
EFFECTS OF MODIFYING RULES RELATED TO FAIR PLAY IN COMPETITION ON THE ACQUISITION OF VALUES IN U-10 FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

Competitions in training stages replicate the formats and systems of professional sports, as well as the negative consequences. Youth sports programs must include adequate planning for personal development and the promotion of values in their objectives, considering the age, sociocultural context, and characteristics of the young athletes to whom they are directed. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a fair play score and classification valued by the team, rivals, and parents/guardians on a scale of 0 to 1, resulting in an average that was the final team's fair play score, with an extra point given for a white card (positive attitudes) or subtracting it (negative attitudes) shown by the referee during the match. A quasi-experimental A-B design was used to determine the impact of the rule changes. The players (n=51) competed in two tournaments with two competition formats (official rules and modified rules), and their values were assessed using the AMDYSQ (Attitudes to Moral Decision-making in Youth Sport Questionnaire) both before and after the tournament. The results show that the best results occur immediately before the competitions, with increasing values associated with fewer sporting behaviours in the unmodified tournament and nearly returning to baseline values in the modified tournament. The new proposed approach appears to shift the perspective and orientation of all competition agents, fostering positive values and an ethical approach primarily focusing not only on performance but also on the personal and moral development of young players.

Key words: Life skills. Personal development. Rules modification. Positive experiences.

Palavras-chave: Habilidades para a vida. Desenvolvimento pessoal. Modificação de regras. Experiências positivas.

RESUMO

Efeitos da modificação das regras relacionadas ao fair play em competições na aquisição de valores em jogadores de futebol sub-10

As competições nas fases de treinamento reproduzem os formatos e sistemas dos esportes profissionais, bem como suas consequências negativas. Os programas de esportes para jovens devem incluir um planejamento adequado para o desenvolvimento pessoal e a promoção de valores em seus objetivos, considerando a idade, o contexto sociocultural e as características dos jovens atletas a quem são direcionados. O objetivo deste estudo foi examinar o impacto de uma pontuação e classificação de fair play valorizada pela equipe, rivais e pais/responsáveis em uma escala de 0 a 1, resultando em uma média que foi a pontuação final de fair play da equipe, com um ponto extra dado para um cartão branco (atitudes positivas) ou subtraindo-o (atitudes negativas) mostrado pelo árbitro durante a partida. Um projeto quase-experimental A-B foi usado para determinar o impacto das mudanças nas regras. Os jogadores (n=51) competiram em dois torneios com dois formatos de competição (regras oficiais e regras modificadas), e seus valores foram avaliados usando o AMDYSQ (Attitudes to Moral Decision-making in Youth Sport Questionnaire) antes e depois do torneio. Os resultados mostram que os melhores resultados ocorrem imediatamente antes das competições, com valores crescentes associados a menos comportamentos esportivos no torneio não modificado e quase retornando aos valores de base no torneio modificado. A nova abordagem proposta parece mudar a perspectiva e a orientação de todos os agentes da competição, promovendo valores positivos e uma abordagem ética com foco principal não apenas no desempenho, mas também no desenvolvimento pessoal e moral dos jovens jogadores.

INTRODUCTION

In the training stages of sport education, different methodological currents point out that the three P's should be pursued: performance, participation and personal development (Côte, Hancock, 2016).

In this sense, in terms of performance, there are a multitude of programs that seek long-term goals to reach the elite (Ford, et al. 2009).

Similarly, sports practice promotes participation and reduces sedentary lifestyles in young people (Janssen, LeBlanc, 2010).

Finally, there are sport programmes that promote personal and social values (Ortega-Vila, et al., 2024; Ortega-Vila, et al., 2022; Weiss, et al., 2013).

In this sense, it should be noted, on the one hand, that personal development in the context of sport is understood as the acquisition of values, attitudes and qualities that enable people to be successful in the different environments in which they live (Danish et al., 2004).

On the other hand, it should be noted that this development does not occur through causal relationships but through a formative approach to the whole teaching-learning process in the long term (Shehu, Moruisi, 2011).

Furthermore, although sport enables the construction of personality and values of young people (Weinberg, Gould, 2023), it does not lead to this promotion of values and personal development on its own (Fuentes-Guerra, 2015).

This objective is achieved only through the implementation of sports programmes with adequate attention to this process of values acquisition and correctly guided by the coach (Omeñaca et al., 2015; Ortega et al., 2015).

Therefore, youth sports programs should integrate the appropriate planning of personal development and the promotion of values within their objectives, considering the age, socio-cultural context and characteristics of the young athletes targeted (Côté, Hancock, 2016).

In this line, different authors have demonstrated the great benefits in the development of values through pedagogical-sport programmes, such as the Sport Education Model (Siedentop, 1987), Personal and Social Responsibility Model (Hellion, Walsh, 2002),

'United Sport for the Promotion of Education and Recreation' (SUPER) (Danish, et al., 2002), Play it Smart (Petitpas, et al., 2004) or First Tee (Petitpas, et al., 2005), and more specifically in the sport of basketball and football the model 'Por una Educación Real: Valores y deporte' of the Real Madrid Foundation (Ortega-Vila et al., 2022).

There are also specific educational projects, not developed under a specific model. These projects are implemented in specific contexts, with clear objectives aimed at the development of values, finding some examples in different sports such as: a) basketball: the 'valorcesto' programme, developed by the Real Madrid Foundation (Ortega, et al., 2012), in which didactic resources such as the White Card are developed, to reward sporting attitudes or the alignment of values; b) golf: the life skills and community service programme based on sport (Brunelle, et al., 2007), which resulted in significant positive impact on adolescents' prosocial values, social responsibility and empathy; c) hockey: the School Sport Programme (Camiré et al., 2013), based on the training of social skills and values in sports practice, which achieved results that evidenced the holistic approach to teaching; and d) boxing: the 'Passport to success' programme (Hemphill et al., 2019), based on the achievement of eight specific values embodied in a passport, which was very successful in transferring the values worked on into daily routines. In general, sports programmes aimed at personal development achieve the proposed objectives, developing pro-social values and social skills useful for life, as analysed in their meta-analysis Bruner et al., (2021).

In football, projects such as the Integral Programme in team sports for values education (Omeñaca, et al., 2015).

In this study, activities complementary to football were carried out through didactic resources such as a notebook, in which different values were reported. Positive results were found related to positive co-existence and pro-social actions, reducing situations of exclusion and discrimination Lee et al., (2017), they developed a 12-week programme of football sessions, consisting of different phases to work on personal values, teamwork and goal setting, achieving significant improvements in all of them. Malette et al., (2022) developed a

study that combined practical football activities with others for the development of teamwork, goal setting, interpersonal communication, problem solving, emotional regulation and leadership.

The results revealed slight improvements in social values and statistically significant improvements in values related to companionship and entrepreneurship.

In current planning in training football, at least in elite academies, their proposals combine the technical learning of the sport with the comprehensive training, promotion of values and academic development of athletes, which influence their personal development, both when they are immersed in the process and when they leave the practice (Rongen et al., 2021).

As we have been able to analyse throughout this section, it can be seen that there are projects and programmes that establish objectives for the comprehensive training of young athletes, but what happens with competition, does it promote the development of pro-social values and personal development, and does it adapt in formative stages with the intention of fulfilling its formative objective? In general, the answer is no, as competitions at formative stages replicate the formats and systems of professional sport, replicating the related negative consequences (Burton et al., 2011).

In other words, preprogrammes in a competitive environment induce more stress and anxiety than personal development of athletes (Mellalieu et al., 2009).

However, competition can also be the vehicle that leads to the development of positive attitudes and behaviours that have an impact on personal development and the promotion of values for the athlete. This requires adapting the rules to be appropriately oriented (Ortega-Toro, 2006; Ortega-Toro et al., 2012).

Following authors such as Alcázar (1983), quoted by Trepát (1999), in order to develop competitions in formative stages, which really fulfil this formative objective, we can highlight some characteristics to take into account: a) the competition must be aimed at all boys and girls, regardless of their sex, race, physical and psychological faculties, etc. b) it must not entail health risks, both physical and psychological; c) it must be adapted to the physical, maturity, psychological and affective

characteristics of the children, always taking their interests into account; d) there must be an explicit intention on the part of the institutions and persons involved to give the competition a clear educational purpose; e) they should not have overly rigid structures, with children being able to make decisions in some aspects; f) competitions should be used as a means of learning and not as an end; g) they should be motivating, providing opportunities for success for all participants; h) they should have an impact on the reinforcement of educational values, among others.

In this regard, there are few examples of competitions that establish specific formats for the development of educational values. Among them, we can mention the Real Madrid Foundation, through which, in its socio-sporting schools, they develop competitions with some modified rules such as the following (Ortega-Vila et al., 2012): a) equal participation, establishing minimum participation times per player; b) mixed modality; c) balanced teams; d) there is no referee, but the players themselves indicate the infractions committed during the game; e) there is a card, called the White Card, which rewards the good-behaviour of the players; or f) there is a post-match debate, in which both teams share their reflections on the experience and the justifications for the white cards assigned on panels are established. Due to this type of competition, it was shown that boys and girls were more inclined towards cooperative attitudes than competitive ones (Ortega-Vila et al., 2019) after experiencing the modified competition.

Another example is the competition proposed by Veroz et al., (2015), called Futgolines. In this study conducted with U7 players, a federative competition is compared with the modified competition.

The basic playing conditions were modified (4-on-4 matches, in smaller fields and goals) and the scoring system (points for positive behaviour or penalising unsportsmanlike behaviour).

The results revealed significant differences in favour of the modified competition in the acquisition of the values responsible autonomy and respect.

In conclusion, although there is an awareness of the importance of including personal development and values in sports programmes at the formative stage,

competitions are not adapted for this purpose, although it is known that these are a fundamental part of the training processes, given the motivation they generate (Ortega et al., 2022).

The aim of this study is to analyse the effect of rule modification and the fair play score on moral attitudes and sporting values in U-10 football players.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

A quasi-experimental A-B design was used to examine how rule modification affected various dependent variables (Barlow and Hersen, 1973).

In situation A (Standard Tournament), the official Spanish Football Federation 8-a-side rules were applied, while in situation B (Modified Tournament), matches were played with regulatory modifications.

Sample

The sample consisted of a total of 51 U-10 participants from four federated boys' football teams. The average age of the players was 9.41 ± 0.11 years, with a training experience of 3.11 ± 0.8 years and an average of 2.8 ± 0.3 training sessions per week. Participants' guardians were informed about the study through written communication and face-to-face meetings and provided informed consent by signature.

Players participated in both tournaments (regulation and modified) using a pre-established substitution system to ensure that they played a similar number of minutes in both tournaments.

The study received approval from the ethics committee of the University of Murcia with ID: 2829/2020.

Variables

The independent variable was the rules of the game. Two regulations were used: the official RFEF regulation and the modified one.

The differences between the two were as follows:

a) Playing time: Standard Tournament, two periods of 25 minutes each were played, with

continuous time and a 10-minute break between the two periods. In the Modified Tournament, five periods of 10 minutes each were played, with a 10-minute break between the third and fourth periods.

(b) Scoring: In the Normal Tournament, a standard scoring system was used, where the result of the match was determined by the sum total of goals scored by both teams. In contrast, in the Modified Tournament, a partial scoring system was used, meaning that at the start of each period, the score started at 0-0, and the final result of the match was determined by the sum of the periods won by each team.

c) Substitutions: Standard Tournament unlimited substitutions were allowed throughout the match, while in the Modified Tournament no changes were allowed during each period, except in the last period or in cases of injury. In the Modified Tournament, two conditions were established to guarantee the minimum participation of each player: first, a player could not participate in three consecutive periods; second, each player had to play at least one full period.

d) Goalkeeper: Standard Tournament - No modifications were implemented in this aspect, while in the Modified Tournament it was established as a requirement that the goalkeeper must play at least one full period as an outfield player.

e) Headers: There was no prohibition in the Standard Tournament, but there was in the Modified Tournament, so that direct headers were prohibited (punishable by a direct free kick), allowing headers if the ball had previously taken one or more bounces.

f) Goal kicks: In the Standard Tournament - No adaptations were made to the rules. In the Modified Tournament, a restriction was introduced that prevented players of the team not taking the kick-off from crossing the offside line until the ball was put into play.

(g) Fair play scoring: Standard Tournament - No aspect related to fair play was considered, whereas in the Modified Tournament a specific assessment was introduced for it. Specifically, the fair play of each team was evaluated by the team itself, by the opposing teams, and by the parents/guardians, using a scale from 0 to 1. In addition, up to 1 extra point could be added to this final fair play score by getting a white card (for positive attitudes) or subtracted (for negative attitudes) that the referee showed

during the match. Therefore, a maximum of 2 points could be obtained for fair play.

h) Scoring for the competition system: In this way, in the Modified Tournament, teams accumulated 3 points for each match won, 2 points for each match drawn, and 1 point for each match lost. To these points were added those obtained for fair play and the achievement

of a white card, which allowed a maximum of 5 points per match to be reached. In addition, an additional ranking was established based solely on the fair play score. In contrast, in the Standard Tournament, winning teams scored 3 points per match won and 1 point per match drawn.

Table 1 - Rules used in both tournaments.

Rules	Tournament A8	Tournament A8-M
Number of Players	8 players	8 players
Space game	58x38 m	58x38 m
Goal Size	06x2 m	6x2 m
Game Time	2x25 min	5x10 min
Score	Running Scored	Partial Scored (SETS)
Substitutions	Unlimited	No substitute during each set, with mandatory participation in at least one period.
Ball Size	4	4
Goalkeeper	Free	The goalkeeper must play at least one player period.
Head-Butting	Yes	No
Goal Kicks	Free	The throw-in cannot be pressed in front of the offside line.
Fair Play Points	No	Yes
Competition Points	System 3 points/won 1 point/tie	3 points/won 2 points/tie 1 point/lost ± 1 point per fair play Classification extra fair play

The dependent variables were attitudes towards moral decision-making in sport, assessed through the AMDYSQ (Lee et al., 2007), which measures the constructs of cunning, cheating, and competitiveness, which have six, six, and three closed questions, respectively, and which are answered through a Likert scale (0 to 10). The data were recorded during the conduct of the survey.

Data were recorded during two tournaments that took place within three days of each other. In each of these tournaments, each team participated in three matches. Both competitions were held at the same time of day and in similar weather conditions. In total, 12 matches were played in the two tournaments, six in the first and six in the second. A round-robin competition format was used, and the order of play was the same in both tournaments.

Prior to the first tournament, a fixed substitution system was established to ensure an equal distribution of playing time among the players. However, in the second tournament, no substitutions were allowed during each period. In the latter tournament, two additional rules were implemented: first, a player was prohibited from participating in three consecutive periods, limiting his playing time to a maximum of 20 consecutive minutes.

Second, the goalkeeper was required to play at least one full period as an outfield player, with a minimum duration of 10 minutes. In addition, each player was required to play at least one full period of play, also with a minimum duration of 10 minutes.

In the first tournament, a 10-minute break was scheduled between the first and second halves of play, while in the second

tournament, the break was reduced to 10 minutes between the third and fourth periods.

Players' attitudes towards moral decision-making, through the AMDYSQ, were assessed at three points in time: the first one prior to the tournaments in a training session, while T1 was assessed after the Normal Tournament and T2 after the Modified Tournament.

Data analysis

Descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics were calculated.

For the inferential analysis, a repeated measures analysis of variance (Pillai trace or assumed sphericity) was used.

For post hoc analysis, Bonferroni's post hoc was used. All data were treated at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The reference eta

squared values used were as follows (Ferguson, 2009): no effect ($\eta^2 < 0.04$), minimal effect ($0.04 \leq \eta^2 < 0.25$), moderate effect ($0.25 \leq \eta^2 < 0.64$), and strong effect ($\eta^2 \geq 0.64$). For statistical analysis, SPSS software version 24.0 was used.

RESULTS

The results show lower values for the three constructs in the Modified Tournament than in the Normal Tournament and even lower in the moment before the tournaments. Statistically significant differences were found in the constructs of Cunning ($F_{2,41}=6.69$, $p=.003$, $\eta^2=.257$), Cheating ($F_{2,41}=3.294$, $p=.047$, $\eta^2=.138$), and Competitiveness ($F_{2,41}=5.820$, $p=.006$, $\eta^2=.221$), with the values always being lower in the Modified Tournament than in the Standard Tournament (Table 2).

Table 2 - AMDYSQ dimensions and differences between tournaments.

Variables	Previous Tournament	Standard Tournament(T1)	Modified Tournament (T2)	p value	Size effect η^2
	X \pm DT	X \pm DT	X \pm DT		
Cunning	26,60 \pm 15,16	33,81 \pm 18,74	31,40 \pm 19,01	.003	.257
Sheeting	17,19 \pm 13,66	21,60 \pm 19,00	17,88 \pm 15,49	.047	.138
Competitiveness	23,00 \pm 6,21	25,79 \pm 5,54	22,91 \pm 8,23	.012	.221

Within the construct Cunning, statistically significant differences were observed between the previous moment and the Normal Tournament ($p = .007$), but not with the rest of the tournaments; in Cunning, there were tendencies towards statistical differences between the Normal Tournament and the Modified Tournament ($p=.060$), but not with the rest of the tournaments; and in Competitiveness between the previous moment and the Normal Tournament ($p=.012$) but not with the rest of the tournaments.

DISCUSSION

The applied regulatory modifications improve the moral attitudes and positive behaviours of the athletes in the Modified Tournament. In particular, higher values for the construct's cunning, cheating and competitiveness were observed in the Regular Tournament than in the Modified Tournament, and even lower values in the pre-tournament

moments. This could be due to the explicit intention of the organisation of the Modified Tournament to give great importance to sporting values in the competition (Ortega-Vila et al., 2012), an aspect that has an impact on the formative approach adopted by coaches and that guides the teaching of these values to youngsters (Fuentes-Guerra et al., 2009).

The first construct, cunning, represents a violation of the spirit rather than the rules of the game, a behaviour that seeks to take advantage of the rules to gain a competitive advantage (Lee et al., 2007).

In this case, it is observed in the results that in the normal tournament there is an increase in this factor, while in the modified tournament it is reduced due to the application of modified rules.

The data from this study are consistent with those found in other studies, which demonstrate the acceptance of cunning-related behaviours in competition in football, compared to other sports (Ponseti et al., 2017).

However, cunning does not always have a negative connotation, and there are studies that relate it to excellence, considering it a strategy that brings the athlete closer to success, as long as it is used in a balanced way and within the legally permitted rules (Leota, Turp, 2020).

The second construct, cheating, represents a violation of the rules themselves and is central to the study of unethical behaviour (Lee et al., 2007).

In this case, the acceptance of cheating is higher for athletes who show anger and aggression, for team sports, and in athletes with an ego-oriented motivational climate (Bovolon et al., 2024).

The data from the present study do not agree with the previous ones, as cheating acceptance increases in the normal tournament but tends to decrease in the modified competition.

Finally, competitiveness represents the pressure for unethical 'win-at-all-costs' behaviour (Lee et al., 2007).

In this case, several studies demonstrate the prevalence of attitudes and values related to competition, the importance of winning, and low tolerance for frustration and failure in the formative stage (Cruz et al., 1995; Wagnsson et al., 2016).

Again, this construct increases in the normal tournament with respect to the previous assessment, decreasing in the modified tournament to return to that baseline value.

In general, it can be observed that the data obtained in the Modified Tournament break with the usual line of results obtained in unmodified competitions in the formative stage in football with regard to moral attitudes and fair play, which reproduce adult competition formats and with them the values and attitudes that prioritise victory over the process (Pacheco, 2009).

In this sense, it can be affirmed that the design of competitions focused on the promotion of fair play increases the development of values to a greater extent than normal competitions.

As an example, other studies coincide with those found in the current study, such as White (2018), in which young U-12 football players are subjected to a full season playing matches with modified rules that emphasize fair play, found a significant reduction in injuries and

competitiveness. Also, the modified Real Madrid Foundation competitions evidenced a greater inclination towards cooperative versus competitive attitudes (Ortega et al., 2019).

Finally, it should be noted that the development of formative competitions in grassroots sport should be an obligation, forming athletes and better citizens of the future (Benedek, 2006) and should follow a series of principles supported by evidence, which according to Giménez-Egido (2023), should include: a) modification of the rules according to the characteristics of the subjects, ensuring a more positive experience of the subjects with sport (Burton et al., 2011; Correia et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2016); b) active participation, enabling the achievement of the three basic psychological needs (Burton et al., 2011); c) high perceived efficacy and enjoyment, which are positively related to an increase in performance (Buszard et al., 2020; Feltz et al., 2008) and improves satisfaction, enjoyment and adherence to practice (Bandura, 1997; Ortega et al., 2009); d) functional motor variability, which favours the emergence of a larger motor repertoire and develops creativity (Ortega-Toro et al., 2020); e) involvement of families, so that they can act as support by creating a comfortable motivational climate (Dorsch et al., 2022); f) avoiding early specialisation in sport, avoiding the processes of injury, abandonment and favouring a broad motor pattern (Li et al., 2020); g) healthy lifestyle habits, which allow the perpetuation of an active lifestyle, as well as fostering social relationships (Cheon, 2021); specific programmes for the development of values, since personal development and the promotion of values can only be achieved if properly planned (Ortega-Vila et al., 2017), establishing intervention programmes throughout the sports community both individually and globally (Bean and Forneris, 2014).

It should be noted that the modified competition designed and developed in this study allowed the achievement of many of these principles, as the modified rules allowed the development of values, healthy lifestyle habits, versatility, and increased variability of technical-tactical actions more desirable for the formative stage.

However, the data obtained should be examined with caution. The study only analysed short-term effects on attitudes towards moral

decision-making in sport, so the medium- and long-term effect of using the proposed modified rules is unknown.

Future work should analyse the impact of the application of the proposed rules after a longer period of time. In addition, the study had a small, male-only, formative sample. This may have influenced the physical-biological, social, and technical levels, as well as the level of specialization of the sample.

Also, more comprehensive approaches should be carried out, which also include the continuous training of coaches and the involvement of families, with the aim of working towards a common goal of education in values through sport (Alcayne et al., 2023).

Despite the limitations, the results show how the manipulation of the scoring system rule with fair play, as well as the rest of the rules that seek a better formative competition, leads to improvements in children's moral and prosocial attitudes compared to federated competition.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that: a) The rules modification, especially the valuation of fair play, leads to improvements in children's moral and prosocial attitudes compared to federated competition; b) For the development of a more formative competition, proper coordination between sport institutions, federations, families, and coaches is necessary; c) The proposed new approach seems to change the perspective and orientation of all actors involved in competition, developing to a greater extent positive values and an ethical approach, not only focusing on sport performance but also on the personal and moral development of young people; d) The results obtained will serve to raise awareness of the importance of implementing new rules in current competitive formats, allowing for significant improvements in the teaching-learning processes and in the personal development of young athletes; e) Further research is required to determine the most appropriate regulations for each training stage so that they do not imply significant structural and equipment modifications to be easily implemented by institutions. In any case, these new regulatory modifications should be based on scientific evidence, which will serve as a basis for evaluating their incorporation by sport federations.

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