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## Aggression and Violence in Sport: Moving Beyond the Debate

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### Abstract

This paper is the latest in a series of articles published in *The Sport Psychologist* in recent years on aggression and violence in sport (Kerr, 1999, 2002; Tenenbaum, Sacks, Miller, Golden, & Doolin, 2000; Tenenbaum, Stewart, Singer, & Duda, 1997). While these respective articles have presented dissenting views on the nature and prevention of aggression and violence in sport, the present paper proposes that much of the apparent disagreement is semantic in nature. Thus, this paper begins by clarifying some definitional issues before specifying both areas of agreement and continued dissention among recent authors. Major emphases in this paper include the importance of adopting preventative rather than reactive measures to reduce the dangers associated with aggression and violence in sport, as well as the manner in which adult sport norms affect youth sport environments. In addition, several broader issues, which have emerged from these recent published debates, are presented for future consideration.

Articles published in sequence during the last few years in *The Sport Psychologist*, beginning with the ISSP Position Stand (PS) (Tenenbaum, Stewart, Singer, & Duda, 1997) followed by Kerr's rejoinder (Kerr, 1999), the reply to this rejoinder (Tenenbaum, Sacks, Miller, Golden, & Doolin, 2000), and ending with Kerr's (2002) response, indicate that much disagreement exists regarding not only the nature of aggressive and violent behaviors in sport, but also the appropriate strategies for addressing them. The present paper, however, proposes that there is also a good deal of agreement, which has been masked largely by semantic differences, among the authors on both sides of these recent debates. The purposes of this article are: (a) to draw attention to these areas of agreement, (b) to discuss some points of continued dissension, and most importantly, (c) to summarize some topics for further consideration that have emerged from, yet extend beyond, this ongoing debate regarding aggression and violence in sport. Before addressing these aims, however, a few comments regarding possible misrepresentations and misinterpretations of recent published arguments are warranted, as is a brief discussion of definitional and semantic issues.

### MISREPRESENTING AND MISINTERPRETING PUBLISHED STATEMENTS

In his most recent paper, Kerr (2002) states that a number of his earlier arguments (Kerr, 1999) were misinterpreted and misrepresented by Tenenbaum et al. (2000). The latter authors had also implied that Kerr (1999) had fashioned unfair and somewhat careless

criticisms of the original PS (Tenenbaum et al., 1997). One consequence of airing a debate in a public forum such as the one provided by *The Sport Psychologist* is that any arguments put forward are subject to the personal opinions and reactions of the audience. Once published, the content of a paper enters the public domain and is subject to public scrutiny. While authors might reasonably expect the readership of a journal to which they submit their work to act as reasonable consumers, they also accept the possibility that readers' perceptions of their efforts may not perfectly reflect the intended message. Thus, the author carries the burden of crafting a clear argument, yet yields the right of interpreting the published ideas to the reader.

This being stated, it is not our intention to defend any of the previous authors for skewing the opposing sides' statements in order to gain favor for their own views, but rather to suggest a different tone be adopted from this point forward. That is, rather than relying on this forum to publicly air a personal debate (while attempting to convince readers that ours is the "true" or "correct" view), our aim is to move beyond the previous arguments and towards a productive discourse on aggression and violence in sport. In this regard, we agree with the sentiment Kerr (2002) has conveyed by stating, "Readers can judge the merits of the arguments and counterarguments by returning to these earlier publications" (p. 69). To provide a further disclaimer, of sorts, we want to make it clear that references made here to Kerr's (1999, 2002) previous arguments, and indeed to others' as well, reflect the present authors' interpretations of the published articles.

The preceding discussion notwithstanding, there is one purported misinterpretation identified by Kerr (2002) that we would like to clarify. Towards the closing of their reply, Tenenbaum et al. (2000) cited an aggressive and illegal action in a youth hockey game that left the then 15-year-old player Neal Goss paralyzed (Swift & Munson, 1999). Kerr accurately refers to this as an "emotive example" (p. 69), which was used by Tenenbaum et al. to refute some of his earlier arguments. After reading Kerr's latest article, it is apparent that one could interpret this passage as implying that Kerr himself would endorse the illegal action described. This was not the intention, and the present authors wish to make it clear that none of Kerr's (1999, 2002) statements would directly support the specific, injury-causing action described by Swift and Munson. The point that Tenenbaum et al. were trying to make was that this, indeed, was a tragic example of the type of behavior that occurs in youth sports as an indirect consequence of norms relating to aggression in adult sport.

## DEFINITIONAL AND SEMANTIC CONSIDERATIONS

In the most recent paper, while critiquing the definition of aggression used in the original PS, Kerr (2002) states, "Physically aggressive acts, like blocking in American football, regular tackles in rugby, and body checks in ice hockey, can be ferociously violent actions yet both within the rules of the game and not intended to injure" (p. 70). If one recognizes the operational definition of aggression provided by the PS (i.e. behavior with the intent to injure), then an action executed without intent to injure cannot be classified as aggressive. Such an action would be considered assertive, as the term is used by Tenenbaum et al. (2000). Readers will note that one need not endorse an operational definition in order to recognize the manner in which a term is used. In the passage cited, Kerr appears to have

juxtaposed his preferred definition of aggression with that provided in the PS, with ensuing passages describing sanctioned “aggressive” acts, despite the fact that such acts would not be deemed aggressive, as the term was defined in the PS. Thus, our concern is that Kerr’s criticism of the PS largely reflects an interpretation of aggression in sport as he would have defined the term, as opposed to responding in light of the operational definition actually provided by the authors.

Notwithstanding Kerr’s (1999, 2002) contention that the traditional definitions of aggression do not apply to team contact sports, a recent review by Anderson and Bushman (2002) presents a definition similar to that contained in the PS. These authors describe *human aggression* as, “Any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the *proximate* (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target is motivated to avoid the behavior” (p. 28).

Of course, we recognize that the terms “aggressive” and “assertive,” as employed by many sport participants and spectators, carry a different meaning than that assigned by psychologists. Kerr (2002) questions whether viewers would describe the type of intense physical contact exhibited in the Super Bowl of American football as assertive rather than aggressive actions. He contends that referring to such behaviors as assertive, “Lacks credibility and remains unconvincing” (p.72). In the context of discussing such behaviors as a sports fan, Kerr may be correct. The PS’s definitions of these particular terms may not coincide with their usage among many spectators, who would not meditate over this “academic” distinction. Nevertheless, we remain confident that readers of *The Sport Psychologist* will consider arguments presented in its articles in light of the definitions provided and supported by the authors.

We do believe, however, that the foregoing discussion regarding definitional issues has highlighted a topic worthy of further consideration (thus, it is addressed specifically in a later section of this paper). Namely, when a similar term is ascribed different meanings by sport psychologists than by spectators, players, and coaches, potential problems exist. We believe that a large part of the dissenting views presented up to now reflect differing connotations of the term “aggression,” when used in a formal as opposed to informal context.

A laudable goal would be to arrive at an agreement on terms that capture both what Tenenbaum et al. (1997) refer to as aggression and what Kerr (1999, 2002) identifies as “unsanctioned aggression” in sport, as well as what these authors refer to as assertive behavior and “sanctioned aggression,” respectively. Kerr (2002) has stated, “Attempting to produce a satisfactory definition of aggression and violence in sport...may not be easy” (p. 71). We agree with this statement, yet we also hold that if these definitional issues could be resolved, we might find that much (though perhaps not all) of the opposing arguments presented in past publications have been more a reflection of differences in semantics, rather than in actual viewpoints.

## AREAS OF AGREEMENT REGARDING AGGRESSION IN SPORT

An example of an area in which we agree with statements made by Kerr (2002) concerns the necessity of intense, physical actions in several contact sports. Relying on Brink's (1995) term *hard play* to describe this type of behavior, which is acceptable within the rules of rugby union, Kerr explains that such behaviors often border quite closely with *foul play*. Foul play, Kerr explains, is not sanctioned by the rules and is not justified. We agree that in a variety of contact sports, including both individual and team events, the distinction between what Brink has called *fair play* and foul play is often difficult to discern. In fact, these popular phrases capture the distinction between assertive and aggressive acts, as the terms were employed in the original PS, based upon their usage in the scientific literature.

Contrary to Kerr's (2002) statement that the PS and Tenenbaum et al. (2000) seem to be arguing for "sanitized" sports (p. 76), this is not our goal, nor was it the goal of the earlier authors. In contrast, we agree that intense, physical contact – whether termed fair play, assertiveness, or sanctioned aggression – is an integral part of many sports. We further believe that steps should be taken to allow athletes to engage and, indeed, to revel in such behaviors without concern that others in the sport environment will react with intent to harm. As Tenenbaum et al. (2000) have stated "Athletes should never be compelled nor expected to proceed with the assumption that it is permissible to intentionally harm another participant" (p.318).

This is the rationale that leads us to support the spirit of the PS recommendations. Realizing that there is a fine line between acceptable and unacceptable acts in contact sports, we support strict enforcement of the rules in order to protect those who play hard while deterring participants from crossing that line. Of course, judging where that line falls is a difficult task: one that usually rests with the officials. Their role in minimizing aggressive behaviors is discussed in a later section. This approach is analogous to the strict enforcement of safety precautions in certain high-risk sports, which allows athletes to "push the envelope" while minimizing the risk of serious injury or death.

There also appears to be agreement among all parties regarding their desire to minimize behaviors that are intended to harm others, though this point may have been diminished in Kerr's (1999, 2002) recent publications via the author's emphasis on rejecting the PS. It is our interpretation that while Kerr objects to using the term aggression to characterize such actions in sport contexts, he does not support behaviors performed with the intent to harm.

Having directed his discussion largely at adult sports, Kerr (2002) claims, "The PS, as it stands, will have little or no credibility among those involved as players, coaches, or administrators in team contact sports" (p. 76). He also states that his motivation for writing both papers was "Based on a real concern that the PS would be seen by those at the cutting edge of sport as just one more unhelpful, unrealistic piece of muddled thinking from academics" (p. 76). After considering these tenacious comments, the present authors tend to agree that many participants, coaches, and spectators will ignore the PS's recommendations, though not because we concur that the PS itself is catastrophically flawed.

Given his extensive experience playing and coaching rugby union, Kerr (2002) may, in fact, be in a position to predict how this particular community of coaches, players, and administrators would react to any set of recommendations. According to Kerr (1999, 2002) the culture of Rugby Union in Australia eventually changed as a result of declining audiences, who were frustrated with the aggression, violence, and foul play in the sport. In this instance, changes were secondary to spectators' self-regulation, which was unfortunate for professional rugby interests, but not tragic.

Unfortunately, despite recommendations to enact proactive changes, for the culture of some sports to change, tragedy must occur. Two examples will illustrate this point. The first concerns amateur wrestlers and their long-held practice of rapid weight loss through severe dehydration and other potentially harmful methods. Despite continual cautions offered by many physiologists, dieticians, and other researchers (Hursh, 1979; Webster & Weltman, 1990; Yarrows, 1988) that such practices were harmful, participants, coaches, and administrators in amateur wrestling dismissed these warnings, maintaining that "cutting weight" was "part of the sport." Even a position stand issued by the American College of Sports Medicine (1996) about fluid replacement during exercise had little effect on these practices. It was not until these routines led to three deaths in one year that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States took major steps to change the culture of the sport (see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). Shortly after these tragedies, the NCAA's Safeguards Committee, along with the Wrestling Rules Committee, instituted major changes to systematically reduce and eventually eliminate the practice of rapid weight loss. A member of the Rules Committee at the time has communicated to the first author that, "Without those three deaths, we never would have fully addressed this problem. I believe a version of our NCAA rules will eventually be used in every state for high school wrestling too... which is a good thing" (C.M. Horpel, personal communication, August 8, 2002).

The second example concerns NASCAR automobile racing. After the tragic death of Dale Earnhardt, those involved in the sport took steps to require all NASCAR drivers to use the *Head and Neck Restraint* (HANS) system (Hubbard/Downing, 2002). Though safety specialists had been recommending the mandatory use of this system for some time, and though other deaths had occurred which might possibly have been prevented, it took the death of a high profile athlete to effect serious change to require all participants to protect themselves, despite their willingness not to reduce the risks inherent in their sport. The HANS® Device has been made mandatory in Formula 1 for the 2003 racing season. Other racing circuits, including CART and Formula Atlantic, have made HANS® mandatory for all its series beginning 2002. A head and neck restraining system is mandatory in NASCAR's Winston Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck series, ASA, and ARCA (NASCAR, 2002).

In short, while we agree with Kerr (2002) that the PS, in its present form, may be ignored by some of the very groups at which it is aimed, this, in itself, is not an indictment of the recommendations. Perhaps the culture of some team contact sports will not take steps to curtail aggression, as it has been defined in the PS, until such behaviors cause a serious enough tragedy to occur. Perhaps if the much-publicized aggressive act committed by

professional hockey player Marty McSorley (see Kerr, 2002, pp. 70–71) had resulted in a more tragic outcome, then in addition to penalizing the offender, the National Hockey League would be taking more serious and systematic steps to reduce the occurrence of fights and other forms of violence.

## AREAS OF CONTINUED DISAGREEMENT

### The Role of Officials

Responding to Kerr's (1999) suggestion that references to officials should have been omitted from the PS and that attacks committed against officials or as a result of their decisions are rare, Tenenbaum et al. (2000) countered by citing studies on officials and aggressive acts. Three of these studies (Rainey, 1994; Rainey & Hardy, 1999; Wann, Carlson & Schrader, 1999) addressed aggression directed towards officials. Focusing on these studies, Kerr (2002) points out that Rainey, referring to baseball umpires, concluded that though, "Assaults on umpires are not rare...they are not common, occurring to perhaps 1 out of 100 umpires per year" (p. 154). In the Rainey and Hardy study, 5.6% of rugby referees reported being assaulted. Having restated these findings, we will leave it to the reader to judge whether these percentages provide cause for concern. More recently, media reports, though perhaps exaggerated, reveal that assaults occur frequently enough that insurance policies are available to protect youth sports officials from this potential danger (Greenburg & Bernstein, 2000). In fairness, Kerr (2002) did not focus on youth sports in his most recent paper. We should note, however, that debating the prevalence of assaults on officials might be counterproductive for two reasons. First, at present, as Kerr (2002) points out, those who have done the research concluded that many questions remain. Second, this debate about aggressive acts targeted at officials diverts attention from the question of how much influence officials actually have in reducing aggression in general.

Tenenbaum et al. (2000) provide references to some of the literature addressing this more central question. A few studies of sport-related injuries shed additional light on the probable importance of the official's role. According to Brust, Roberts, and Leonard (1996), rule enforcement is especially important in contact sports. Brust, Leonard, Pheley, and Roberts (1992) found that for 29 injuries resulting from tactics judged illegal in hockey, only four penalties were assessed. Studying catastrophic injuries, Tator, Edmonds, and Lapezak (1991) noted that rules were frequently not enforced and hockey players were injured as a result of illegal play. Brust et al. (1996) describe 3 hockey games in which injuries occurred as hostile players called each other names and fought, parents expressed anger, and referees' calls were "hotly disputed." As officials are charged with enforcing rules, these studies indicate that their proficiency in doing so, or lack thereof, appears to have a meaningful effect not only on the (unsanctioned) behavior of players, but also on the injuries that can result.

As mentioned above, the line between hard play and foul play can be difficult to discern, though doing so is an important challenge for officials, especially those overseeing contact sports. Despite Kerr's (2002) cautions regarding judging a player's intent, this is exactly what officials are frequently called upon to do in distinguishing permissible conduct from illegal actions. For example, "spearing" in American football is defined as "Intentionally



driving the helmet into a player in an attempt to punish him” (Adams, 2002, p. 47). In addition, international rules forbid wrestlers to, “Perform actions, gestures, or holds with the intention of torturing the opponent or of making him suffer to force him to withdraw.” (USA Wrestling, 2002, p. 48)

Providing further support for including officials in this discussion, a recent survey of leading scholastic officials revealed most believe that preventing aggression is an important aspect of their vocation (Sacks & Watson, 2002). It is worth noting that, in this study, the term used to query participants on this matter was unsanctioned aggression. Partially as a response to Kerr’s (1999) rejoinder, the researchers wanted to be certain that the officials surveyed would not confuse the word aggression with physically intense actions that are permissible in certain sports.

In their professional publications, officials often use the term “poor sportsmanship” to describe various unacceptable behaviors, including fighting and other forms of aggression. Encouraging sportsmanship has become an increasingly popular topic in these publications during recent years. In a recent edition of *NFHS Official’s Quarterly* (Gillis, 2002), for example, two of the four feature articles were written by officials addressing sportsmanship.

Another recent article in *Referee* magazine (Arehart, 2002) presents the view that poor sportsmanship at the professional level has led to similar problems among high school athletes. Mike Pereira, Director of Officiating for the National Football League (of American football; NFL) is quoted as saying, “The pros and college sports have a huge impact on the play of the game at the lower levels. To turn our backs on that is a huge mistake” (p. 25). This reference to the vicarious learning effects of watching adult sport relates to another area of ongoing disagreement.

### Effects of Observing Aggression and Violence in Sport

Specific behaviors identified in the Arehart (2002) article that were first noticed at the professional level and then in youth sports include the throat slashing gesture (in American football) and headbutting (in basketball). According to Pereira:

It’s incumbent on the NFL and everybody else (at the pro level) to assume responsibility, to work on our games, to work on those individuals who are creating those highlight clips on ESPN, and try to discourage that so that they emulate a positive role model for young people involved in the game. (p. 25)

This is but one of many references made by those on the cutting edge of sport regarding the detrimental effects that can result when youth observe undesirable behaviors by adult athletes. Writing for *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, Mickey Rathbun (Rathbun, 1997, ¶ 1) states, “When a superstar athlete misbehaves, his antics make headlines and TV news everywhere—including, most likely, in your house. Your child gets a lesson in sportsmanship, whether you like it or not. And it probably isn’t the kind of lesson you like.”

Evidence suggests that some of the recent violence in youth sport settings stems at least in part from modeling effects of observing adult sports. In a well-publicized incident that resulted in the death of a hockey parent, the conflict reportedly began with overly violent

play among young athletes during a scrimmage. Prior to being attacked by another parent, the victim is reported to have argued that such actions were part of the game (see Nack & Munson, 2000, p. 88). One might also speculate that one factor influencing the type of play that eventually injured Neal Goss, who was apparently retaliated upon for his successful performance, is the youth league's modeling of professional hockey norms (see Swift & Munson, 1999).

These anecdotal accounts are supported by a vast body of scientific literature demonstrating the saliency of learning through observing others, and several studies are cited by Tenenbaum et al. (2000). Kerr (2002) appears skeptical of this literature and criticizes the PS and Tenenbaum et al. for making, "Definite statements about the effects of observing aggression and violence on those viewing sport" (p. 72). He also points out that not all psychologists are convinced of the saliency of learning aggressive behavior from models. While perhaps it is unscientific to make definite conclusions about any phenomenon, we believe that findings regarding learning through observation are among the most consistent in the psychological literature.

Not surprisingly, professional athletes are often perceived as having very valued characteristics and, therefore, are more likely to be imitated by those who observe them (Singer & Singer, 1981). This may be especially harmful if the viewer is young. Research shows that aggressive habits are often learned at an early age and become more and more resistant to change in later years (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Huesmann & Eron, 1986). Additional studies have supported the notion that early observations of aggression may serve as precursors to future aggressive tendencies (Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, & Fischer, 1983; Huesmann, Moise, Podolski, & Eron, 1997). In addition, a study exploring 724 male football players and non-players in a Midwestern community found a significant positive relationship between observed illegal aggressive acts and the eventual use of these acts in competition (Mugno & Feltz, 1985). In summary, both scientific research and logical inferences based upon anecdotal reports present an extremely strong case that individuals are more likely to behave aggressively in a sport context after viewing aggressive acts by other athletes.

### **Limiting Discussion to Adult Team Contact Sports**

The possible effects of learning aggressive and violent behaviors by observing adult models in sport has important implications in recent debates, given that Kerr (2002) has restricted his comments largely to adult sport (p. 69). This stated limitation contrasts with the goals of the PS, Tenenbaum et al. (2000), and the present paper. If, in fact, adult sport were played in isolation from viewers, then it might be defensible to argue that competitors, as consenting adults, should be free to compete as they see fit. However, if the evidence suggests that the actions of adult athletes influence youth sports as well (and we strongly believe this is the case), then it seems rather irresponsible to address aggression and violence in adult sport without considering both the immediate and secondary impacts.

We are also somewhat surprised that Kerr (2002) has confined his comments to team contact sports. While Kerr reports that his own playing and coaching experience is in a team sport, we are puzzled that he ignored individual contact sports. Tenenbaum et al. (2000) list



boxing, judo, and wrestling as sports in which physically intense actions are crucial. Certainly, many of the same issues that Kerr (1999, 2002) has explored are relevant to these individual combat sports as well.

Despite Kerr's (1999, 2002) comments (and our acknowledgements above) that the PS will have little credibility for contact sport participants, many organizations and youth leagues have instituted policies that are very much in line with the PS. A recent web-based search, for example, yielded a number of codes of conduct that mirror many of the PS recommendations (see Appleton Area Hockey Association, 2002; National Alliance for Youth Sport, 2002; Northern California Junior Hockey Association, 2002; Positive Coaching Alliance, 2001). In summary, while Kerr prefers to limit his discussion to adult team-contact sports, there has been little controversy regarding the applicability of the PS to other sport contexts.

## ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

### Respecting the Culture of a Sport

In the preceding section, we have stated our belief that norms characterizing adult sport have an effect on younger athletes. Given this assumption, one might question whether a desire to preserve the culture of a sport, however violent, is outweighed by a need to prevent undesirable consequences from “trickling down” to youth. As this dilemma is somewhat abstruse and philosophical, considering the number of injuries incurred by young athletes provides some concrete data. In releasing its policy on the practice of checking in youth ice hockey, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reported that 86% of injuries sustained by 9–15 year old hockey players resulted from high-speed collisions (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). Since most youth hockey injuries result from body checking, the AAP recommended that hockey players, ages 15 and younger, should not check other players. While it is difficult to prove definitively that these injuries stem from the practices of professional sports, it is likely that the norms of the adult game are a contributing factor.

Notwithstanding these points, those who participate in, coach, and administer adult sports certainly possess the right to do so as they see fit. At what point, then, should an organization such as the ISSP offer statements that would impede upon the will of those parties? This is indeed an issue with moral and ethical overtones, and we would expect responses to this rhetorical question to be colored by readers' personal philosophies. It is not our purpose to resolve this question here, but rather to illustrate this issue as an overriding concern – one worthy of future consideration – that has emerged from recent debates on aggression and violence in sports. For the interested reader, a number of studies have revealed some interesting associations between moral reasoning and aggressive tendencies (see, for example, Bredemeier, 1985, 1994; Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Cooper, 1986).

In lieu of discussing the moral nature of aggression in sport, Kerr (2002) does invoke a legal argument in its favor by citing Smith's statement, “Volenti non fit injuria – to one who consents no injury is done” (p. 71). According to this premise, athletes who agree to participate in sports where competitors intentionally harm one another are, in fact, justified in doing so. For example, if the norms in professional ice hockey make it permissible for

one player to provoke a fight with another, then such behavior is acceptable – at least legally. The same would hold true for athletes who accept the possibility of serious injury or death for the sake of the thrill in various high-risk sports. Legal precedence indicates that permissible behavior by consenting adults becomes unacceptable when an athlete's "reasonable assumption of risk" has been violated. As for identifying the point at which respect for the culture of a sport conflicts with moral and ethical considerations: that is a task for continued deliberation.

### **The Purpose of a Position Stand**

Another broader issue emerging from the recent debates concerns the original purpose for issuing a position stand. While Kerr (1999, 2002) has criticized the ISSP PS for its alleged lack of potency in effecting change, others might consider that one purpose of a position stand is to argue for the ideal, while making recommendations based upon sound research, experience, and, indeed, moral and ethical considerations. Again, while Kerr may be correct that the PS may not lead to changes in certain sports, we maintain that an effective position stand should recommend proactive steps to effect change, rather than reactive changes that are so often the case.

### **Problems with Professional Versus Popular Jargon**

An ongoing point of contention since the PS was issued concerns the definition of terms such as aggression, assertiveness, and violence. In this paper, we have attempted to point out that disagreements regarding the semantics of these terms have clouded other topics, some of which actually represent areas of agreement among "dissenting" authors. If there are lessons to be learned here, they involve paying vigilant attention to how psychological constructs are operationalized, as well as considering the context in which terms are to be used.

The present authors recognize that the term aggression has various connotations in differing contexts. As we would imagine is the case with many readers, we have used the term in an academic environment to describe undesirable behaviors executed with the intent to harm another (similar to the use of the PS's definition of the term) and later, in a sport setting, employed the same word to encourage athletes to engage in hard but fair play (which is similar to Kerr's usage). Perhaps this variability in usage necessitates that a document like the PS be presented in two versions: one for an academic audience, and one for the "larger sectors of society."

The preceding is but one example of a term meaning one thing to psychologists or academics and another in other contexts. While we would expect contributions to a journal like *The Sport Psychologist* to be considered in light of the operational definitions included, it is not a trivial matter that various parties referred to in this paper use the terms aggression, unsanctioned aggression, foul play, and "unsportsmanlike" conduct to refer to similar concepts.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the present effort, we have attempted to summarize the recent exchanges regarding aggression and violence in sport. In doing so, we have found that despite some points of continued dissention, there are a number of issues upon which all authors agree. It is our hope that the discussion has moved beyond the level of public debate and towards a forum that will prove useful to those concerned with aggression and violence in sport.

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