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CONSEQUENCES OF INSTRUMENTALITY IN SPORT

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SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to discuss the topic of instrumentality within the area of competitive sport and to explore its consequences. First, I shall describe two kinds of instrumentality in sports – internal and external instrumentality. Second, I shall discuss the consequences of both of these kinds of instrumentality on the athletes and their performance. Instrumentality influences the quality of sport performance from the point of view of the quality of movement and from ethical point of view. In the conclusion, I shall ask questions about the idea of diminishing instrumentality in sport, which might help us the better to understand sport, sport practice and last but not least ourselves.

Key words: instrumentality, sport performance, process, ethics

Instrumentality in Sport

Instrumentality means that something is used as a means for something else. Usually, when we speak about sport and instrumentality, we are referring to the use of sport as a means to the achieving of various values that people have elsewhere in life. From the point of view of sport, these can be called ‘external goals’.

Particular external goals will vary in relation to the context in which sport is practised, so we might expect different extrinsic values to be pursued at different levels of sport (elite sport, children’s sport, school sport, etc.) and these depend on the different perspectives we take. For example, from the point of view of the majority of people in society, external values attributable to sport might include the learning of discipline and rule-adherence or just prevention of youth vandalism or criminality. From the point of view of parents, teachers and coaches, the obvious example of instrumentality is the phenomenon of ‘achievement by proxy’, whereby others gain benefits from the achievements of those in their care. From an existential perspective, some people practise sport in order to gain specific benefits such as money, fame, the approval or admiration of others, etc. All these, and many other kinds of instrumental goals, may be perfectly

legitimately pursued although, equally, they may also prejudice the supposed benefits of participation.

However, it is important to notice that external goals do not exhaust the topic of instrumentality in sport. Sports are rule-governed competitions wherein physical abilities are contested. They are more formal, serious, competitive, organised, and institution-alised than the games and other (usually pragmatic) activities from which they often sprang. The goal of sport is to achieve something, to fulfil a task which is given by agreed rules within a competitive setting. And it is this joyful striving and improving with respect to the given task, together with and at the same time against an opponent, that forms the basis of sport.

Thus, since the goal of sport is to achieve something, it means there is always *some* goal for an athlete to follow *within* the sport itself, and these may be called ‘internal goals’ or ‘autotelic goals’ (see Steenbergen & Tamboer, 2002). In this way, we can recognize the two kinds of instrumentality of sport – the instrumentality of extrinsic (external) goals and the instrumentality of intrinsic (internal) goals (Martínková & Parry, 2011).

The *internal goals* of sport are the necessary conditions of a particular sport, and it is in terms of internal goals that athletes compete against each other and are compared to each other. Internal goals determine the specific character of the performance within a particular sport. These goals are, for example, scoring a goal in football or handball, running a specific distance as fast as possible in athletics, collecting as many points as possible in volleyball, etc. The internal goals lead to specific *results* (e.g. the score of 1–2 in football, the time of 9.8 seconds in 100 meters sprint). These results then enable *rankings*, i.e. the outcomes that arise due to comparisons of the participants (e.g. a finishing place in a race in relation to the other competitors). Ranking itself can have different facets – it can point towards actual placement in a particular race or, seen as one of a series of performances, to placement within a wider competition (e.g. a league), or even to placement in all previous races (e.g. a world record).

However, not all sports are the same in relation to the character of their goals. Parry (1989) distinguishes two kinds of sports in this respect – purposive sports and aesthetic sports. *Purposive sports* are those whose purpose or function can be specified independently of the manner of achieving them. For example, the style of running in the sprint is not judged as long as it is some kind of running. What counts is just the running speed. *How* the athlete runs is irrelevant, providing that it is within the rules. In purposive sports, the quality of the manner of performance is not evaluated in respect of the result, and is only seen as important insofar as the actual achieving of the result is concerned.

On the other hand, *aesthetic sports* are those whose goals cannot be specified independently of the manner of achieving them, such as can be found, for example, in sports like gymnastics. Here, the means are *part of* the end – *how* a somersault is done is all-important, in two senses. Firstly, if the move is not done in a certain prescribed way, it will not even *count* as a somersault. The end specifies the means: “If you want to do a somersault, here is *how* it has to be done ...” Secondly, what is evaluated by judges is the *quality* of the process of the performance – *how well* the athlete does the somersault determines his or her marks. However, even though in aesthetic sports there is not a simple means-end relationship between performance and result as there is in purposive sports, this does not mean that there is no instrumentality there at all. Since aesthetic sports are competitive

activities, ranking is still important for the athletes practising them. Competitors are compared according to marks obtained, and so the performance is still instrumental to the effort towards victory.

The consequences of instrumentality for the practice of sport

Now, after describing the two kinds of instrumentality of sport, I shall examine their consequences for the athlete and for his or her performance. I shall start by showing the consequences of external goals, and then I shall continue to discuss the internal goals.

The *external goals* that we attribute to sport are of various kinds. Some are highly individually oriented goals, such as wealth and fame. By contrast, some external goals that are pursued through sport are very valuable for society, such as, for example, moral education or an active lifestyle. However, the problem with external goals in sport is not that people pursue values that they hold in life, or that society tries to uphold, but that, *while* pursuing external values, sport is used just as a vehicle for other interests.

There are two problems with this: firstly, the value of sport itself is not recognized and, secondly, alternative vehicles could also be used for achieving those non-sport-specific values. On the one hand, this endangers the existence of sport, which could be swapped for a different vehicle, and on the other hand it bereaves us of sport-specific values. For example, there may arise questions concerning whether sport is a valuable part of the content of Physical Education, or whether youth sport participation, sport for all, etc. are valuable pastimes for people and should be supported within society – and whether there exist better vehicles for the expected values than sport.

An additional problem with external goals is that they multiply the effect of internal goals. Since external goals arise from the pursuit of internal goals and also from consequent results and rankings, they make the internal goals more important for the athletes and coaches. So let us take a look at the internal goals of sport now.

The main consequences of the *internal goals* of sport relate to the *quality of the process* of the sport performance. Overall concern with internal goals in sport that is often emphasized by external goals threatens to override the importance of the actual process of the athlete's performance. This focus on goals is increased by the influence of the expectations of society (traditionally Western, but presently it is almost a world-wide tendency), in which results are generally considered more important than other aspects of the sport performance (see also Hogenová, 1997, 47). This is true whether the focus of attention is on the goal of the particular sport (as well as on rankings), or just on the rankings. This tendency to emphasize goals and/or results and/or rankings heavily influences the way in which sports are practised – the means and processes are seen as not so important as the results themselves, which leads to an over-evaluation of victory and a side-lining of other values that we usually associate with the *process* of sport practice.

Let us show two facets of the consequences of instrumentality on the process of the performance: *the quality of movement*, which is interconnected to such topics as, for example, perfection of movement (fluency, grace), overall human balance, joyful experiencing of movement, a sense of mastery, etc.; and *the well-lived process*, which relates to respect for others, fair play, etc. (see Loland, 2000). Let me now introduce some of these topics.

Firstly, I shall discuss *the quality of movement*. One consequence of sport's inescapably inner instrumental and comparative nature is that it cannot be considered as enabling the athlete to achieve or regain perfection of movement, fluency and balance. This needs to be seen from various perspectives.

Sport is about improvement, and it leads to excess. Athletes strive to become better – ever faster, higher, and stronger (which is depicted in the Olympic motto). Thus, rather than helping with balance, sport requires and employs athletes' already-existing levels of balance in order to be able to overcome a hindrance, an opponent or a record. Sport demands “performing one's best on the given occasion”, which often means “giving it all completely” and “going beyond one's limits”, and that is why it leads to exhaustion, overuse and also injuries. To be able to perform at one's best, athletes have to be well-balanced *in advance*. While harmonizing can be a part of the training of an athlete, it is just a supporting activity, not the sport performance itself. Without already-existing balance, sport generally magnifies and multiplies athletes' dysbalances, rather than removing them. This is not to say that the quality of movement is not important for athletes – but that there are limits to it.

Sport is a competitive activity, and results are a necessary part of it, but because of this necessary attention to results and *via* them to rankings, etc., it seems that no more care need be given to the quality of the process (i.e. the actual movements of the athlete) than is necessary for outperforming one's opponents in particular circumstances. In fact, to pay more attention than is necessary for success may even seem to be wasteful and inefficient. This is because the performance required for victory on a particular occasion is always comparative to the performance of an opponent. The performance of an athlete has to be “good enough to win” and not necessarily excellent (in terms of a balanced, fluent movement, full of grace). An athlete (or a team) can even perform quite poorly, but still rank well or even win. This does not support any aim such as perfecting, polishing and balancing one's movement (becoming excellent), unless and until that is required by competition.

On the basis of the importance of comparison of performance amongst athletes, the result striven for by the athlete is always interconnected with the general level of performance within the given sport at the given time (and possibly also in the past). Thus, the quality of the sport performance in new or not-so-popular sports often does not reach a very high standard in order for the athlete to succeed – and thus winning is not so demanding and usually does not require so much attention to the process underpinning it. On the other hand, in highly popular sports, the performance of the top-level athletes has to be more often of a high quality, and winning demands a long time of practice, with high concentration on one's best performance in terms of the quality of process. Sport practice becomes more demanding and time-consuming, and that is why sport becomes a full-time job for some athletes. However, the concern with quality of performance here is still not just with the performance itself, but only in terms of the requirements and demands of the competition – the quality of the process of the athlete's performance is not usually seen as an end in itself, but as a means towards the end of the best performance possible and *via* that to the best result and ranking. And the top ranking of an athlete is not necessarily connected to the perfection of his or her performance, but is relative to the performance of other participants. The problem is that athletes compare themselves with others, not with perfection. (See more in Martínková, 2009.)

There may arise a question of why balance, fluency, and the perfection of movement are important. These ideas usually come from traditions that presuppose that sport leads to human improvement in respect of the overall excellence of the athlete, and they are the ultimate (though maybe idealized) goals of this kind of thinking. These ideas relate to ideals such as *areté* and *kalokagathia*, that we associate with ancient Greek athletics, Coubertin's idea of *eurhythmia*, or even forms of education from the Far East (such as, for example, those described in Japanese martial paths). However, it is important to distinguish between instrumental goals and goals as the above-mentioned ideals. Even though the goals as ideals can be called "ultimate goals", they should not be seen as "objectives" or "ends" or "purposes" of the activity. Rather, they are *process goals* – referring to the values inscribed in the process itself, that result in the gradual development and improvement of the human being in those valued ways – just from engagement in the process. Therefore they do not contribute to instrumental goals and we cannot talk of a "triple instrumentality of sport" (cf. the idea of "double instrumentality of sport" – see Martinková and Parry, 2011).

The over-emphasis on results within rankings puts an enormous tension on the athletes in terms of the expectation of the best possible results of their performance, which may trigger for the performance disturbing emotions, thoughts and expectations that often disable the athletes from performing in the best way. The resulting stress not only destroys the effectiveness and fluency of the athlete's performance, but also overshadows the experiential qualities usually associated with the human being moving and playing (e.g. joyful striving).

A second consequence of sport's inescapably inner instrumental nature is that it influences ethical aspects of sports engagement – what we might call *the well-lived process*. Instrumentality in this context leads to an underestimation of the values underlying human relationships in sport, such as, for example, fair play, treating others with respect, developing friendship(s), etc. When understanding the opponent instrumentally, he or she is just a means towards my victory, or my own profit (often connected to various external goals). This approach sidelines the other participants in sport as well as the internal values of sport itself. At its worst, this attitude tempts athletes towards the seeking of unfair advantages, such as the use of performance enhancing substances, various forms of cheating, violence, disrespect of others, etc.

Instrumentality within sport can be seen as the tendency to promote one's own self, which causes problems for positive relations towards others, and thus raises moral issues. This is exactly why sport can be used as a tool for moral education, with which sport practice is often associated (and which is one of the external goals of sport). In this respect, sport practice becomes a suitable area for identifying problems and dealing with them. In this context, Parry (1986) considers sport games as "laboratories for value experiments".

Decreasing instrumentality in sport

After having identified two kinds of instrumentality and discussing their negative consequences for the performance of an athlete, I shall now examine the possibility of decreasing both of the above-mentioned kinds of instrumentality in sport.

Firstly, in the practice of sport, we can seek to *reduce the significance of external goals*. This may not be easy, but it is possible. It is not easy because sport is a part of society and cannot be entirely excluded from it – all the athletes belong to a wider society and are

influenced by its values. When some values prevail in society, people use different means to obtain them. For example, in present times, sport is often viewed as a vehicle for pursuing money and fame.

Protecting sport from the effects of external goals – especially the problem of receiving money for one’s performance – is, for example, what Pierre de Coubertin tried to achieve within Olympism. One way of doing this was to insist that the athletes remained amateur. Amateurism was an effort to exclude financial rewards for participation in sport. Coubertin (2000a) saw money as a huge threat to Olympism – overriding all the values for promoting humanity connected to Olympism. Amateurism, which permitted participation only to those athletes who did not take money for their performance, was meant to prevent the practice of sport as work, by those existentially dependent on it. Sport was to be about overall *education*, improvement and development of the human being; not to be *work* to bring income. Of course, adherence to the ideals of amateurism was the source of many problems within Olympism, since the distinction between amateurs and professionals was in some cases not very clear. It was hard to distinguish those who had taken money for their sport performance from those who had never done so. As one example let us remind ourselves of the problem of ski instructors, who were considered amateurs by the International Ski Federation, while being regarded as professionals by IOC (see more in Schantz, 2011, 6 n.). As others, consider the full-time athletic ‘students’ in the USA and the full-time athletic “soldiers” in the former Eastern bloc. Nevertheless, amateurism was a restriction that tried to keep sport competition away from common worldly ends.

Since the old distinction between amateurism and professionalism is no longer observed, we need to think about other ways of decreasing the external goals of sport, if we do indeed want to reduce the negative effects of external goals in contemporary sport. Developing a better understanding of what sport is, which is an aim of sport philosophy, is definitely one possible approach.

Secondly, in the practice of sport, we can seek to *reduce the significance of internal goals*. Here, it is important to realize that the internal goals cannot be eliminated, since they are constitutive of the sport. Even though athletes may be able to merge with what they are doing during their performance and more or less remove instrumentality (which might be seen as the achievement of “flow” or “optimal experience” – see Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), some level of instrumentality always remains. Whenever the athlete is participating in a particular sport, there is always a goal to fulfil, which cannot be completely avoided during his or her performance.

However, even in the area of internal goals there is still an opportunity to decrease instrumentality. One way of doing this is by diminishing the emphasis on results, while putting the results in line with other values that sport may bring. Hyland (1990, 37) calls this approach “putting winning in perspective” and he describes it in the following way: “Putting winning in perspective may mean recognizing it as a legitimate value, but as only one value among others, whereby the quality of our athletic involvement is assessed.” Instrumentality can also be diminished when we highlight the *process* of the actual sport participation, aside from the *results* of participation. The focus can be shifted to the quality of movement – balance, fluency, flow, economy of strength and effort – which describes in a more complete way what the athlete is doing. Here also the highlighting of experiential qualities, such as fun, excitement, joy, a sense of mastery, enjoying the present moment,

etc., come to the fore. To be aiming at perfection in one's present movements does not have to *exclude* the achievement of results – it merely puts them aside from one's focus for the moment. For example, in running, the more balanced, fluent and harmonious the style of an athlete's running, the better the chance of victory she has. Similarly, in football, the better an athlete is in passing, dribbling and running, the better chance she has to score. In harmonizing and becoming more fluent, an athlete diminishes the instrumental use of her body for the sake of expected values, and is more at one with herself.

With respect to Olympism, this attitude is seen in Coubertin's work: "What counts in life is not the victory, but the struggle; the essential thing is not to conquer, but to fight well" (Coubertin, 2000b, 589). The same idea is also captured by the Olympic creed: "The most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight; the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well" (*The Olympic Symbols*, 2007, 5). In these Olympic mottoes, athletes are encouraged towards paying attention to the process and its quality, while the motto "faster, higher, and stronger" rather leads them to achieving goals. Thus both facets of sporting engagement are captured: both the internal goals of sport and also the actual process.

Also, an emphasis on process focuses our attention on the well-lived process, which is related to the ethical perspective. Overcoming instrumentality in this context leads the athletes away from pursuing selfish goals to a concern for respect for others, fair play, highlighting friendship, and a sense of community, helping to bring people together, even when they are competing against each other. This is an important part of sport, and without due attention to the preconditions for the nurturing of these values, sport is limited in what it can offer to us.

The above-mentioned ideas towards decreasing negative consequences of instrumentality in sport are just a first step in thinking about this topic. They need to be examined more profoundly, but this goes beyond the aim of this paper.

CONCLUSION

After having described the two levels of instrumentality and understanding some of the negative consequences it has, I tried to show some possibilities for decreasing it. However, we cannot dispose of instrumentality in sport completely, since it is an internal part of it. In sport, there is always some achievement to be reached and this tends to overshadow any orientation toward process. When the end is more highly valued than the means, process becomes just a means to a goal. When the end overrides the means, we fail to pay adequate attention to the means of our performance. This may be problematic because in this way we make ourselves, as well as other human beings, into an instrument for our aims; and thus we may fail to treat ourselves in a respectful way, perhaps even exploiting or harming ourselves or others.

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DŮSLEDKY INSTRUMENTÁLNOSTI VE SPORTU

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SOUHRN

Cílem článku je představit problém instrumentálnosti v oblasti soutěžního sportu a prozkoumat její důsledky. Nejprve jsou popsány dva druhy instrumentálnosti ve sportu – interní a externí. Dále jsou diskutovány důsledky obou druhů instrumentálnosti na sportovce a jeho sportovní výkon. Instrumentálnost ovlivňuje kvalitu sportovního výkonu z hlediska kvality provádění pohybu a z hlediska etického. V závěru je položena otázka ohledně možnosti snižování instrumentálnosti ve sportu, jež by nám mohlo pomoci lépe pochopit sport, sportovní trénink a v neposlední řadě i sebe sama.

Klíčová slova: instrumentálnost, sportovní výkon, proces, etika

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