Ethics and Sports Rules

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Doctor of Philosophy
December 2002

Abstract

There are two influential theses about right action in sporting games: one holds that right action should be judged based on 'rule formalism'; the other states that it should be judged according to 'the ethos of the game'. This thesis rejects both accounts. The former fails to see that the ethos side of a game affects the 'contents' of sports rules whereas the latter is too broad to apprehend an appropriate account of ethos. While 'the spirit of rules' and 'the spirit of games' are more sustainable, they need to be elaborated further. Consequently, I proposed 'the Olympic Spirit' (i.e. Olympism) as a better account of good ethos for all sports, to be regarded as the organizing concept for sport education. Specific points have been addressed as follows:

(i) since there are different conceptions of sport and because of the current trends of debate, I have limited my focus to those commonly accepted 'sporting games' or 'sports contests' in which rules are governed rather than sports in general;

(ii) the central sports rules can be seen just as 'constitutive rules' as they are constituted/reconstructed by rule makers and stated in a rule book of a particular sporting game. They are also 'quasi-regulative rules', given the premise that all rules are regulative. They are expandable rules based on the relevant ethos of a particular sporting game.

(iii) sports rules are in certain aspects different from moral norms and laws. However, sports rules and laws should work together coherently and they should be protected by morality;

(iv) it is held that rule formalism cannot fully elaborate on ethical issues (negative or positive) such as cheating and sportsmanship in sport;

(v) 'the ethos of games' covers 'the spirit of rules' and 'the spirit of games'. 'The spirit of rules' can be included in 'the spirit of games', which determines how each particular game has to be played in concrete circumstances. A better account of 'the spirit of games' is Olympism, which could cover all the human positive values and function as a paradigm good ethos of sport.