



Sport Officials' Longevity: Motivation and Passion for the Sport

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Abstract

The purpose of this review was to examine sport officials' motivation and passion to become and remain a referee in today's sport climate. There are endless accounts of misconduct towards officials from participants, coaches, parents and fans. This review examined the research evidence that explained why officials continue to work in their sport and tried to determine what motivations were factors in their continued service. Additionally, this review wanted to see how passion played a role in the officials' desire to become and remain a sport official. The findings were clear as officials often became involved with officiating or continued to officiate 'for the love of the game'. Once they became involved they continued to officiate because of their feelings of commitment to the sport and because of the relationships that they had developed with other officials, athletes and other members of the sporting community. This review pointed out that sport officials are concerned about maintaining enough officials to continue sport. The authors suggested that once recruited, new officials should be evaluated and mentored so that these young officials have time to develop their feelings of commitment and relatedness.

Keywords: referee; officiating; stress

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper was to conduct a synthesis of sport officials' motivation studies, to gain a better understanding of the passion to become and remain a referee in today's sport climate. Simply observing referees in a sporting event, it is apparent that officiating can be a highly charged and at times stressful experience. Therefore, what intrinsically motivates someone to become initially involved in the realm of officiating? Furthermore, what motivates referees to continue in this profession having experienced the stress and anxiety often associated with officiating? A study examining New Mexico high school sports officials' perceptions of sportsmanship in the competitive sport environment indicated that verbal and nonverbal misconduct by spectators was a common concern among all officials. It was also reported that 85.7% of the officials would seriously consider terminating their officiating services should the environment worsen (Hughes, 2001). In the United States, The National Association of Sport Officials indicated that 85% of high school sports administrators reported declining numbers of official registrations within their state. The same study also showed a third of all officials quit after their first year (Sabaini, 2001).

Referees experience immediate and unrestrained negative feedback throughout the game and after a match (Wolfson & Neave, 2007). A good example of this was former Notre Dame football coach Dan Devine's angry denunciation of an official: 'If the official made a mistake on that call, I'll work to see that he'll never work another game' (Appenzeller & Appenzeller, 1980).

Findings from studies during games indicated sports referees often experience various forms of acute (short-term, time-limited) stress (Kaissidis & Anshel, 1993). In April 2002, players in separate incidents in Africa attacked two soccer referees - once when a teammate was sent off and again when a goal was disallowed. Regulating bodies for officials are very familiar with sources of threats and have offered to provide psychological training to help officials cope (Mahoney, 2003). At all levels of sport (youth, intramural, sport clubs, middle school, high school, collegiate and professional sport), officials experience a variety of verbal and non-verbal abuse along with threats.

Although some research has investigated referees' emotional processes involved in their response to stress (Thatcher, 2005), little research has empirically examined motivational processes in referees which arouse, maintain, and channel behavior towards a goal (Philippe, Vallerand, Andrianarisoa, & Brunel, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to conduct a synthesis of sport officials' motivation studies, to gain a better understanding of the passion to become and remain a referee in today's sport climate. Two basic search engines, ERIC (EBSCO) and PUBMED, were used to identify articles relating to sport officials motivation.

Literature Review

There are various factors which contribute to the desire to begin officiating as well as continuing in a profession which has the capability of producing intense satisfaction along with apprehension and unease. Addressing the dynamics of motivation, the factors of stress and anxiety and how officials cope, the passion felt for sports, and finally the need to recruit and retain quality officials are examined.

Motivation and Self-Determination Theory

Motivation is a complex process that influences individuals to pursue and persist in an activity. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are two basic forms of motivation. When people are motivated to perform an activity for its own sake, they are said to be intrinsically motivated. Often external rewards are not enough to keep a person motivated; instead, intrinsic motivation or motivation that comes from within generates the satisfaction required to continue the given task. When people perform an activity only to obtain some external reward, even when the task to be done holds little or no interest, they are said to be extrinsically motivated (Williams, 2006).

An empirically based theory, Self-Determination Theory, addresses the social conditions of human motivation and focuses on types rather than just an amount of motivation. It pays particular attention to autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation as predictors of performance (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Individuals with autonomous motivation, which includes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, engage in an activity with a sense of readiness and eagerness. Controlled motivation consists of external motivation in which one's behavior is a function of external possibilities of reward and punishment. Furthermore, controlled motivation consists of interjected motivation, which involves a person engaged in an activity

because they will feel approval for engaging in an activity as opposed to feeling guilt for not engaging in an activity. Amotivation is the opposite of autonomous and controlled motivation and refers to the lack of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

For a person to experience satisfaction according to the Self-Determination Theory, he or she must fulfill three needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The inherent need for autonomy is fulfilled when people recognize that they are the origin of their choices and decisions (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008). In other words, they are in control of their lives. When individuals succeed, they feel a sense of mastery through effective interaction with his or her environment. When individuals are respected by and connect well with others, there is a certain level of relatedness achieved. Psychological and physical well-being is satisfied when these psychological needs are enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Gray and Wilson (2008) examined the relationship between organizational commitment, perceived relatedness to fellow officials, and continuance intentions among track and field officials. The 75 participants completed an eighteen-item survey to measure the organizational commitment to Athletics Canada. Participants also completed a set of items, personalized from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale, assessing the degree of meaningful connection felt by track and field officials to one another in this sport. The track and field officials that were surveyed felt minimal commitment to Athletics Canada as an organization and greater commitment to the sport of track and field, the role of being an official, and the athletes competing in track and field events (Gray & Wilson, 2008). Perceived relatedness and commitment to the sport were the strongest indicators of continuance intentions; the surveyed officials showed increased intentions to continue track and field officiating over the next two years. These track and field officials felt firmly attached to the sport and that motivated them to continue to officiate. Furthermore, the results provide initial insight into the motivational dynamics at play in track and field officials' decisions to terminate or continue their involvement with the sport and support the importance of need satisfying experiences within this domain. The track and field officials are intrinsically motivated to continue in this profession and feel that they have a personal commitment to the sport and the athletes involved (Gray & Wilson, 2008).

Stress, Anxiety and Coping under Pressure

Officials need to be physically and mentally prepared to handle the physical requirements and able to combat the psychological stressors associated with the sports they officiate (Burke, Joyner, Pim, & Czech, 2000). A survey of 25 male high school and college basketball officials from two southern states (not specified) was conducted to investigate their perceptions before, during, and after a basketball game. It was hypothesized that basketball officials would experience higher anxiety levels before and after a game than during the game. One hour prior to game time, officials were administered the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory – 2 (CSAI-2) which measures cognitive state anxiety, somatic state anxiety, and confidence, and the Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT) which requires them to assess how they “generally” feel when they are involved in sports. Within 30 minutes of the start of the game, the officials responded to a questionnaire requiring them to list their three primary reasons for becoming a basketball official.

Results revealed that officials felt less cognitive anxiety after a contest as compared to before and no significant difference in self confidence and somatic anxiety across all three trials. The officials’ experiences may provide the necessary development of coping strategies and adjustments to learn how to effectively cope with anxiety-producing situations (Burke, et al., 2000). The study also showed 70% of all officials mentioned they refereed basketball games for “the love of the game and exercise.” Other reasons for becoming a basketball official included money, excitement, challenge, or experience, but a majority chose to officiate for the love of the game.

Another study was designed to examine the extent to which potential stressors are seen as problematic by referees and identify the psychological mechanisms used to maintain confidence among soccer referees. A four-page questionnaire was given to the 42 referees that participated in the study. The questionnaire included information on years of experience, level of refereeing, and time spent on duties. Referees also rated the degree to which various factors motivated them in their role as an official (Wolfson & Neave, 2007).

Results showed all 42 officials admitted to having made errors and experiencing a bad game. When these officials experienced a bad game, there were many responses to their mistakes, but the majority of the officials used this as a positive opportunity to learn from their mistakes. These results revealed the most highly accepted reasons for refereeing were those related to the intrinsic commitment to soccer, while the most

rejected were concerned with rewards such as power, income, prestige, recognition and by respect (Wolfson & Neave, 2007). As with the study of basketball referees, soccer officials continued to officiate because they enjoyed the game of soccer.

Passion

Passion can fuel motivation, enhance well-being, and provide meaning in everyday life (Vallerand et al., 2003). If someone is going to participate in an activity for an extended period, they must have the desire to stay committed even when times are rough (Vallerand, 2008). Harmonious and obsessive passion can be distinguished how it is internalized into one's core self or identity (Vallerand, et al., 2003).

Harmonious passion results from an individual's personal identity towards an activity (Vallerand, et al., 2003). Individuals with harmonious passion have freely accepted an activity as important to them without any contingencies attached to it. This type of passion creates motivational energy to engage in the activity freely and encourages a sense of desire in pursuing the activity. Individuals with harmonious passion do not experience an uncontrollable urge to engage in a passionate activity, but rather freely choose to do so. One example is a professor who must prepare for an important presentation and receives an invitation to play basketball with some friends. Although the professor has harmonious passion towards basketball, he can turn down or postpone the invitation to prepare for his presentation without any suffering or regret (Vallerand, 2008).

Obsessive passion results from an individual's attachment towards an activity, such as feelings of social acceptance or sense of excitement (Vallerand, et al., 2003). Individuals with an obsessive passion may experience an overwhelming urge to engage in the activity they view as important or enjoyable, but may also be at risk of experiencing conflicts and other cognitive and behavioral penalties during and after activity engagement (Vallerand, 2008). With the example of the professor, having an obsessive passion will make him unable to resist the invitation to play basketball, even though his work obligations are logically more important. During the basketball game, the professor may feel disappointed in himself for playing basketball instead of preparing for the presentation. Therefore, he may be unable to focus on the task at hand (the basketball game) and may not receive the desired positive reward he initially sought by agreeing to participate in the game.

Two studies were conducted to examine passion for refereeing. The first study investigated the role of passion in referees' emotional experiences and the flow of the match during game conditions. Flow can be described as the athletes and officials being completely focused in the game and being aware of their surroundings on the court/field. The second study investigated the role of passion in regulating the most important stress factor in refereeing, making an incorrect judgment (Philippe, et al., 2009). The two studies used a passion scale which measured both harmonious and obsessive passion in conjunction with the four-item criteria of passion to examine the referees passion towards a particular activity.

In the first study, two samples of participants were examined. The first sample included 90 soccer referees (82 males and 8 females) working in national and international level leagues. The second sample was 148 referees (131 males and 17 females) who all were officiating in regional and district level leagues in France. Seventy-nine of the participants officiated soccer and the other 69 officiated basketball. The passion scale (Vallerand, et al., 2003) was administered to assess the type of passion that characterized participants refereeing. Results showed that 100% of sample one, and 93% of sample two were moderately passionate about refereeing. The data also showed no difference of passion as a function of gender in both samples and that the referees' age and years of experience were unrelated to the level in passion. Furthermore, the results indicated harmonious passion for refereeing was positively associated with the experience of flow while refereeing and positive emotions. Referees showing evidence of obsessive passion exhibited a positive association between refereeing and the experience of negative emotions during a game. There was no relationship indicated between obsessive passion and the experience of positive emotions during a game (Philippe, et al., 2009).

In the second study, 227 soccer referees (223 males and 4 females) from France participated. Those sampled ranged in age from 14-58 years old, had officiated an average of 30 games per year, and had refereed for 6.49 years on average. The participants officiated in low-to-moderate-level soccer leagues at both the district and regional levels. The same passion scale used in study one was also used in study two. Results of the four-item criteria of passion scale revealed 88% of the participants were passionate about refereeing. Furthermore, harmonious passion was negatively associated with concentration problems and make-up call decisions, but not related to reflection following a wrong call (Philippe, et al., 2009). This showed that harmonious

passion for refereeing protects one from the negative cognitive and emotional consequences associated with refereeing errors. As for obsessive passion, results showed it was positively associated with stress and negative self-related emotions following a wrong call. Obsessive passion had positive affects with rumination and make-up call decisions, but was unrelated to concentration problems.

Recruitment and Retaining Officials

Sport officiating is usually a second job pursued by sports advocates, many of whom are former athletes who want to stay involved with sports while giving something back to the athletic world (Furst, 1991). The National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) consists of 19,000 officials across a variety of sports (Titlebaum, Haberlin, & Titlebaum, 2009). These officials either seek out officiating positions on their own or are recruited by current members (Furst, 1991).

A 2001 report by NASO indicated there is likely to be a shortage of sport officials in the near future. Another 2001 NASO research study suggested a shortage of sport officials at the high school level and indicated that a third of all officials quit after their first year (Titlebaum, et al., 2009). In the September 2008 issue of Athletic Management, it was reported that the lack of sport officials could lead to the end of Florida's high school soccer teams (Scholand, 2008). Some of the top reasons that referees quit include obligations to their primary career or other job, sportsmanship of the participants, sportsmanship of the spectators, time away from family, and low game fees (Sabaini, 2001). Since so many sport officials quit after their first year, there is a potential shortage of officials in the United States.

However, for those officials who continue to referee, the reasons for their persistence are challenge and fitness, a commitment to sport, and the relationships developed as an official (Furst, 1991). According to Titlebaum et al. (2009), in order to recruit and retain officials, the following steps should be followed: market the job; set standards for officials under consideration to be hired; continually evaluate officials and the program; set up mentoring programs; create incentives for staff members; create a job structure where students can advance within the program; set policies of how games will be assigned; and hold fans, participants, and officials accountable for their behavior during the game.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to conduct a synthesis of sport officials' motivation studies, to gain a better understanding of the passion to become and remain a referee in today's sport climate. Extrinsic motivation factors such as power, income, prestige, recognition and respect were clearly rejected as reasons to continue officiating.

Sport officials are often recruited by current officials or seek out officiating positions on their own in search of a second job. The reasons officials continue to officiate is for the commitment to the sport and the relationships they develop as an official. According to this research, the ways to recruit and retain officials are to market the job, continually evaluate officials and the program, set up mentoring programs, and create a job structure where students or young officials can advance within the program.

This review has demonstrated the passion and motivation officials experience when refereeing. It also demonstrates the pitfalls and issues of entering the officiating profession. This is important because participants who enter the profession at a young age may do so thinking officiating will be an easy paycheck, perhaps unaware of the stress and anxiety that comes with officiating. In addition, although NASO cannot control many of the factors that lead to corrosion, the sporting world can make strides to improve the stress factors related to the job of officiating (Titlebaum, et al., 2009). This review can help NASO, campus recreation, parks and recreation, and other recreational programs in need of officials have better training programs in officiating which can possibly lead to longer longevity.

Officiating sports is a skill and not everyone is intrinsically motivated to referee. One of the issues in the sporting world is that a third of all sport officials quit after their first year. Consequently, official associations like NASO should devise new ways to recruit officials and motivate them to stay in the profession. New officials can be recruited in many places, such as recreation centers and parks. Also, since many former athletes decide to become officials to stay involved with sports, e-mails may be sent to them to see if they are interested in refereeing. As for the campus recreation setting, flyers can be placed around campus in search of new officials as well as posted on the Campus Recreation department's website.

Once the new officials begin officiating, evaluate them on a frequent basis to help improve their skills and knowledge of the sport they are officiating. Create mentoring programs for the new officials and create a job structure where they can advance in the program. For example, this may include professional development and allowing the

officials to lead training sessions for the sport they officiate. Ideally, this will motivate officials to continue in the profession and instill within them a passion to referee.

Maintaining an adequate number of sport officials is vitally necessary. Therefore, it is of great importance that the motivation and passion as well as the challenges experienced by officials be understood so as to recruit and retain qualified individuals in these essential positions.

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