

Sport



Is sport a human right? In the strict sense, the answer is no! None of the human rights declarations or covenants contain specific provisions formulating the human right to the practice or to access to sport. However, sport can be seen as an essential element of the rights both to education and to culture.

The right to education is given in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It states “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of

“The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport in accordance with his or her needs.”

The Olympic Charter, Principle 8.

The Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Games are an athletic competition for people with disabilities, including amputees, people with impaired vision, paraplegics and people with cerebral palsy. “The Paralympic Games originated in 1948 at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England. (...) Beginning in 1952 the Paralympics were staged in Olympic years. The Winter Paralympics were first held in 1976. In 1992 in Barcelona, Spain, 3 500 athletes from 82 nations competed at the Summer Paralympics. The first true parallel with the Olympic Games took place in 1988 in Seoul, South Korea, where the athletes had a Paralympic village and used Olympic sites for competition. (...) The Paralympics are recognised and supported by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).”⁴⁸

its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Through sport people develop physically and intellectually. Participation in sports raises self-esteem; it provides opportunities for self-realisation and respect from others. This is especially so for disabled people through events like the paralympics.

As for children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that the education of the child shall be directed to “... the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and

Related activities

- Just a minute, page 150.
- Play the game, page 194.
- See the ability, page 209.
- Sport for all, page 214.

physical abilities to their fullest potential” and Article 31 refers to the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child.

The right of everyone to take part in cultural life is given in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Sports of all kinds are enjoyed everywhere - soccer, swimming, darts, chess, tossing the caber, sumo wrestling, American football - whatever! Sport is undoubtedly an important part of cultural life in all countries and it can therefore be argued that everyone has a right to enjoy sport as a spectator, competitor or player.

Although sport is not generally recognised as a human right, the practice of sport and the way it is supported do have implications for human rights. In different circumstances, it may be used as a tool to promote human rights or even to abuse them.

Sports promote human rights

Participation in sport generates shared interests and values and teaches social skills that are necessary for democratic citizenship. Sport enhances social and cultural life by bringing together individuals and communities. Local or national teams are often multinational or multi-religious, and spectators also come from various backgrounds. Thus, sport helps to overcome difference and encourages dialogue, and thereby helps to breakdown prejudice, stereotypes, cultural differences, ignorance, intolerance and discrimination.

Open Fun Football Schools

Open Fun Football Schools is a humanitarian and non-profit consortium founded by two Danish NGOs, the Cross Cultures Project Association (CCPA) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The context is a public sport culture characterised by a strong local focus, democratic principles, volunteerism, parental support and the basic principle of “sports for all”. The wish is to empower the clubs by distributing sport equipment to all football clubs participating in the programme. It is also an incentive to the schools to open up their clubs to all children and young people regardless of skill, gender or ethnic or social background.

During the past two years, Open Fun Football Schools have implemented 15 Open Street Events. These are little ‘playsports’ festivals open to all children. They last three to five hours and are mainly used as an “opener” or “appetiser” in very difficult locations. For example, in 1999 a Street Sports programme in Kosovo established a network of 140 so-called streetmasters - youngsters aged between 14 and 18 - who organise street sports on a day-to-day basis for the children living in their neighbourhood. They estimate that approximately 6000 children of all ages took part in their programme, most of them on a daily basis.⁴⁹

In relation to discrimination against women, the very fact that women can practice so-called “men’s sports” like football or weight-lifting, encourages the elimination of various stereotypes about women’s roles and the differences between men and women.

The status of sports personalities is such that they are often chosen to be “goodwill ambassadors” to promote humanitarian work through informal education. For example, Ronaldo, the Brazilian football star, is a special representative for the “Force for Change: World AIDS Campaign with Young People”.

Human rights can also be abused through sports

The use of performance enhancing drugs is probably the most well known abuse of human dignity and health. There are also controversial issues of hormone treatment and sex-testing of women athletes that have to do with respect, human dignity and the right to privacy.

Sponsors can exploit sportsmen and women, and ambitious parents can exploit children who demonstrate precocious ability. Intensive training and pressure to compete can lead to sports injuries and be a risk to mental well-being. Everyone has the right to know the potential risks and attractions of reaching high levels of performance.

“Gymnastics: just a sport or child abuse?”

Until recently Alexandra Huci, aged 12, was just one of many talented young girls who spend their young lives in training camps and dream of becoming world champions when they grow up. One day while training, she suddenly collapsed, fell into a coma and died five days later. Her tiny body could simply take no more.

Diets and physical exertion have very often caused young gymnasts more suffering than joy. “Pain has been part of my life ever since I started training”, said 10-year-old Wang Shuo in a recent interview for CNN at the Beijing training camp, where children start their “careers” at the age of three. Maria Pardo, a Spanish gymnast weighed 43 kilograms and is 170 cm tall..⁵⁰

Sporting opportunities are not always inclusive and there may be elements of discrimination against religious or cultural minorities in access to sports facilities. Commercial pressures and interests may be linked with human rights abuses that undermine dignity and respect for others. For instance, some players accept bribes to commit “professional fouls” in soccer and to fix matches in cricket. There are other issues of human rights abuses associated with the globalisation of the sporting goods industry. In many countries, both national and local sports associations have developed policies about the labour standards demanded of producers of the equipment and clothes they use. There are campaigns, for example, the Clean Clothes Campaign in Europe, which aim to get manufacturers to respect the human rights of their workers. The Sports Shoes Campaign in North America campaigns, amongst other things, to get sports people such as Tiger Woods and André Agassi to stop promoting products made with exploited labour.⁵¹

Sport and politics

Sport has long been used as a peaceful means of political action against injustice. In the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City, John Carlos and Tommie Smith gave the Black Panther salute during the victory ceremony to protest against discrimination against black people in the United States of America. During the apartheid era, many countries refused to have sporting relations with South Africa, which made a significant contribution to political change in that country.

“Capoeira”

In the sixteenth century, Angolan slaves in Brazil kept alive their traditional dances and rituals and developed them into “capoeira”, an art of self-defence. The slave-masters forbade any kind of martial art, but the slaves were able to train using the guise of an innocent-looking recreational dance. In the seventeenth century the art of “capoeira” was further perfected and then used in a decade-long fight for freedom against the colonial oppressors.

Sport may also be misused for nationalistic or political purposes. For instance, at the 1972 Munich Olympic games, eight Arab terrorists invaded the Israeli team headquarters, killing two people. A further nine hostages were murdered after a failed rescue attempt by German police.

The Olympic games have long been used as a forum for nations to make political statements. For example, the United States of America together with 65 other non-communist nations

boycotted the Moscow games of 1980 because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union and fifteen of its allies then boycotted the next games in Los Angeles in 1984 for security reasons and fears of political asylum being sought and given.

? Should sport and politics be mixed?

Whether it was right that China was chosen to host the Olympic games in 2008 is debatable. China has long been criticised for its lack of democracy and for human rights abuses. Some of the arguments given for not blocking Beijing's bid were that China's handling of dissidents and other human rights abuses would anyway continue to be criticised in fora such as the annual gathering of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Indeed, allowing the Olympic bid to go ahead might even make Beijing take more note of such condemnation.

Sport and racism

Racism in sport is not a phenomenon confined to football grounds, nor is it confined just to players of colour. It can affect all sports and can manifest itself at several levels; in amateur sport and at institutional and international levels, as well as in the media. It can occur at local level particularly, but not exclusively, in the interaction (for real or imagined reasons of colour, religion, nationality or ethnic origin) between or against players, teams, coaches and spectators and also against referees. It can include the abuse of teams or even whole groups.

The responsibility for combating racism in sport falls on everyone, to public authorities (the legislative authority, the courts, the police, governmental bodies responsible for sport and local authorities) and non-governmental organisations (professional and amateur national sports associations, clubs, local sports associations, supporters' clubs, players' organisations, anti-racist associations and so on).

? What can you in your school or club do to ensure that the sports you play are socially inclusive and promote human rights?

Reported incidents

21 September 2001. SK Rapid Vienna striker Gaston Taument sustained continuous racist chanting during yesterday's UEFA cup match against FK Partizan in Belgrade. Gaston Taument, who earned 15 caps for the Dutch national team and is of Surinamese origin - said earlier in an interview: "If racist incidents occur..., it is wrong to remain silent on racism."⁵²

Racist behaviour at football matches provides an excellent topic for debate about the dilemmas in implementing human rights.

? Should a suspected hooligan be banned from travelling to another country to attend a match? Is this an infringement of their right to freedom of movement?

Youth and sport

One example of how young people are working for human rights is through "Football against Racism in Europe". FARE fights *through* football all forms of discrimination *in* football: in the stadium, on the pitch, in the changing-room, at the training ground, in the office and classroom; by fans, players, managers, coaches, administrators or educators.

In relation to the Sports Shoes Campaign described above, student groups across the United States of America are turning sports sponsorship on its head and demanding that companies adhere to a Code of Conduct or lose the contract to kit out their college athletic teams.

The work of the Council of Europe

The Directorate of Youth and Sport is a part of the Directorate General for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport and Environment. It elaborates guidelines, programmes and legal instruments for the development of coherent and effective youth policies at local, national and European levels. It provides funding and educational support for international youth activities aimed at the promotion of youth citizenship, youth mobility and the value of human rights, democracy and cultural pluralism.

The Council of Europe Committee for the Development of Sport (CDDS) has initiated various activities to promote healthy lifestyles and participation in sport, for example, EUROFIT, (personal fitness tests for both children and adults). There is the Anti-Doping Convention of 1989 and the "Clean Sports Guide", an education and information pack for schools and sports organisations produced in co-operation with the European Union⁵³. In 1986 The European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events was developed.

International instruments and international days related to sports

1. The 1975 European Charter of Sport for All. Article 1 proclaims the right of everyone to practice sport.
2. The 1975 European Charter of Sport and Code of Ethics provides that access to sports installations and to sports activities be assured without any discrimination.
3. The 1978 International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, Article 1: "Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of their personality".
4. The 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The importance of non-discrimination against women in sport is strongly emphasised. States have the obligation to ensure women's right to participate in recreational activities, sport and all aspects of cultural life.
5. The 1985 International Convention against Apartheid in Sports.

References

- The Council of Europe, Directorate of Youth and Sport, www.coe.fr/youth/home.htm.
 How you play the game: the contribution of sport to the promotion of human rights. Conference in Sydney 1 to 3 September 1999, http://members.ozemail.com.au/~hrca/Sport_and_human_rights.htm.
 Symonides, J., Sport in the service of human rights, World Conference on Education and Sports for a Culture of Peace, Unesco, Paris, France, 5 to 7 July 1999.
 Sports Shoes Campaign, www.heartland-cafe.com/aup/aup.html

Key dates

3 December

The International Day of Disabled Persons.

31 May

World No-Tobacco Day.

7 April

World Health Day.