

MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS OF ROLES BETWEEN ATHLETES AND SOCIETY

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Sport is a major phenomenon in modern society, and becomes a part of people's everyday life. Sport also legitimates national and ethnic loyalties by competitive striving. To be able to compete in sport, a person needs to interact with other persons; for example the opponents, audience, and the general public or the society as well. As such, its function can be primarily viewed from a social interaction perspective, which plays an important role in the life of athletes.

Athletes interact with people in the society in which they belong to express their needs, expectations, and hopes. In return, society also has their own expectations of their heroes. From the perspective of "*athletic social system theory*" (King & Chi, 1979), participation in sport places explicit demands and expectations upon the athlete that is basically the result of certain spheres of interaction between the athlete and society. Those demands and expectations are in regard to the athlete's attitude and behavior, and how athletes perceive themselves in being a certain type of person displaying particular characteristics. Based on King and Chi's further explanation, it can be concluded that the athletes' successful participation and commitment to their social system must reflect a consensus that accommodate the demands and expectations of all parties involved. In other words, there must be a continual give and take between the athlete and the society or social system. Ralph Linton's (1936, pp.114-115; in Calhoun, 1987) definition about role verifies this conclusion.

A role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. The individual is socially assigned to a status and occupies it in relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitutes the status into effect, he is performing a role Each person has a series of roles deriving from the various patterns in which he participates and at the same time a role in general, which represent the sum total of these roles and determines what he does for the society and what he can expect from it.

Athletes have to interact with other people in their own social system. In other words, many people are becoming involved in the lives of the athletes. In this social interaction, each individual is bringing his or her own interest, needs, and priorities as well. It implies that in a sport setting, the interaction of many individuals strongly reflect every interests, needs, and expectations of all people. It can be said that sport activities involving many people in the society function similarly to a laboratorium facilitating many personal and group differences. If this is the case, then the aim should be to create and develop favorable social skills of the community in order to foster mutual perceptions of shared experiences.

Cultural beliefs, values, and norms should be important factors to consider if we wish to better understand the world of sport and the particular people involved. Social interaction implies that every person involved in the process would have certain roles to

play. Every person has and plays his role, as one does in life as a whole (Calhoun 1987). The role perspective of athletes lies in the ways they interact with society in terms of behavior. It envisages that athletes play a series of interrelated roles in society, which arouse expectations and demands from both parties.

In terms of the athletes' existence in their respective society, the roles of both parties should be mutually favorable in terms of meeting the expectations of the athlete and the society. Incompatible expectations perceived by both parties are the common cause of conflict, which may negatively affect the athlete's performance and further achievements. The worst that can happen is dissatisfaction and early retirement on part of the athlete. Whenever there is a conflict of interest in the roles within a relationship, there needs to be renegotiation based on openness and honesty.

Observation of field practices and our national media coverage show disturbing tendencies in that the authorities and government people in charge of competitive sports lay too much stress on extrinsic rewards with the sole aim to motivate athletes' efforts to excel in all levels of competition.

I strongly believe that too much stressing on external rewards will create destructive implications in terms of the way athletes value their involvement in sport which, in turn, may well affect perceptions of their role in society. There should be more efforts being done on how to foster intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards or motives. External rewards must not be given to athletes as mere reinforcement to perform better. Instead, it should be regarded as a token of appreciation given to athletes who have shown their heroic efforts and performances in competition. Athletes who are more intrinsically motivated in doing their best may value their social existence much more favorably. The way they value their own attitude and behavior, their dedicated efforts to improve and excel, their needs to be recognized, yet pay empathy and respect to other people's thoughts, feelings, and deeds; all of those may well establish a positive perception in favor of their role in society. Consequently, they may well perceive themselves as being good role models to inspire the younger generation apart from winning or losing a competition in which they took part.

However, when an athlete fails to win for the sake of the prestige of his country and nation, society may perceive the case differently. The failure of the athlete to meet the demands and expectations of the society may lead to disappointment and anger on part of the society, saying that the athlete is letting everyone in the community down. Even the press exaggerates by considering the loss as a "catastrophe".

The way in which an athlete feels the burden of losing an important match, and how it could affect the perception of his role in the community is illustrated as follows: the Indonesian men's doubles competing in recent badminton matches of the Sudirman Cup in Eindhoven, Netherlands, suffered a decisive loss against China. The media coverage included a short interview of the players, who admit of not being able to perform well due to the burden of extraordinary expectations of the sport officials and community to win the match. The players perceived themselves as failing to comply with the demands of winning the match and expectations of the society. Of course, it is understandable and reasonable if all of the officials in particular, and Indonesian society in general have great expectations on both players to win that very important match.

However, if the society and the media turn their back on the players, we may expect that the players will question their further role and status in the community. They may well perceive their ultimate dedication and efforts as useless, that the community is only valuing instant outcomes, and jeopardizes previous recognitions of their achievements.

Thus it is very important to foster and maintain good relationships between athletes and the community. In other words, there should be complementary of roles (Malim, 1997), where the community shows empathy for the players, and understands that winning and losing in sports are only part of the process in achieving better performances. Consequently, the players will remain focused on their tasks, responsibilities, and roles in their respective society. A positive attitude of the society will shed light on their role to encourage, value, and recognize the athletes whatever the end result of a match is.

Figure 1 shows a whole series of interrelated roles of athletes and the society. Each important role function, role partner(s), and expectations from role partner(s) are described, thereby providing a picture of mutual perceptions between athletes and their respective society.

Figure 1
Roles and Expectations of Athletes and Society

<i>Role function</i>	<i>Role Partner(s)</i>	<i>Expectations from role partner(s)</i>
Athletes:		
Athlete	Coach Team Officials Society	Good play, co-operation, enthusiastic training and playing, good efforts, highly motivated, winning. Winning, loyalty.
Head of family	Family members	Loving and caring husband/wife/father/mother, providing the family.
Student	Tutor Other students or friends	Pay respect, accomplishing assignments. Joining groups, helping each other.
Employee	Employer Other workers	Working well, jobs done. Joining groups, helping each other.
Society:		
Coach, Team officials,	Athlete	Recognition of efforts, encouragement, support, feedback, achievement in performance.
Family members	Athlete	Support, recognition, encouragement.
Tutor	Athlete	Understanding, recognition, support.
Other students	Athlete	Recognition, encouragement, support.
Employer	Athlete	Recognition, encouragement, support.
Other workers	Athlete	Recognition, encouragement, support.
The public	Athlete	Recognition, understanding, support, rewards, jobs, status.

Expectations of every party (athletes and members of the society) must be met and fully understood on the basis of mutual respect. Athletes need to be recognized in terms of their best efforts to excel, and not in terms of the outcome of a match alone. Athletes need to be assured of their welfare once they are retired. Athletes, however, must understand and accept if the community or society may value an athlete's failure differently or contradict the expectations of the athlete. Athletes should be mentally prepared when faced with society's unfavorable reactions, responses, and attributions.

It is still a fact that many unfortunate top athletes are left to their fate by the society. Even the local government is mostly unable to provide athletes with a decent job from which they can earn a living. If these facts remain unsolved, then the potential for unnecessary conflicts between athletes and respectable members of the society will continue.

In conclusion, some suggestions are directed to introduce ways, which are expected to foster mutual perception and understanding between athletes and the society.

1. To increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and value of sports as it contributes to the enrichment of the life, status, and mutual understanding of the athlete's role in society.
2. To effectively utilize the mass media in stressing the importance of intrinsically motivated efforts to improve and increase competitive sport performance.
3. To stimulate recognition of the public on the competitive achievement efforts and process of athletes rather than on the outcome alone through teaching, coaching, coaching clinics, and socialization programs.
4. To foster programs which will encourage deeper insights of the demands and expectations regarding the athletes' role in society.
5. To endorse the N.O.C. and the government to establish a support system for the welfare of top athletes, either for those who are still performing or retired.

If athletes and other members of the community are willing to share mutual perceptions of their interests, needs, and expectations, then the process could make the society stronger to establishing harmony in terms of cooperation, communication, tolerance, respect, and solidarity.

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SPORT IN MODERN SOCIETY:

1. MAJOR PHENOMENON
2. PART OF PEOPLE'S LIFE
3. LEGITIMATION OF NATIONAL & ETHNIC LOYALTIES

Athletes need to interact with other persons in their social environment.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF AN ATHLETE:

1. COACH
2. TEAMMATES
3. OPPONENT
4. AUDIENCE
5. SIGNIFICANT OTHERS
6. GENERAL PUBLIC