

# How Sport can be Part of Civil Society (“Madani” Society)

Ermawan Susanto

Department of Physical Education  
Faculty of Sport Science  
Yogyakarta State University

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** There are phenomena's where sport becomes new spirituality in western countries. Sport should develop parallel with the existence of civil society in democratic states, but still the negative value of sports dominates everywhere. Spirituality, religion, and sport are part of the lives of civilians which sometimes ignore one another. **Objectives:** This paper tries to search relation between sport and spirituality, and religion as part of civil society, to find good character of sport that could be applied, and to see the context of sport, spirituality, and religion with Indonesian civilian. **Methods:** This paper is a library research which takes some literatures about spirituality and sport on civil society. **Results:** (1) Sportsmanship refers to virtues such as fairness, self-control, courage and persistence and has been associated with interpersonal concepts of treating others and being treated fairly, maintaining self-control in dealing with others, and respect for both authority and opponents, (2) Being a "good sport" involves being a "good winner" as well as being a "good loser", (3) Theoretically, when people fail at discovering meaning in their lives they may use sports to fill this vacuum, (4) Based on the research of psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968), it shows that through sport individuals potentially find meaning in life, to fulfil their spiritual needs, (5) The athletes themselves reach the top and experience self-actualization, (6) Spirituality takes on the following characteristics: faith becomes more personal, less dogmatic, more open to experimentation, and is based upon personal experience, (7) Sports in the 21st Century is as a vehicle for spiritual *upliftment* in the place of contemporary religion. **Conclusion:** Modern sport has become new spirituality to fulfill the need of belonging and self-actualization. Sportsmanship is good character of sport that should be developed in civil society. Indonesia as a religious country should develop the aspect of spirituality on sport as one integral aspect of religion.

**Key words:** *spirituality, sport, civil society.*

## BACKGROUND

Sports are clearly more important than ever to both the individual and society in economic, cultural and financial terms. Take for example, the growth of the Olympic Movement. Increases in broadcast revenue over the past two decades have provided the Olympic Movement and sport with an unprecedented financial base. From 1984 until 2008, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has concluded broadcast agreements worth more than US\$ 10 billion (IOC, July, 2004). Displays of what in traditional religious vernacular could be termed liturgy and ritual and mass idolatry are part of the fabric of the

game and the fourteen day build-up. This article will attempt to analyse the use of sports in the 21 st Century as a vehicle for spiritual *upliftment* in the place of contemporary religion.

The dramatic growth in the popularity of sports is in sharp contrast to the near collapse of formal or orthodox religions in many countries (Robertson, 2004). Inglehart and Baker (2000: p.20) observe that “not only has weekly church attendance plunged, but Latin American countries are now sending missionaries to ‘save the souls’ of their former colonizers”. Further testimony to the decline of ‘formal’ religion is provided by the UK experience. The results of the Social Trends Survey (2002) demonstrated that approximately 24% of the UK population attended a sports event as a spectator, while half of all adults aged 18 who belonged to a religion have never attended a religious service. Religion, particularly Christianity is in numerical decline throughout the Western world. William Docherty, a professor at the University of Minnesota, notes that children’s participation in religious activities has decreased by 40% from 1981 to 1997.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Spirituality through Sport?**

**Spirituality** is relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material. Spirituality is associated with religion, deities, the supernatural, and an afterlife, although the decline of organized religion in the west and the growth of secularism has brought about a wider understanding of its nature. Traditionally, religions have regarded spirituality as an integral aspect of religious experience and have long claimed that secular (non-religious) people cannot experience "true" spirituality. Many do still equate spirituality *with* religion, but declining membership of organised religions and the growth of secularism in the western world has given rise to a broader view of spirituality.

While the terms *spirituality* and *religion* can both refer to the search for the Absolute or God (or whatever name you want to use), an increasing number of people have come to see the two as separate entities; religion being just one way in which humans can experience spirituality. Religion is not identical with spirituality; rather religion is the form spirituality takes in civilization. Those who speak of spirituality outside of religion often define themselves as "spiritual but not religious" and generally believe in the existence of many different "spiritual paths" - emphasizing the importance of finding one's own individual path to spirituality. According to one poll, some 24,4% of the United States population identifies itself as spiritual but not religious. One might say then, that a key difference is that religion is a type of formal external search, while spirituality is defined as

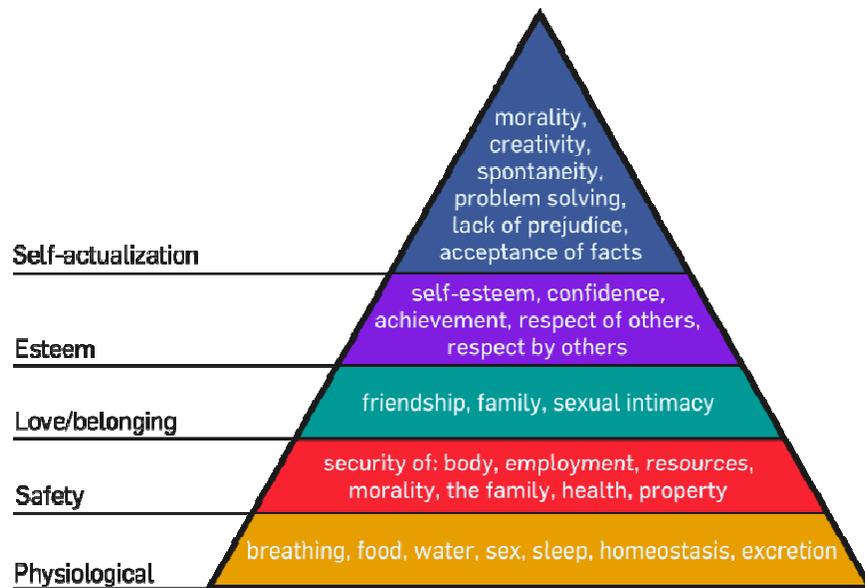
a search within oneself. The experience of 'spirituality'; the human emotions of awe, wonder and reverence, are also the province of the secular/scientific, in response to their highest values<sup>1</sup>, or when observing or studying nature, or the universe. With respect to religion, this implies that spirituality takes on the following characteristics: faith becomes more personal, less dogmatic, more open to experimentation, and is based upon personal experience. From this perspective, *religion* and *spirituality* can be seen as merely two stages in the inner growth of the faithful aspirant, so much so that many followers of constituted religions consider spirituality to be an intrinsic and inseparable aspect of their religious experience. The relationship between *religion* and *spirituality* can, thus, be seen comparable to the relationship between container and content, between form and substance, or between theory and practice.

While dissatisfaction and alienation from traditional religious practices is increasing, there is a continuing, if not growing interest in the concept of "spirituality" (Novak, 1993). The term "spirituality" is evidently an emotive and contentious one. "Some people, especially baby-boomers, reject the idea of religion, but believe they are 'spiritual'" (Roberts, 2004, p.9). This perception may require networks to allow the individual to develop their own concept of spirituality. In sports spirituality is cultivated through allegiance or commitment to a team, either as a fan or as a spectator. Themes within sport may also typically include freedom and escape from normal life, discovery of meaning in life, commitment to a set of ethics and possibly a rediscovery of play in its purest sense.

People statistically may not want church (if evidence of declining attendance is accepted), but they do appear to question a purely materialistic view of life. They want to believe in something more, even if they do not know-or want to know - what that something is (Hamilton, 1995). The growth in the popularity of sports may be in part explained by society's emphasis on "individualism" in the 21 st Century (Blake and John, 2003). Arguably, the more individualistic the society, the more intensely people may need some means of regaining a sense of group identity.

The research of psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) may help to partially explain the way in which spectator sports act as a means of fulfilling individuals' spiritual needs to belong. Maslow placed the "sense of belonging" halfway up his hierarchy of needs, with self-actualisation at the top. The need to belong is commonly regarded as a crucial part of an individual's support of a sports team. However, only the athletes themselves reach the top and experience self-actualisation, spectators experience it vicariously. Theoretically,

when people fail at discovering meaning in their lives they may use sports to fill this vacuum. **Through sport individuals potentially find meaning in life.**



A.H. Maslow, a theory of human motivation, *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943): 370-96.

### **Physiological needs**

For the most part, physiological needs are obvious - they are the literal requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met (with the exception of clothing and shelter ), the human body simply cannot continue to function. Physiological needs include: breathing, food, sexual activity, homeostatis. Lack of air and food will kill an individual. A lack of sexual activity would mean the extinction of humanity, probably explaining the strength of the sexual instinct in individuals.

### **Safety needs**

With their physical needs relatively satisfied, the individual's safety needs take over and dominate their behavior. These needs have to do with people's yearning for a predictable, orderly world in which injustice and inconsistency are under control, the familiar frequent and the unfamiliar rare. In the world of work, these safety needs manifest themselves in such things as a preference for job security, grievance procedures for protecting the individual from unilateral authority, savings accounts, insurance policies, and the like. These have been lacking for most of human history, but at this point are mostly satisfied in the "First World" -- although the poor, both those who are poor as a

class and those who are temporarily poor (university students would be an example), must often still address these needs. Safety and Security needs include: personal security, financial security, health and well-being, safety net against accidents/illness and the adverse impacts.

### **Social needs**

After physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third layer of human needs is social. This psychological aspect of Maslow's hierarchy involves emotionally-based relationships in general, such as: friendship, intimacy, having a supportive and communicative family. Humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a large social group, such as clubs, office culture, religious groups, professional organizations, sports teams, gangs, ("safety in numbers"), or small social connections (family members, intimate partners, mentors, close colleagues, confidants). They need to love and be loved (sexually and non-sexually) by others. In the absence of these elements, many people become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, and clinical depressions. This need for belonging can often overcome the physiological and security needs, depending on the strength of the peer pressure; an anorexic, for example, may ignore the need to eat and the security of health for a feeling of control and belonging. This need for belonging can often overcome the physiological and security needs, depending on the strength of the peer pressure; an anorexic, for example, may ignore the need to eat and the security of health for a feeling of control and belonging.

### **Esteem**

All humans have a need to be respected, to have self-esteem, self-respect. Also known as the *belonging need*, esteem presents the normal human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People need to engage themselves to gain recognition and have an activity or activities that give the person a sense of contribution, to feel accepted and self-valued, be it in a profession or hobby. Imbalances at this level can result in low self-esteem or an inferiority complex. People with low self-esteem need respect from others. They may seek fame or glory, which again depends on others. It may be noted, however, that many people with low self-esteem will not be able to improve their view of themselves simply by receiving fame, respect, and glory externally, but must first accept themselves internally. Psychological imbalances such as depression can also prevent one from obtaining self-esteem on both levels.

Most people have a need for a stable self-respect and self-esteem. Maslow noted two versions of esteem needs, a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, recognition, fame, prestige, and attention. The higher one is the need for self-esteem, strength, competence, mastery, self-confidence, independence and freedom. The last one is higher because it rests more on inner competence won through experience. Deprivation of these needs can lead to an inferiority complex, weakness and helplessness. Maslow stresses the dangers associated with self-esteem based on fame and outer recognition instead of inner competence. Healthy self-respect is based on earned respect.

### **Self-actualization**

The motivation to realize one's own maximum potential and possibilities is considered to be the master motive or the only real motive, all other motives being its various forms. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for self-actualization is the final need that manifests when lower level needs have been satisfied. Classical Adlerian Psychotherapy promotes this level of psychological development, utilizing the foundation of a 12-stage therapeutic model to realistically satisfy the basic needs, leading to an advanced stage of "meta-therapy," creative living, and self/other/task-actualization. Maslow's writings are used as inspirational resources.

### **Sport and Spirituality, harmful to the spirit?**

Sport is clearly one of the most successful ways of taking up time in an activity which, from a Marxist perspective, may have no "utilitarian value" (Jakubowski, 1990, p.86). For many it may be a total irrelevance. Take the joke concerning golf ruining a beautiful walk in the countryside. According Carroll (1998) argues that this view neglects the notion of "anima mundi" or soul. Sport for the ancient Greeks and Romans represented an avenue to find the connection to soul. The battle, whether it is on the golf course or in the boxing ring offers this opportunity to re-connect to the soul.

The enthusiasm to participate in sport, either vicariously as a spectator or directly as a participant may be intrinsic. Testimony to this manifests itself in a child's playful actions. The desire and enthusiasm to engage in distraction and play may be intrinsic to the human psyche, but Trotsky (1993, p.211) argues that in order that "spiritual requirements may flourish it is necessary that physical requirements be fully satisfied". As *the Jesuit scholar Hugo Rahner has put it; "To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic ...*

to enter a world where different laws apply, to be relieved of all the weights that bear it down, to be free, kingly, unfettered and divine”.

The above is potentially reinforced through sport with its inherent ideals of “fair play” and “codes of conduct” enshrined in the rules and regulations. This is disputed, however by George Orwell in his essay, “The Sporting Spirit” written in 1945 where he comments upon the nature of modern sport, concluding that it has nothing to do with fair play. “It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence; in other words war minus the shooting”.

Does the pursuit of sport harm the spirit? The prevalence of cheating and drug abuse does seem to challenge this aspiration of a connection to a “higher calling”. Does spirit become severed in elite sport? This question raises the issue of “sportsmanship” or the practice of ethical behaviour in modern sports. Sportsmanship is characterised by notions of civility and is “a matter of being good (character) and doing right (action) in sports” (Grough, 1997: p.21). Fair play and sportsmanship are challenged by what many regard as increased emphasis on a philosophy of “win at all costs”. The impact of the coach is crucial in mediating the importance of sportsmanship and with it the notion of a games inherent spirituality. How individuals reconcile “the shifting definitions of sportsmanship with the objective of winning” (Buford May, 2001, p.387) is a complex task.

**Sportsmanship** is conformance to the rules, spirit, and etiquette of sport. More grandly, it may be considered the ethos of sport. It is interesting that the motivation for sport is often an elusive element. Sportsmanship expresses an aspiration or ethos that the activity will be enjoyed for its own sake, with proper consideration for fairness, ethics, respect, and a sense of fellowship with one's competitors. Being a "good sport" involves being a "good winner" as well as being a "good loser". Often the pressures of competition, individual achievement, or introduction of technology can seem to work against enjoyment by participants. As a result, sportsmanship may be contrasted with gamesmanship. Sportsmanship typically is regarded as a component of morality in sport, composed of three related and perhaps overlapping concepts: fair play, sportsmanship, and character. Fair play refers to all participants having an equitable chance to pursue victory and acting toward others in an honest, straightforward, and a firm and dignified manner even when others do not play fairly. It includes respect for others including team members, opponents, and officials. Character refers to dispositions, values and habits that determine the way that person normally responds to desires, fears, challenges, opportunities, failures and successes and is typically seen in polite behaviors toward others such as helping an

opponent up or shaking hands after a match. An individual is believed to have a “good character” when those dispositions and habits reflect core ethical values.

Sportsmanship can be conceptualized as an enduring and relatively stable characteristic or disposition such that individuals differ in the way they are generally expected to behave in sport situations. In general, sportsmanship refers to virtues such as fairness, self-control, courage and persistence and has been associated with interpersonal concepts of treating others and being treated fairly, maintaining self-control in dealing with others, and respect for both authority and opponents.

### **Poor sportsmanship**

Poor sportsmanship may be exhibited by the winners "rubbing pudding in the noses" of the losers, or the losers expressing frustration at not winning, perhaps to the point of holding a grudge, booing the winner's national anthem (at an event such as the olympics) or failing to congratulate the winners. On certain levels of sport, poor sportsmanship is punished. For example, in American football, a team can receive a penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct. A competitor who exhibits poor sportsmanship after losing a game or contest is often called a "**sore loser**" (those who show poor sportsmanship after winning are typically called "**bad winners**"). Behavior includes blaming others, not taking responsibility for personal actions, reacting immaturely or improperly, making excuses for their loss, referring to unfavorable conditions or other petty issues.

### **CONCLUSION**

The intrinsic appeal of sport for many people is the uncertainty of outcome. Historically, however, this has never prevented mankind from attempting to tip the balance of uncertainty through various forms of cheating; indeed, the emphasis upon victory in sport defies and corrupts the ethics of fair play. If sport does indeed offer a vehicle with which to fill the spiritual void left by the demise of traditional forms of religion, it may do well to adopt the Buddhist philosophy which states that “Life is a journey”. However, in the context of Indonesian people who are religious, the spirit of sport is believed as in accordance with the spirit of religion.

## References

- A.H. Maslow. (1943). *A theory of human motivation*, *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943):370-96. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs).
- Blake, J., John, A. (2003). *The world according to Margaret Thatcher*. Michael O'Mara Books.
- Buford May, R. A.(2001).The Sticky Situation of Sportsmanship: Contexts and Contradictions in Sportsmanship among High School Basketball Players. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol 25, No.4, pp.372-389. Sage Publications.
- Carroll, J. (1998). *Ego and Soul: the Modern West in Search of Meaning*. Harper Collins.
- Novak, M. (1993). *The Joy of Sports End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit*. Madison Books.
- Hamilton, M. (1995). *The Sociology of Religion*. Routledge.
- Jackubowski, F. (1990). *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*. Pluto Press.
- Grough, R. (1997). *Character is everything: Promoting excellence in sports*. New York: Harcourt Brace College.
- Roberts, K. A. (2004). *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Thomson.
- Robertson, T. (2004). *Religion Losing To Youth Sports On Weekends*. Boston Globe. February 16th 2004.
- Trotsky, L. (1994). *Problems of Everyday Life*. Pathfinder Press.