

Assessment of Spectator Behavior at Youth Soccer Games

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

by

Teagan Lazzarotti

December, 2010

© 2010 Teagan Lazzarotti

ABSTRACT

ASSESSMENT OF SPECTATOR BEHAVIOR AT YOUTH SOCCER GAMES

TEAGAN LAZZAROTTI

DECEMBER 2010

Sports have always played an important role in children's lives. American Youth Soccer Organization provides youth athletes the opportunity to participate in a soccer league that focuses on teaching good sportsmanship and player development. The purpose of this study was to assess fan behavior at middle school age female and male AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo. The subjects of this study were spectators (i.e. coaches and parents) of AYSO. The researcher and the research assistant attended six games during October 2010. At each game, notes were recorded on comments and behaviors, both positive and negative. After the data were recorded, it was found that a majority of spectators were positive, however there was an occasional negative remark or gesture. There were also instructional comments classified as neutral. Recommendations for future research include using a larger age range of subjects and attending additional games.

Keywords: youth sports, AYSO, fan behavior, aggression

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of the Study	1
Review of Literature	2
Parents and youth sports	2
Gender differences in sports	6
Summary	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions.....	8
Delimitations.....	8
Limitations	9
Assumptions.....	9
Definition of Terms	9
CHAPTER 2. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	11
Description of Subjects.....	11
Description of Reviewers or Observers	12
Description of Instrument	12
Description of Procedure	13
Method of Data Analysis	14
CHAPTER 3. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS	15
Interrater Reliability.....	15
Youth Male Games	16

Youth Female Games.....	18
Summary.....	20
CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	21
Summary.....	21
Discussion.....	22
Conclusions.....	25
Recommendations.....	26
REFERENCES	27
APPENDIX.....	30
Appendix A. Observation Form.....	31

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of the Study

Sports have played an important role in children's lives for many years. They provide children with the opportunity to grow and socialize. According to Rosewater (2009), "High-quality organized sports are a gateway to academic achievement, better grades, improved chances of attending college, and success in the labor market" (p. 50). Associations such as the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) do just that. AYSO (2009) focuses on six main philosophies to ensure that youth benefit from their program, including: Everyone Plays®, balanced teams, open registration, positive coaching, good sportsmanship, and player development. They believe that each child should play in at least 50% of a game because sitting on the bench is not a way to have fun or learn about soccer (AYSO, 2009). The only requirement to participate in the program is that children are between the ages of 4 and 19. As stated on the AYSO website, "There are no elimination try-outs and nobody gets cut" (AYSO, 2009, para. 3).

San Luis Obispo County has three regions of AYSO soccer programs that serve cities ranging from Paso Robles to Santa Maria. The program is available for males and females and runs from approximately August to November. By studying parent and spectator behaviors at youth soccer games and comparing them by gender, it will provide pertinent information to league officials.

In the past, very little research has been conducted on the connection between parents in youth sports and gender differences in fans' behavior. How does a persons'

gender affect their behavior at youth sporting events? Are certain parents more likely to react a certain way based on the sport because of their gender? These are questions that still need to be addressed. By looking at the difference between parents' reactions and other spectators, research will show if one gender is more aggressive or behaves a certain way more than the other. AYSO will then be able to use the findings in this study to address problems in fan behavior and work on a system that helps resolve this growing issue.

Review of Literature

The research collected for the review of literature was obtained through Internet searches and the use of Robert E. Kennedy Library during the Spring 2010 quarter at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. ABI/Inform, Academic Search Elite, Expanded Academic ASAP, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, and SPORTDiscus were the online databases utilized. The review of literature is constructed into two topic sections that include: parents and youth sports, and gender differences in sports. The literature review will discuss how parents and fans affect young athletes, and compare gender differences in sports.

Parents and youth sports. Parents have always played a large role in youth sports, from registering their children to play to supporting them at each game. Displaying these positive behaviors encourages children to want to participate in a fun and challenging extracurricular activity. According to Bowker et al. (2009), "While parental involvement in youth's sports activities typically involves time (e.g., transportation to games and practices) and money, parents also provide emotional support and encouragement to

children by attending games and cheering them on” (p. 302). Their participation and support provides a solid background and excellent example for young athletes. However, there has been a recent trend of parents and spectators taking the game to a new level and acting or reacting aggressively.

By registering a child to play AYSO soccer, a parent is agreeing to abide by their code of conduct. This includes supporting the child, always remaining positive, remembering the child wants to have fun, reinforcing positive behaviors and not acting as a sideline coach (AYSO, 2009). As a parent, it is their job to support the child and encourage their involvement. Bowker et al. (2009) stated:

Parents influence their children’s motivation to pursue sports in a variety of ways: from their willingness to enroll them in programs; parental modeling of active sports involvement; and, perhaps most importantly, the extent to which they communicate their perceptions and expectations of children’s abilities and performance. (p. 302)

Children might never participate in sports if it were not for parents’ encouragement and support. However, in recent times there has been an upward trend of higher levels of aggression from parents at youth sporting events. According to Tenenbaum, Stewart, Singer, & Duda (1997), “Even the International Society of Sport Psychology recently recognized that sport aggression has become a social problem both on and off the playing field” (as cited in Keeler, 2007).

Fans have shown heightened levels of aggression towards referees, coaches and even the players. Kanters and Estes (2002) found, “The escalation of violent and vulgar behavior of parents has been reported at competitive matches between teams of elite

teenagers down to t-ball games for five-year-olds” (p. 20). What parents are failing to recognize is that their actions have a direct effect on their children. Kanters, Bocarro, and Casper (2008) agreed, “The beliefs and subsequent socialization activities of parents are so powerful, especially during the introductory stages of a child's sport participation that they have been shown to significantly influence children's sport-related beliefs” (p. 65).

A study on background anger defines it as, “[A] construct defined by the presence of a verbal, nonverbal, or physical conflict between two or more individuals” (Cummings, 1987, as cited Omli & LaVoi, 2009, p. 244). There are several different actions that qualify as background anger that affect the way a child views and relates to sports. Some of these include:

- (a) Verbal anger such as parents yelling at officials, coaches, and athletes, (b) nonverbal anger such as avoidant communication, stomping up and down the sidelines, or eye-rolling, and/ or (c) physical anger such as shoving a coach after the game, punching an opposing parent, or grabbing a child angrily but the arm after a poor performance, may be uniquely distressing to children for a number of reasons. (Omli & LaVoi, 2009, p. 253)

Omli and LaVoi (2009) also noted that after being around this type of behavior, children begin to display similar acts of aggression in their play.

By behaving negatively or aggressively at youth sporting events, parents influence how children view sports. “Children who perceive parental involvement as negative may have lower perceptions of competence and lose interest in sports” (Kanters et al., 2008, p. 66). Parents have a strong influence on how their children feel and relate to sports. Fans’ negative behavior takes the fun out of participating. Players begin to “feel

trapped and may experience sport burnout” (Kanters et al., p. 65). Most youth play sports because they are supposed to be enjoyable, not because they are looking for a college scholarship. However, with the constant criticism, children start to feel that participating is no longer worth it.

Another example of how children’s behavior is influenced can be seen in the parents that try to live out their dreams vicariously through their children. By putting massive amounts of pressure on the child to play sports and be successful, parents change the meaning of the game. According to Murphy (1999), parents that are overly involved have been reported as a contributing factor in the large decrease in participation in youth sports. Woolger and Power (1993) suggested that parents sometimes fail to recognize that their increasing involvement in their child’s sport may be viewed as stressful rather than supportive. Although the parent may have the right intentions, their actions increase the child’s stress level to the point they would rather not play than have to deal with the pressure from their parents. A parent’s presence does not imply positive reinforcement if they spend the entire time displaying negative aggression towards the coaches and players. It is important to distinguish what actions are seen as supportive and actually help the child become successful.

Children are very impressionable starting at a young age. They tend to mimic the behaviors they see and experience. For example, children who witness a coach using negative behavior will also start to portray a negative attitude (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreiness, 2009). This may cause a downward spiral. Now, not only does a team have negative fans, but also players. By adjusting the way parents and spectators behave at youth sporting events, it will not only change the atmosphere at games but also

increase the number of players staying in sports.

Gender differences in sports. Both men and women play and watch sports, but differences exist relative to motivations for their involvement. As mentioned previously, parents play a large role by enrolling and supporting their children in youth sports. Parents comprise a significant portion of the fans attending youth sporting events. Therefore, it is important to examine research on sport fans and gender differences. Hall and O'Mahony (2006) examined what motivates both male and female sports fans:

Emotional arousal at the sporting event and being a 'true fan' was significantly more important for males; for females, Back Room issues, such as parking, seating and stadium accessibility; Front Room issues, such as enjoyment and experiential aspects of a sports event, and Social factors, such as sharing the event with friends and family, were significantly more important. (p. 335)

Although these findings were centered on professional sports, they are consistent with others who have studied similar ideas. In a study conducted by Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte (2000), it was shown that females enjoyed the social aspects of the game, as opposed to men, who attended because they enjoyed the sport. These results show that female spectators tend to behave less aggressively at sporting events than men.

Other studies have examined what leads females to participate in sports in the first place. Although women have come a long way in sports, they are still underrepresented in the media (Hardin & Greer, 2009). Messner (2002) explained that the most popular spectator sports in the United States are those that are considered masculine. This idea was also highlighted in Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000), "When females attempt to participate in

sports, they are either ignored or their performance is trivialized. Then their participation as a sports fan may also be trivialized” (p. 222). This leads to, “Female sport fans [engaging] in fewer masculine-oriented sport fan behaviors” (Dietz-Uhler et al., p. 222). This study of female fans shows that women are still perceived as weaker and belittled when it comes to sports.

According to the research, there are several different motivations for attending a sporting event, which may differ based on gender. This leads to the idea that there are still questions that need to be examined and studies that need to further explore and compare male and female behavior at different sporting events.

Summary. Parents play a large role in youth sports but sometimes fail to realize the impact their behavior has on young athletes. Although children want and need their parent’s support, it is also necessary to examine whether they are over-parenting, which may cause the child to decrease their interest and make them want to drop out of the sport all together (Coakley, 1992). Parents have a difficult task of encouraging and supporting their children without becoming overly aggressive and competitive. By maintaining a positive attitude, players may be able to mimic the behavior shown to them. This will start a constructive change in youth sports.

Many of the fans and spectators at youth sporting events are parents and other family members. While examining fan behavior, it is also important to study the gender differences among supporters. Several studies have shown females attend sports for more social reasons, whereas men attend more so because of the love of the sport (Hall & O’Mahony, 2006). This leads to the question, how male and female behavior at youth events will differ based on their gender.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess spectator behavior at middle school age female and male AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between spectator aggression and player aggression?
2. Does the spectators' level of aggression increase when his or her team is losing?
3. Does male spectator behavior differ from female spectator behavior?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. The subjects in the study were female and male spectators and players at middle school age soccer games.
2. Spectator behavior and levels of aggression were measured.
3. Data were collected at three male games and three female games in San Luis Obispo County during Fall 2010.
4. Information for this study was gathered using field research and observational methods.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. A lack of spectators present at each game limited the amount of data recorded.
2. The researcher and research assistant recorded data at different speeds.
3. Spectators noticed researchers were recording data, which may have affected their behavior.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that the subjects were did not alter their behavior due to the researcher and research assistant's presence.
2. It was assumed that the researchers had the same understanding of what qualified as negative or aggressive behavior.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Aggression. Parents acting in a negative manner or using negative language

AYSO soccer. Soccer league for male and female children ages 4 to 19 (AYSO, 2009).

Background anger. Construct defined by the presence of a verbal, nonverbal, or physical conflict between two or more individuals (Cummings, 1987, as cited Omli & LaVoi, 2009).

Middle school age children. Children ages 9 to 14

Negative fan behavior. Verbal anger such as parents yelling at officials; nonverbal anger such as avoidant communication; and physical anger such as shoving a coach (Omli & LaVoi, 2009).

Player. An individual who plays in the sporting event

Spectator. An individual who attends and observes a sporting event

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to assess spectator behavior at middle school age female and male AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County. This chapter includes a description of the subjects, researchers, instrument and procedure used to analyze data collected.

Description of Subjects

The subjects of the study were spectators and players at AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County. Subjects included any person who attended the game including coaches as well as the individual players on each team. Subjects were both males and females and varied in age. Besides gender, no identifying information was recorded about subjects due to the observational nature of the study. The AYSO soccer players were males and females between the ages of 10 and 14 residing in San Luis Obispo County. Players consisted of those in the game and on the sideline.

Participants were selected based on their attendance at one of the AYSO soccer games being observed by the researcher and research assistant. The study used nonprobability purposive sampling, as the sample being observed was purposely chosen and met certain criteria; in this case, being a spectator or player at an AYSO soccer game. The sample size observed in this study was based on the number of attendees at each game.

Description of Reviewers or Observers

The researcher and a research assistant served as observers for this project, and the research assistant was a fellow Cal Poly student. The research assistant was briefed on the purpose of this study and was trained by the researcher how to collect data. Before beginning the observation process, methods were discussed and practiced to ensure data would be accurately recorded.

Description of Instrument

The instrument used to collect observational data and field research was a blank form brought to each game by the researcher. At the top of the paper, the researcher and the research assistant identified the date and time of the game, the gender of the children playing, and the estimated age range of the players. During the game, the researchers took field observations on the spectators and players, identifying different actions and behaviors. The field research form has been included as Appendix A.

In order to test the validity of the field research, researchers conducted two pilot tests. These tests were conducted two weeks before actual data collection to ensure the field observations were effectively and accurately recorded. Upon completion of the pilot tests, researchers reviewed observations and came to agreement about how behaviors were recorded. Adjustments were then made to more accurately record data.

Due to the observational nature of the study, and based on guidelines posted by Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee, the study was determined to be exempt from the need for Human Subjects Approval.

Description of Procedure

Prior to the observations, the researcher obtained a league schedule for all AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County. Three games were selected for both males and females ages 10, 12, and 14. The games took place during October 2010 on Saturday mornings.

The researcher and research assistant visited the fields/location of games before the study began to identify the best place to gather data without drawing attention. A pilot study was conducted before observations were collected. The pilot test determined the effectiveness of methods taken to remain anonymous to spectators and players. It also allowed researchers to establish if the field research notes were effective in identifying the answers to research questions. If a spectator approached the researcher or research assistant about their identity, the established response was, "I am a student at Cal Poly conducting research for my senior project." This prearranged response was established to avoid deception of subjects. Changes were made to the observational sheet and research methods in an effort to collect more accurate data.

During the observation periods, researchers drove in separate cars and arrived approximately five minutes apart in normal clothing. They sat on the home side of the field on opposite sides of the crowd. Researchers tried to be discrete in their note taking as to not identify themselves as outsiders. Notes were recorded on verbal comments and physical behaviors, both positive and negative. It was also noted whether the comment was made by a male or female, and if their comment affected a player's response. Researchers stayed until the end of the game to view the team's reaction to winning or losing. This process was repeated for each of the games.

Method of Data Analysis

The field observation notes were reviewed and discussed by the researcher and research assistant. The observations attempted to answer questions regarding a relationship between spectator aggression and player aggression, a difference between male and female behavior, and how a spectator's level of aggression may change depending on whether a team is winning or losing. The basis of the observations gave the researcher qualitative data to analyze. The data were compared across different genders and age ranges and categorized into common themes. The researcher and research assistant independently coded and analyzed the data. Inter-rater reliability was then assessed in comparing results.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess spectator behavior at middle school age female and male AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County. During October 2010 field research was conducted at three games for both males and females ages 10, 12, and 14. The games took place at Damon Garcia Sports Complex in San Luis Obispo. The observations recorded by the researcher and research assistant during this study consisted of qualitative data. This chapter is divided into the following sections: interrater reliability, youth male games, youth female games, and summary.

Interrater Reliability

This study was conducted using observational and field research methods to collect qualitative data. The researcher and research assistant were able to have strong interrater reliability by reviewing the definitions established by the researcher and discussing what they would record prior to data collection. Also, before beginning the observations, methods were practiced to ensure data would be recorded in a similar fashion. After data analysis, notes were compared between the researcher and the research assistant and the reliability was calculated based on how many times their notes identified the same spectator, player, or coach's behavior. In this study interrater reliability was established to be 90%.

Youth Male Games

The researcher and research assistant attended a total of three male games. At the boys under 14 years old game, comments varied between positive, negative and neutral. The majority consisted of several, “Nice try guys,” “Great play/job,” and “Nice shot!” There were also some comments from the coach as well as some fans that gave players instructions such as, “Cover up defense” and “Go to the ball blue!” The majority of the negative comments were those said by fans under their breath. One fan said, “Down the line, Go! Go! Go!” and when the team missed the shot on the goal, the fan sighed and momentarily turned her body away from the field. The most common negative remark observed was fans making “Aww and Ohh” sounds after the team shot and missed. At the end of the game, after the team had lost, many fans expressed their encouragement, “Good job guys!” while one fan to another fan (under his breath) said, “At least it wasn’t a shut out.” In the boys under 14 game, there was one female fan who was very vocalized while the rest of the female spectators remained relatively quiet and seemed to be socializing at one end of the field. Many of the male fans chose to stand during the game. However, they were in pairs, whereas the female fans were in larger groups. No discernible change was observed in player behavior due to spectator comments.

During the boys under 12 game, the coach was the most vocal person on the field. He yelled mostly instructions at the players including, “Help on D,” “Stay with him,” and “Take your time, all the way up!” Many of the fans chose to stand during the game and seemed fairly interested. As the team scored many parents clapped and cheered while shouting positive comments such as, “Good job” and “Good teamwork.” One negative comment identified by the researcher, after the team scored, was said by a female fan to a

male fan, “They can’t let up because the other team will probably score.” Also at one point, a child swung to kick the ball and missed and several parents along the sidelines chuckled to themselves. Later in the game when the other team scored, only one female fan from the team clapped. Other fans simply replied with “Aww’s” when the other team scored. One male fan got upset at an offsides call towards the end of the game. He shouted at the referee, “He was not offsides!” Then he turned to some surrounding parents and explained why it was a bad call. They did not seem very interested. At the end of the game the fans clapped for the team and many said, “Way to go” and “That was a good game.” During this game, it was observed that there was no significant difference between male and female spectator behavior.

The last male game was boys under 10 years old. Many female fans were sitting in chairs while several male fans stood along the sidelines. Similar to the previous games, the coach yelled mostly neutral comments and gave instructions and directions, however it appeared he did shout more negative comments than the other coaches. This mainly related to his tone. Some remarks included, “Look! Who’s Moving? (in a sarcastic tone), Do it now!!” and “Get it out, get it out” in a loud and harsh tone. There were also comments from the coach and the fans of, “Good job” and “Nice try.” While the game was going on, there was one small child off to the side of the field playing with a soccer ball. He accidentally kicked it onto the field, and the child’s father came over to him and said, “What the hell are you doing?” quietly so no one else around him heard. The child looked upset and stopped playing with the ball. Some other parents on the sideline were laughing and socializing. Each time a goal was scored parents had similar reactions as in

the previous games, including clapping and cheering. Although the coach was aggressive at times, the players did not seem to be affected.

Youth Female Games

The researcher and research assistant also attended three girls' games. Similar to the boys' games, there were comments recorded that were positive, negative and neutral. In the girls under 14 game, most of the fans were sitting. A few male fans were yelling neutral instructional comments, such as, "Take it Away" and "Take your time, Go! Go! Go!" Another male fan spoke to a fellow fan talking about the different baseball games that were on that day, not paying very close attention to the game. The majority of the fans were quiet during the game. When they did speak, it was often positive, "Good job on D," and "Right idea, nice try girls!" After the team scored for the sixth time, the parents no longer seemed to cheer, just a few fans clapped. One player kicked the ball and it hit the goal post, a fan responded to another fan by saying, "Oh my! That was an incredible shot!" The male fans seemed to give more instructional comments, whereas the female fans tended to be more positive and social. One female fan sat in her chair and talked on her phone for a large portion of the game. The cheering during this game was much less than some of the others. However, the team was winning 8-2. It was observed that the male spectators tended to be more interested in the game while the females were focused on socializing.

The girls under 12 team was the first team researchers witnessed that had a female coach. She was a dominant voice throughout the entire game and appeared to be more aggressive than the other coaches observed. The tone of the coach's voice was much

harsher than others, and she yelled a lot of her instructions. For example, “Sada, go right” in a loud, stern and forceful voice. The coach also made several negative remarks that included, “You have to listen to me” and “When I say move up, you have to move up.” One comment made under her breath was, “Oh for God’s sake, Riley.” During one play in which the referee did not call a player offsides, the coach yelled, “She was so offsides, good God, are you kidding” After the team scored the parents cheered and clapped and the coach gave a positive “Good job.” Again there were a few parents socializing to the side of the game. At one point one of the players came out of the game and a parent asked, “Are you out?” The daughter responded with, “I don’t want to be out!” and the mom replied with, “Okay, well don’t be such a drama queen.” During halftime, the coach talked to the players using a friendly and nicer tone, but once back on the field it was back to her old ways. When the other team scored, the coach still made a positive remark to the girl playing goalie, telling her it was a good effort. One young male fan on the sidelines reminded his parents how boring the game was. Many fans clapped and cheered at the end of game as their team had won. This game was the first that the researcher observed player reactions from the coach’s comments. Overall, it did not seem to affect their playing, however it was noted that they did acknowledge the coach’s remarks.

The last female game was girls under 10 years old. During this game a majority of the fans were sitting down, and the female coach was standing. The coach made a few neutral instructional comments as well as many positive remarks, “Good passing blue” and “Nice Camille!” A few male fans sat on the sidelines also shouting directions to the players and had many, “Go, go, go’s!” and “Go Emma, take it!” At one point during the game the referee called offsides on one player and then proceeded to explain to the little

girl what it meant to be offside. After a shot on goal, many parents made the “Aww” sound. A male fan shouted, “Nice try, Em.” Moments later when the team scored, the fans erupted in clapping, whistling, and laughing. During a play where the goalie stopped the ball, the coach cheered, “Great job goalie” while a dad said, “Oo that was a terrible shot” under his breath. At the end of the game the parents and fans cheered for the team and put their hands up to build a tunnel for the players to run through. There was very little difference observed between male and female spectators.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter shows the methods used to verify interrater reliability by comparing the researcher and research assistant’s observations, and present the qualitative data collected from the coaches and spectators at the male and female youth soccer games. The research shows that overall most comments are positive, however there was an occasional negative remark or gesture. In general, the coach was the most vocal person during the games, and their responses varied by age of players and gender. A detailed summary and discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess spectator behavior at middle school age female and male AYSO soccer games in San Luis Obispo County. This chapter is divided into the following sections: summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary

Sports have always played an important role in children's lives by providing them the opportunity to learn and socialize. They have also been shown to lead to better grades and overall higher achievement. AYSO provides male and female youth in San Luis Obispo a chance to participate in a soccer league that runs from approximately August to November. The league focuses on teaching good sportsmanship, player development and positive attitudes.

Literature regarding fan behavior examined the previous research that has been conducted. Parents have always had a large influence on whether a child plays a sport. They are responsible for signing the child up and making sure they attend each practice and game. They also play a key role in support and encouragement for the child. What many parents neglect to realize is how negative actions or comments can affect the child. In recent times, there has been a trend of parents and spectators showing heightened levels of aggression at youth sporting events. Other studies have examined the differences between male and female fan behavior. They found, in general, that males attend a sporting event because they enjoy the sport itself, while female fans attend for

the social aspects of the game. Previous research also shows that female fans tend to behave less aggressively than male fans.

The subjects of this study were spectators (including coaches) and male and female players participating in an AYSO soccer league under the age of 10, 12, and 14. The researcher and the research assistant attended six games during October 2010. At each game, notes were recorded on verbal comments and physical behaviors, both positive and negative. It was also noted whether a male or female made the comment, and if their comment affected a player's behavior.

After the data were recorded, it was found that a majority of coaches, fans, and parents at AYSO youth soccer games were positive, however there was an occasional negative remark or gesture. There were also several instructional comments that were classified as neutral. These results will be further discussed in this chapter.

Discussion

This section will discuss how the findings of this study relate to the research questions and the previous literature. Limitations, conclusions and recommendations for future research will also be addressed at the end of the chapter.

The first research question examined a relationship between spectator aggression and player aggression, implying that as a spectator acts out, the player will follow in similar fashion. Based on the observations conducted during this study, there was no relationship between spectator and player aggression. In the few times when a spectator did reply with a negative comment or behavior, it tended to be under their breath and not something where a player could hear. In the instances when negative comments were

shouted onto the field by either a spectator or coach, the child did not seem to be affected one way or another. Therefore, in this age group and with this league it was concluded that there is not a significant relationship between spectator aggression and player aggression.

The second research question addressed spectators' level of aggression increasing as his or her team is losing. Based on the findings in this study, a majority of fans behaved the same regardless of whether their team was winning or losing. For example, the coach with the under 12 girls team yelled constantly throughout the entire game even though her team was winning. In the boys under 14 game when they were losing, the coach and parents still were giving the players instructional comments and cheering, "Good job" and "Nice try." When one parent said that at least it wasn't a shutout, it was at the end of the game and was said quietly to another parent. One finding that relates to this research question is that although spectators behaved the same in regards to winning or losing, they did act more aggressively when a "bad call" was perceived to be made by the referee. This was shown when the referee did not call offsides in the under 12 girls game, and the coach yelled at the referee "Good God, are you kidding?" These findings lead to the conclusion that spectator aggression did not increase based on their team's status of winning or losing, but did increase when a disagreeable call was made by the referee.

The last research question examined the behavioral differences between male and female spectators. Males tended to be standing during a majority of the games, whereas females were either sitting in chairs or standing in groups with other females. In terms of spectator behavior, male spectators more often voiced instructions or directions to

players, and female spectators often had praises for the children such as, “Nice try” and “Go Natalie Go!” This differed when it came to the coaches. The coach that showed the most aggression was the female coaching the girls under 12 game. This female coach yelled for a majority of the game in a harsh and aggressive tone. She was the only one to yell consistently at the players. This leads to the conclusion that gender differences exist between male and female spectators, but coaches should be examined separately.

Parents have always played an important role in youth sports. According to Kanters, Bocarro, and Casper (2008) the beliefs and actions of parents are so powerful, they have shown significant influence on children’s sports beliefs. Parent behavior has been found to impact the sport participant. In this study, parents behaved positively, and may have influenced the players to also behave positively. Males tended to be more involved in the game by standing and giving directions, while the women were standing in groups socializing. According to Hall and O’Mahony (2006), females attend sports for the social aspects, whereas men attend because of the love of the sport. There were instances when a female spectator yelled instructional comments. However a majority of the time, a male spectator would be the one giving more directions whereas the women would cheer and say, “Good job!” These findings support prior research.

This study was affected by several limitations. One limitation of this study was that spectators may have noticed researchers were recording data and therefore altered their behavior. If a spectator was not acting how they normally would, it could have impacted the results of the study. Another limitation that affected the study was the limited number of games attended due to scheduling conflicts. This caused less data to be recorded. The final limitation was that the researcher and research assistant recorded data

at different speeds and at times took notes on different people. For example, the researcher took notes on the coaches' response to a particular play, whereas the research assistant recorded data about a male spectator after the same play. These limitations may have had an influence on the findings.

This study was created to get a better understanding of spectator behavior at youth sporting events. Although research and some assumptions are made that parents are becoming more aggressive at sporting events, it was minimally displayed through the AYSO soccer league. Parents with children of that age appear to still be in the process of focusing on having fun. AYSO has also done an excellent job branding their organization and reminding parents why they signed their child up to participate. This study has shown that aggression in spectators does exist; however with this age and organization it is very minimal. A recommendation for future research would be to include a larger age range and attend more games.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. There was no relationship between spectator aggression and player aggression displayed during the observations conducted.
2. The spectators' level of aggression did not increase when their team was losing, however it did increase after a call was made by the referee that the spectators or coach disagreed with.
3. Male spectator behavior differed from female spectator behavior, as the male spectators tended to stand during the games and give instructional comments

or directions. The women most often stood together in groups or sat in chairs shouting praises to the players.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. More AYSO soccer games should be observed to increase the amount of data collected.
2. Additional research assistants should be added to collect and analyze more data.
3. Extend the age range of players being observed to allow for older children to be included in the study.
4. Find a way to be more discreet while collecting data so as to not potentially impact spectator behavior.
5. Examine the relationship between the coach and player when dealing with aggression.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- American Youth Soccer Organization. (2009). Why join AYSO. Retrieved from <http://ayso.com/home.aspx>
- Arthur-Banning, S., Wells, M., Baker, B., & Hegreiness, R. (2009). Parents behaving badly? The relationship between the sportsmanship behaviors of adults and athletes in youth basketball games. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32(1), 3-18.
- Bowker, A., Boekhoven, B., Nolan, A., Bauhaus, S., Glover, P., Powell, T., et al. (2009). Naturalistic observations of spectator behavior at youth hockey games. *Sport Psychologist*, 23(3), 301-316.
- Coakley, J. (1992). Burnout among adolescent athletes: A personal failure or social problem?. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 9(3), 271-285.
- Dietz-Uhler, B., Harrick, E., End, C., & Jacquemotte, L. (2000). Sex differences in sport fan behavior and reasons for being a sport fan. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 23(3), 219-232.
- Hall, J., & O'Mahony, B. (2006). An empirical analysis of gender differences in sports attendance motives. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 7(4), 334-346.
- Hardin, M., & Greer, J. (2009). The influence of gender-role socialization, media use and sports participation on perceptions of gender-appropriate sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32(2), 207-226..
- Kanters, M., Bocarro, J., & Casper, J. (2008). Supported or pressured? An examination of agreement among parent's and children on parent's role in youth sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 31(1), 64-80.
- Kanters, M., & Estes, C. (2002). Parents and youth sports. *Parks & Recreation*, 37(12), 20-27.
- Keeler, L. (2007). The differences in sport aggression, life aggression, and life assertion among adult male and female collision, contact, and non-contact sport athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 30(1), 57-76.
- Messner, M. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Murphy, S. (1999). *The cheers and the tears: A healthy alternative to the dark side of sports*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Omlil, J., & LaVoi, N. (2009). Background anger in youth sport: A perfect storm? *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32(2), 242-260.
- Rosewater, A. (2009, September). Learning to play and playing to learn: Organized sports and educational outcome. *Education Digest*, 75(1), 50-57.
- Woolger, C., & Power, T. (1993). Parent and sport socialization: Views from the achievement literature. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 16(3), 171-189.

APPENDIX

Appendix A
Observation Form

Game Information

Date:

Time:

Gender:

Age Range:

Researcher #:

Field Observations: