

“Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is war minus the shooting.” Comment.

By Stesha Low Lin Hui (16S32)

Sport plays an integral part in our lives, be it as a form of relaxation and for the purpose of leisure or as a means to display one's skills and talent on the national, or even international level. More often than not, sport is for the purpose of the latter, and it has even reached the extent whereby sport is taken so seriously that people are willing to simply throw away the real value of sport and the ethics that govern it, mainly honesty and fairness. Instead, sportsmen are resorting to unethical means in order to gain an advantage over their opponent and emerge victorious from the battle. Victory itself is something highly sought after in the world of sport as it allows those who emerge victorious to exert dominance over others, and to be seen as superior. Hence, I agree to a large extent that there is no fair play in serious sport, and that it is similar to war minus the shooting as sportsmen go out on a 'battlefield' to play their respective sport with only one side emerging victorious at the end.

Firstly, in today's modern world where growth is driven by technological advancements, sport will inevitably be impacted by these advancements as well, in the form of drugs which can be used to boost an athlete's performance in his or her respective sport. The increasing use of drugs in sport is due to the high stakes involved in serious sport, so much so that athletes have to perform exceptionally well in order to reap the financial benefits that come along with it, such as sponsorships from sports giants like Nike and Adidas. As a result, some athletes are willing to resort to all means in order to perform better and ensure that their stakes are not lost, with the main objectives of winning in their mind. For instance, Maria Sharapova, a world renowned tennis player, was caught for substance abuse in 2015 which resulted in her being banned from the sport and anything related to it for a period of time. As a result, she had to take a backseat in her tennis career and lose large sponsorship deals from Porsche and Tag Heuer, which is a big setback since she had earned \$16.5 millions in sponsorship deals in 2014. This shows how sport has become so serious and competitive that fairness no longer has a place in it, and what is even worse is that athletes will resort to such unethical means to win. Hence, serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to a war minus the shooting.

Secondly, athletes take their respective sports so seriously that they become over competitive, to the extent that they ignore the welfare of their competitors and are willing to break rules and regulations in order to win, which undermines the value of honesty in sports. One such incident was when Nancy Kerrigan, a former American figure skater was attacked after a practice session during the 1994 United States Figure Skating Championships in Detroit. After much investigation, it was discovered that the people behind this incident were Jeff Gillooly and Shawn Eckhardt, who were the ex-husband and bodyguard of Kerrigan's long time rival and team mate, Tonya Harding. They had hired Stant to break Kerrigan's right leg so that she would be unable to compete at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, making way for Harding to win. Fortunately, her leg was only bruised, not broken, but the injury forced her to withdraw from the national championships. This incident shows the extent to which some athletes and their supporters are willing to go - intentionally harming and injuring their competitors in order to gain an edge despite the rules and regulations put in place by sporting bodies.

Hence, this shows that serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to war minus the shooting.

Lastly, when sport is carried out on national and international levels, when countries from all over the world send their athletes to a host country to participate in a sporting competition. The differences in their cultural background or political ideology can result in tension and conflict between athletes. It is almost as though the athletes view each other as enemies like in a war, and simply overlook the spirit of sportsmanship where discrimination and hostility should play no part. One such example is when an Egyptian Judoka refused to shake the hand of his Israeli opponent after a Judoka competition in 2016, showing how some athletes take their sport so seriously that they allow cultural and political differences to cloud their view of what sport truly means. Such instances show how athletes behave as though they are 'fighting on a battlefield' similar to what happens in a war which breaks out due to a clash in ideologies between countries. Hence, serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and is similar to war without the shooting.

However, some detractors may argue that most athletes in today's world play sports for the love of it and because of their strong passion for their respective sport. These athletes value the importance of honesty, fair play and sportsmanship and will not resort to unethical means in order to achieve victory. Instead, they respect each other as opponents and train hard, putting in immeasurable amounts of time in order to excel in their sport and emerge champions. A notable example is United States swimmer Michael Phelps who has earned more than 20 Olympics gold medals in all the years he has competed in swimming events. His outstanding achievement was a result of him training hard to always consistently strive to improve himself, and while participating in competitions, had always exemplified fair play. In addition, it is also evident that he understood the importance of sportsmanship - during the 2016 Rio Olympics when he lost to Joseph Schooling of Singapore in the 100 metres butterfly event, which came as a shock to many, he went up to Joseph Schooling right after the event to give him a pat on the back and to congratulate him. Hence, in such instances, athletes are seen to value the importance of fair play while at the same time take their sports seriously; they certainly do not behave as though they are opponents engaged in a war without the shooting.

In a nutshell, I agree to a large extent that serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to a war without the shooting. Although I do acknowledge the fact that this is not the case for many sports and their sportsmen, just a handful of athletes who engage in such mindset and behavior is sufficient to ruin the reputation of all sportsmen and how sport is viewed in the world today.

Comments:

The discussion connects the two parts of the question most of the time, and this is an important part of the argument. Relevant examples are provided and this is also important in doing well especially when they connect to the point. More examples to show the animosity involved in competition and stronger emphasis on the high stakes involved e.g the prize money, the honour and glory accorded to both athletes and the nations they represent would be good. It might be more appropriate to take the stand that to a large extent, sport is not like war minus the shooting, since you concluded that it is only a handful of athletes who engage in this.

