



## AGGRESSION AND ITS INFLUENCE IN SPORTS PERFORMANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*Aggression is a general feature of human beings, a potential condition which can be activated fast or slow and it may take various forms of manifestation. In sports, where the main characteristic is the competition itself, the essential coordinates of the existence are: rivalry, direct confrontation with the opponents, desire to win and optimal activation. Today, the increasing number and frequency of aggressive acts occurring on or around the sports ground, makes us wonder where or which are the limits of combativity. This situation also demands a good understanding of deep psychological connotations of such behaviour. This paper aims to throw light on the reasons for the existence and persistence of such behaviour and possible remedies to deal with the same.*

**KEYWORDS:** Aggression, behaviour, sports.

### INTRODUCTION

#### What is Aggression?

The term aggression is used in several ways in sport and exercise. Aggression is defined as 'any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.'(Baron & Richardson, 1994,p.7 ). Aggression is physical or verbal behaviour, it is not an attitude or emotion. It involves harm and injury,which may be either physical or psychological e.g.,we would all agree that hitting someone with a baseball bat is an aggressive act,but so too is purposely embarrassing someone or saying something hurtful. Defined as the intention to physically, verbally, or psychologically harm someone who is motivated to avoid such treatment, aggression can be either hostile or instrumental. Hostile aggression refers to actions that are motivated by anger and that are intended solely to harm someone. Thus, with this form of aggression, the perpetrator simply wants the victim to suffer—eg, a soccer player deliberately and illegally tripping an opponent with the sole purpose of injuring that person. In instrumental aggression, however, harmful actions have a purpose over and above that of wounding another player. Athletes might, for instance, attempt to injure an opponent because they believe that doing so will increase their chances of victory. In sport, research has focused mainly on the aggressive actions of three groups of individuals: athletes, spectators, and parents at youth sporting events .

#### Types of Aggression

Aggression can be of the following types:

1. Direct: where the athlete can abuse face to face directly or hurt somebody by words or actions.
2. Indirect: hurting others by gossips, rumours, internalmurmurings etc.
3. Instrumental: this is cognitive, where the aggression is intentional and planned but not to directly hurt someone, rather for gaining something like a reward, fame, scoring goal, etc.



4. Emotional: also called impulsive aggression refers to aggression that occurs with only a small amount of forethought or intent. Several theories on aggression have been proposed but they fall into four main categories:

1. Instinct theory suggests that aggression is the result of an inherent drive like hunger, thirst etc.
2. Social learning theory suggests that aggression is a function of learning, not merely a biologic drive.
3. Moral reasoning theory where the aggressor justifies his or her action as proper.
4. Frustration-aggression hypothesis states that aggression is a result of frustration.

**AGGRESSION AND SPORTS**

Terry and Jackson (1985) defined aggression in sport as: ‘harm-inducing behaviour bearing no direct relationship to the competitive goals of sport, and relates, therefore, to incidents of uncontrolled aggression outside the rules of sport, rather than highly competitive behaviour within the rule boundaries.’

Aggressive and violent actions which might be illegal outside sport, or in supposedly non-contact sports like Basketball, Football, Cricket, etc. are legal and allowed in the context of combat sports like Judo, Karate and Wrestling, or team contact sports like Rugby, American football and Ice hockey. All these sports are characterised by high levels of aggression and often violent physical contact which may be within the rules of the game and not intended to injure. The same sort of behaviour outside the sports context may however be defined as criminal. Participants in these sports have also accepted the inevitability of rough contact and possible injury in these sports. A high degree of aggression that is not in line with competitive spirit is illegitimate and sometimes even illegal. In some sports, however, there appears to be a gray zone where aggression is accepted by ‘victims’ as a legitimate part of the game.

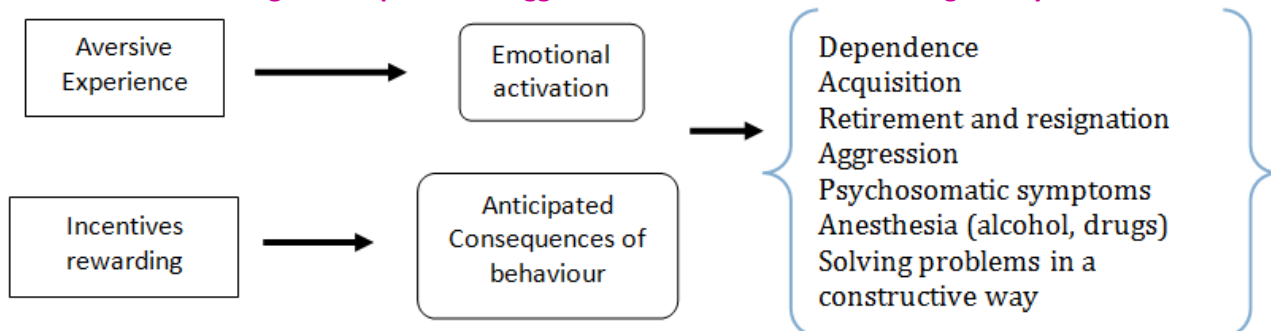
W. Gordon Russell (2008) provided a good understanding of the real meaning of aggression in sports. He had discussed the role of various external social influences on human aggression or the effect of provocations such as hurtful remarks, chants and songs were discussed. The most likely targets for aggression are officials, women, young entrants, and athletes who are victims of racial bias.

Sex differences have also been considered as contributing factors to aggression. Evolutionary Psychology states that all behaviour is designed to perpetuate the continuance of the gene pool and ensure the survival of the species. This evolutionary imperative contributes to gender differences in behaviour. Environmental factors are also believed to have an influence on the state of mood. For example temperature, noise, drugs, alcohol, steroids, presence of weapons, have all shown to increase aggression.

**Fan Violence**

Some of the dirtiest instances of sports aggression and violence happen among the spectators. There are individuals who instigate violence. These individuals are attracted to violence tend to score high on the personality scale for anger and physical aggression

**Figure 1: Sports And Aggression in terms of social learning theory**



### Effects of Aggression on Sports Performance

It is a common knowledge that acts of aggression on the part of an athlete will constitute a distraction and result in a poor performance. These acts are likely to be distracting to the team also as a whole. Research has shown, for example, that the poorer a team is in the performance, more likelihood it will engage in aggression. As the game gets bloodier (more intense), hostility levels after the game are significantly higher.

### Controlling Aggression in Sport

With the cooperation of all concerned parties, aggression in sport can be minimized. However, some most influential people sometimes actually end up promoting violence in their urge to sell tickets. Angry feelings and angry behaviour, the precursor to aggression and violence can be modified through proper anger management training and role play.

### Controlling Aggression and Violence by Athletes

1. Athletes who involve in aggressive acts must be severely penalized, at levels much more than any reinforcement that the game offers.
2. Young athletes must be taught to have non-aggressive but assertive behaviour.
3. Athletes should be rewarded for showing restraint and patience in emotionally charged game situations.
4. An athlete's anger feelings can be regulated through proper role play.
5. Tolerance and patience on the part of the coach or leader will reduce violent behaviour in athletes.
6. A friendly atmosphere, more in the lines of a family event should be ensured by the organizers.
7. Aggressive athletes can be provided proper counselling and rehabilitation.

### Aggression due to Situational Factors

1. Temperature: Higher temperatures can lead aggressive athletes to become more aggressive.
2. Retaliation due to perception of victim's intent: Some athletes imagine that an opponent's intent is to inflict harm, so they respond with aggression against the opponent.
3. Fear of retaliation by victim: To an extent, the fear of retaliation by the victim of aggression can discourage the aggressive player from initiating that aggression.
4. Game situation: Several studies have shown that more aggressiveness occurs as there is a big difference between scores. When the scores are close, aggression is at a minimum.
5. Rivalry due to familiarity: Familiarity breeds contempt. As players become more familiar with one another due to frequency of play, rivalries also may increase, and aggression in turn becomes more frequent.
6. Reduced goal orientation: As the ego state of the athlete increases, there is general lack of respect for the game or the official. A high task goal orientation results in a higher level of sportsmanship

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### 10. Controlling Aggression and Violence by Fans

1. Troublemakers should be closely monitored.
2. Known offenders should be identified and denied admission.

3. Distribution of alcoholic beverages/cigarettes at sporting events should be stopped.
4. Media can help by not glamorizing the aggressive acts by players or fans.

## CONCLUSION

Aggression and violence have become common in modern day sporting events, especially those that have high emotional content. Whatever the degree of aggression, it can be minimized by adopting a systematic approach at the psychological and sociological levels. Tolerance and empathy on the part of the organizers and the coach, followed by proper training to the athlete may be the solution.

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