

## **Sports and Conflict Prevention; the Way Forward For Global Peace**

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**Abstract:** *This paper discussed sports and conflict prevention by looking at the way forward for global peace. Generally conflict is defined as a state of disagreement between persons or group of persons. The major causes are usually differences in opinion, prejudice and discrimination, belief, and access to valued scarce resources. Conflict is an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily life. Conflict can either be positive or negative depending on how it is handled. Conflict can emanate from various sources, within us, school, home and community or the society at large. Achieving global peace means creating peace within individuals, communities and the society. Sports as a veritable tool for social transformation can be effectively utilized to achieve a certain level of peace among individuals and nations. This paper focused on the possibility of utilizing the values of sports in creating understanding, tolerance, and respect for human dignity, development of moral values and social integration as a vehicle for creating peace among nations. If nations can achieve these qualities, then conflict can be minimized and global peace can be guaranteed. The influence of sports on character formation and social cohesion has direct bearing on peaceful attitudes. The development of emotional fitness, self-esteem, need for recognition, sense of belonging and feelings of anger, hostility and aggression are all met through participation in competitive sports. The sports environment starting with the athletes, coaches, umpires, spectators and vendors should all portray peace and act in a manner the peace can prevail. To prevent conflict and achieve global peace, sport managers, handlers and enthusiasts must develop the capacity to detect conflicting situations among nations and develop strategies in sports to deal with before it erupts.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Sports can be viewed in different dimensions by different people. Sports can be seen either as competitive physical activities or all forms of physical activity that contributes to physical fitness, mental wellbeing and social interaction. A conflict as defined by Miriam (2009) is the manifestation of hostility in face of conflicting interests between individuals, groups, or states. These conflicting interests can be over resources, identity, power, status or values. Weismann (2005) identified four stages of conflict: the latent, escalating, crisis and post conflict. These stages require different strategies to mitigate them. Conflict prevention is the ability to stop conflict before it erupts. The first step is to understand and detect the signal and develop the necessary capacities and structure to manage it.

A lot of theories have been postulated to fully explain the dimension of conflict. The social conflict theory refers to conflict as arising in the process of interaction between individuals or group, and as such conflicts occur within the context of a given socio-cultural milieu (Anugwom 2009 in Ikejiani-Clerk). The causes and solutions of such conflict lie within the normative structure of a given society. While the structuralist theory sees conflict as based on the understanding that conflict is built into the particular ways a society is structured and organized. The theory identifies such social problems like political and economic exclusion; injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality as sources of conflict (Faleti 2009). The liberal structuralism explains conflict in terms of negative and positive peace. While the structuralist sees the solution of the exploitative tendencies ending in revolution, civil war or some form of violence; the liberal structures advocates for the elimination of structural defects with policy reform.

Sport is a universal language. It has the ability to bridge social and ethnic divides as a result it can be used as a tool for promoting peace, symbolically on the global level and practically within communities. As indicated by the UN International Task Force (2013) sport can be used as a powerful tool for preventing conflict as well as an element for building sustainable global peace. When used effectively, sports programme promotes social integration and foster tolerance. These sports values are the same as those necessary for lasting peace.

The role and impact of sports in society has been a subject of debate for centuries. For many, sport is viewed as a physical activity that is always associated with competition among nations or teams for pride and glory. Sport, games and physical activity in general are activities present in virtually every society across the globe. The popularity of sports transcends political, national and ideological frontiers and it is a practice enjoyed by spectators and athletes alike. But just as sport is oftentimes associated with fierce competition and aggression, sport can also be regarded as a dignified activity and as a vehicle through which the highest moral

and corporeal ideals are expressed. In this connection, sport has also the capacity to foster friendship and to unite people around a common activity, sometimes in the most unexpected of circumstances.

## **II. The Concept of Global Peace**

The concept of global peace is not the absence of global conflict, but rather the resolution of conflicts through non-violent processes to eradicate war. The free Wikipedia (2014) explains that global peace system relies upon a multi-strand approach to conflict resolution incorporating broad social and political solutions. The term global peace accrued from the work of Robert (1978) on *political theorist*, which stated that, the prevention of wars required the creation of a peace system. This led to the coining of the term global peace system by Johansen (2003). It was argued that, contrary to the advocated and perceived military security in the international system, the peace system provides greater justice, economic well-being and ecological security. According to Johansen, in a global peace system, conflict is resolved through non-violent, political, social and judicial processes. He therefore called for the establishment of such systems by the people's movement. Global peace invites us to adopt the policy of Dialogue or Bilateral Negotiations. We are living in a very crucial age, where confrontational determination to counter force should be replaced by a policy of non-violent dialogue.

Fry (2013) noted that the creation of global peace system involves synergistic elements such as transformative vision that a peace-based global system is possible, the understanding of interdependence and cooperation, an added level of social identity including all human beings, the creation of effective and democratic procedures of international adjudication, and peace-supporting symbols and values. McElwee (2003) also suggested three focal areas in the construction of global peace system. These include: strengthening international norms and institutions against war, eliminating the conditions that give rise to war and violence, supporting and encouraging alternative means of international conflict transformation. Other sector-based approaches to peace building link international development, humanitarian assistance, gender, the private sector, religion, environmental change, security, media, health and rule of law (Wikipedia 2014). Diamond and McDonald (1996) introduced the Multi-Track Diplomacy as a system approach to peace. They advocated for nine tracts of conceptual and practical framework that assist and work in the peace building sector, they identified these tracts to include: Government, Non-governmental/ professional or peace making through conflict resolution, business or peace making through commerce, private citizens, peacemaking through personal involvement, research training, and education or peace making through learning; Activism or peace making through advocacy, religion or peace making through faith in Action, Funding or peace making through providing resources and Communication and media, or peace making through information. Interestingly, sport is conspicuously missing in this list. All the nine tracts identified can conveniently find a root in sports. Because sport is an international language, it has the ability to bridge ethnic divides. It is therefore a very powerful tool for promoting peace.

## **III. Sports and Conflict Prevention**

Conflict prevention is a term used interchangeably with peace building. To prevent conflict means to maintain a state of tranquility. The greatest attribute of peace is justice. Where justice prevails peace will reign. In most situations, sports apart from its health benefit possess unique qualities that facilitate peace and conflict resolution. The benefits of sports are directly and indirectly linked to peace building and conflict prevention. These characteristics start with the individual and go beyond this to the communities, the nation and the world at large. The ingredients that can be used in sports to prevent conflict are: equity and justice, fair play, human resources development, social, economic and political empowerment. Justice and fair play are ingredients that can be used in sports to prevent conflict. This can be done by addressing the sources of conflict in sporting programmes. Conflict prevention at a global level through sports can be achieved through imbibing the spirit of the Olympic ideal. Coubertin's philosophy of the triad of the mind, body and character led to the conceptualization of an event that could promote cooperation and this event turned out to be the Olympic Games which he intended to be rooted in fair play and the elimination of excessive nationalism. This he felt could promote cooperation among political frontiers on the international level.

In sports, justice and fair play can be displayed in various situations. Fair play starts with the individual athletes. This is exhibited in the way they obey the rules and regulations of the game, their attitudes towards their fellow contestant and how they conduct themselves generally on the playground. The development of the sportsmanship character makes athletes to abhor cheating making them act in a just and acceptable manner.

The second level where justice can be displayed is in the officiating. When umpires officiate by the rules; tranquility will be achieved and the game may end up successfully. The officiating of a game has direct implication for peaceful ending because of the control of sports fans. As indicated by Wann, Peterson, Cothran and Dykes (2006) some fans are psychologically connected to a team, and such fans are more likely to be aggressive to the outcome of a competition. For the highly identified fans, the outcomes of a competition involving their team have relevance for their feelings of self-worth. Any misjudgment by the umpire can lead to

violence by such individuals. Globally, it has been reported by experts (Clements, Alkire, Anthony, Barakat, Mesa, Grono and Stepanova 2014) that the most peaceful countries shared high levels of transparency of government and low corruption. This shows there is a direct relationship between justice, fair play and good governance, and this can contribute in no small measure to the prevention of conflict from the individuals, community and the society.

The value of attributes of sports that can be linked to achieving global peace is the role of sports in human development. Sports have been identified as one of the medium for the development of the whole individual (physically, mentally and socially). The physical development of the individual is associated with many advantages beyond the physical. As observed by UN the physical development of the individual through sports goes beyond physical fitness. The physical development goes with psychological benefits. The psychological benefits are essential for a sense of positive embodiment: This implies that the individual have the right to create active healthy lifestyles to sustain vitality in their lives. This concept encompasses fitness, and psychological wellness, strategies, and the pursuit of active self-care for body, mind and spirit. Such positive pursuits are essential for conflict prevention because the individual will always or in most times see things in the positive. Adopting these physical embodiment concepts in sports will be very essential but it requires complex changes in our lifestyle. This is because self-care requires individuals to create time and space for positive interaction of the mind, body and spirit.

The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sports for Development and Peace (2014) equally recognized the importance of the skills learned through sports. It states that the skills help empower individuals and enhance psychological well-being, such as increased resiliency, self-esteem and connection with others. In defining development, the UN document sees it as a process of enlarging people's choices and increasing the opportunities available to all members of society. The emphasis is on increasing opportunities for the current and future generation. The basic human capabilities necessary for this are to live long and healthy life. They therefore recognized that sports can help build these capabilities.

Apart from the development of the physical and psychological attributes that are basic ingredients for conflict prevention, sports have also been identified as a powerful tool for social interaction and prevention of social vices among youth. Many people see sport as a key component of social life. Sports bring people together in a fun and participatory way and help create social relationships; it builds connection and improves communication between individuals and groups which helps to strengthen the social fabric (UNDP 2002). Because of its wide social interaction, sports programmes when properly organized can be a powerful means to tackle social exclusion, and integrate marginalized groups into their community.

Sports have the potential to prevent youth from taking part in risky behaviours. UNODC (2002) report shows that the social and personal skills learnt in sports can be an effective medium to intervene in a person's decision to abuse or not to abuse drugs. Although it was observed that participation in sports does not inherently lead to drug free lifestyle, well designed programmes that are handled by credible individuals can help to reduce risky behaviours. It has also been clearly observed that participation in sports provides youth the opportunity to make positive connection with adults and peers, such connections can transform them and integrate them into constructive activities within the society. Sport is one of the medium through which gender inequality can be addressed. Kaidal (2014) stated that sport is a powerful tool for women empowerment. It helps women develop leadership and communications skills and provide social interaction for girls beyond the home. These skills give women the opportunity to participate in decision making in the home and the society.

Sports can be an instrument for integrating persons with disability into society. It provides them opportunities for positive social interaction, reducing isolation and breaking down prejudice. The physical activities in sports are therapeutic and can increase motor skills and mobility. This helps the participants develop self-sufficiency and self-confidence (Kaidal 2014).

Although sports have been identified as a major contributor to human development, it is equally a potential catalyst for economic development. Lal Kaka (1999) stated that the economic potentials of sports are highlighted by its economic weight resulting from activities such as the manufacture of sporting equipment, sport events and sports-related service. Beyond these services, the physical fitness developed in sports produces physically active and healthy population leading to improved productivity of the workforce. It is also described as an engine for local economic development and job creation. All these factors put together results in sports having considerable potential for initiating economic development.

The link between sports and peace is very strong. From the grassroots to international events, sports bring people together in a way that cross boundaries and barriers are broken. It is reported that the sports field is usually described as a simple and political site for initiating contact between antagonistic groups. The power of sports can also be used as a tool for preventing conflict, as well as an element for building sustainable peace. Because sports programs promote social integration and foster tolerance, it is an ideal forum for resuming social dialogue and bridging social divides. It can also be a powerful voice for communicating messages of peace and site for symbolic public acts on the global and local levels.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It is important to state that, skills and values learnt in sports are similar to those values taught in peace education to resolve and prevent conflict and create conducive conditions for peace from the inter-personal to international. As indicated in UNICEF (1999) document, well-crafted sporting activities teaches respect, honesty, communication, cooperation, empathy and adherence to the rules and regulations. Sports communicate these values in a way that is fun and participatory.

#### **V. Recommendations**

- Organizations and Institution on the fore-front of research and programs in peace should be well articulated and robust in peace building theories which would offer a much deeper knowledge of the benefits attributed to sport as an agent of change and transformation that could promote peace in the society.
- To prevent conflict and achieve global peace, sport managers, handlers and enthusiasts must develop the capacity to detect conflicting situations among nations and develop strategies in sports to deal with before it erupts.
- The sports environment starting with the athletes, coaches, umpires, spectators and the vendors should all portray peace and act in a manner that peace can prevail in our society.
- Honestly, justice, fair play, tolerance, respect for others should be the watch ward of every sports man/woman.
- The ideals of the Olympic Games where the individual athletes celebrate rather than counting medals for nations should be emphasized in every competitive sporting event. This is to de-emphasized extreme nationalism.
- Explicit values that emphasize personal and social development should form the cardinal objectives of sporting programmes.

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