiger Woods.

Another area in which sport confronted society's ills and became a catalyst for significant change is represented by the turbulent 60's. That period was marked by social disturbances and assassinations of well-known leaders such as John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. This moment is also represented by street demonstrations and students killing from campuses; all these during the United States' war with Vietnam.

In 1968, during the Olympic Summer Games in Mexico City, two black athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos (that won gold and bronze medals at 200-meter dash) used the awarding ceremony to protest against injustice, as a revolt against all these social and political phenomena.

During the national hymn, Smith and Carlos bowed their heads and saluted the crowd by raising their hands and holding their fists tight, gesture interpreted as a greeting form to highlight the power of black people. Although they were dispossessed of their medals, the protest brought to light many of the injustices that Afro-Americans were put through. Moreover, this protestant speech revealed America's hypocrisy, which was considered "the land of the free". As the author John Gettings stated in 2002, this protest was not only one of the most memorable moments in the history of the Olympic Games, but also one of the

foundation stone in applying justice (for human rights).

During the 1990's, sport along with a well-known sport person went against stereotypes, helping as a result to transform society. In the highest point of his career, Magic Johnson surprised not only the Olympic Basketball Games but also the entire United States, when he made public his situation – HIV infection. Before hearing this shocking announcement, many Americans had been aware that thousands of people died of AIDS and other millions were infected with this lethal virus.

Although at that time, the public was informed on the death caused by this disease of Hollywood celebrities and of star Rock Hudson, investigations and finding a cure to destroy this virus were abandoned. But this had changed with the announcement made by Magic Johnson. Shortly after this event, his medical condition and his stepping back from Basketball League brought him the appropriate acknowledgment of society. This episode represented a dramatic demonstration of the great power of influence of the sportsman on the society.

Another noteworthy example to prove the importance of sport in society's evolution is the participation of women in sport games and in any sport activity. Before the 1970's a great part of the society's segments, including numerous sportive activities were considered too difficult to be practiced by women. But, in order to progress, many women, having men's support, have fought for every female willing to enter the sport field.

These efforts brought many satisfactions to women and young women, to their families and communities. For the first time in the history of the United States, young females and males have the possibility to grow and learn how to practice sport. The young females would

also feel the benefits of sport, by creating an identity and a place in something more complex and greater than themselves, facing the physical, social and intellectual trials in sport. It is due to sport that women and young women build their fighter character and their fulfillment, become aware of their limits and learning capacities and find out how to build their own destinies, not only within sport activities but also in every area of society in which they are integrated.

Finally and surprisingly, sport made a few steps in trying to overcome the ideas and theories on homophobia. Acting as such, this strong institution created various places for homosexual athletes, although only for individual games such as tennis or golf. An example is the golf player, Rosie Jones. And here is what he affirms regarding the significance of successful sportsmen:

“Many of them reminded me that times have changed. I wouldn’t have this opportunity as an athlete today, and our society wouldn’t be as open to change, if there were no successful athletes and many other persons with the necessary courage to expose their beliefs”

Implications for sport managers

Sport sociology has a series of implications for sport managers. Discussions were made on confronting individualities and overcoming challenges, therefore gaining feelings like self-confidence and power. It was also put under analysis the exaggeration and injustice made by mass-media regarding women athletes, human stereotypes, perpetual racism in the sports world and social conflicts taking place in the political life of communities. It was also observed how the Olympic Games and sport universities have the ability to unify cities and nations, thus provoking and destroying oppression and injustice. All that have in

common these scenarios are the people, and knowing human nature is an essential quality for a sport manager. Snyder, for example, stated in 1990 that management and physical sport activities depend on the person’s desire to get involved as a viewer or to practice it. A manager has to understand the foundations of social sport context in order to guide a sportsman and to keep him involved for a long time.

As we have observed, women participating in sport is a recent phenomenon. For that reason, before Title IX, sportswomen were not considered real women. Even though, as we all know, practicing sport brings every person special physical qualities and benefits, whether they are men or women. Having a sportive lifestyle means reduced percentage of obesity and heart diseases. In addition, sport can serve as a method to overcome depression or to strengthen self-confidence.

But, having as definition the historical events regarding female capacity to be equally woman and athlete, we can observe that the majority of older women require a sport manager to keep them in the sports world. Sport managers that understand and respect the life of older women can help them create a sport program according to their age and preoccupations.

Conclusions

Sport sociology requires scientific studying of sport context. Although sport sociologists study various methods through which people can participate in events and sport activities, they are mainly interested in the sport’s purpose and its influence on our social, political and economical institutions.

Sport management is tightly connected with sport sociology, because both are influenced by cultural and social sport aspects.

Sport plays an important role in society, by building and maintaining significant and numerous cultural values. Social sport benefits include children education as well as presenting to them social positive places and sport groups, from which they will take part.

Sport has also negative aspects like: sexism, racism and violence. As a concluding point, sport can act as mediator for social transformation. Sportsmen can prevent and make people aware of problems like AIDS, social injustice and homophobia.

Understanding and appreciating the sportive sociologic area creates a solid base in comprehending sport management. More precisely, sport managers have to pay attention to social aspects regarding sport activities.

Taking into consideration that the sport managers work with people on social

aspects, they have to understand both the person's individuality and the space where he/she lives and interacts with other persons.

Sport managers can play an essential role in developing positive, secure and endowed sport places.

When this happens, the public desires automatically to take part in sport activities, either as athletes, viewers, fans or clients.

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