

# Effects of a Psychology–based training programme on football grassroots coaches upon young player’s sportspersonship and disposition to cheat

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*EFFECTS OF A PSYCHOLOGY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME ON FOOTBALL GRASSROOTS COACHES UPON YOUNG PLAYER’S SPORTSPERSONSHIP AND DISPOSITION TO CHEAT*

**KEYWORDS:** Psytool, Fair Play, Cheating, Gamesmanship, Grassroots Sports, Football.

**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this study was to evaluate sportspersonship, gamesmanship and cheating in a sample of soccer players before and after their coaches completed the 10 lessons of the Psytool program on these topics. The participants were 20 coaches and 189 male soccer players from 13 to 18 years of age from two first division clubs in Spain and Portugal, who completed the questionnaires: Predisposition to Cheating in Sports (CDED) and Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientations Scale. (MSOS). The results indicate that at the beginning of the season the young players showed a moderate acceptance of cheating and a high acceptance of gamesmanship, while after the intervention with the coaches the acceptance of cheating and gamesmanship decreased significantly. With regard to sportspersonship, at the beginning of the season players showed a high acceptance of Respect for the rules and the referees as well as for the opponents and a moderate acceptance of social conventions and sports commitment. On the other hand, at the end of the season, respect for rules and referees and for opponents decreases and respect for social conventions and commitment increased. Thus, the intervention was effective in several aspects, although not in all variables, probably because the intervention was only done with one of the agents of change: coaches.

Sportspersonship, cheating and gamesmanship are controversial issues among sport psychologists. The construct of sportspersonship according to Vallerand, Brière, Blanchard, and Provencher (1997) implies: a) Full commitment: valuing personal improvement through maximum effort and learning from mistakes; b) Social conventions: respect for the sport and engagement in prosocial behaviours ; c) Rules and Officials: respect for and willingness to abide by the rules and for those who enforce them; d) Opponent dimension: level of respect and concern for the opponent(s); and e) Negative approach: the extent to which the athlete reacts negatively to their participation. As Weiss, Smith and Stuntz (2008) have outlined, sportspersonship depicts behavioral norms and conventions that are expected within society (e.g., follow the rules, be honest) as well as concerns about physical and psychological well-being of others (e.g., don’t make fun of others, don’t hurt others physically). In summary, sportspersonship involves respect, fairness, honesty and responsibility in regard to the rules and people participating in a particular sport.

Different studies have used the terms cheating and gamesmanship interchangeably, but in the present article we make a distinction between these concepts. The concept of cheating implies infringing the rules of a given sport with the intention to

deceive and put the opponent at a disadvantage. This personal disposition is expressed in different ways, along with the specific cheating behavior: “It is ok to cheat if nobody knows”; “If other players are cheating, I think I can do the same too”; “I would cheat if I thought it would help the team win”. (Lee, Whitehead and Ntoumanis, 2007; Ponseti et al., 2012).

Gamesmanship relates to actions which, while not infringing the rules of any specific sport, they do affect the spirit of the game, and they can even use the rules themselves to gain an advantage. These may include faking injury, wasting time, or trying to unnerve the opponent (Sage, Kavussanu, & Duda, 2006). All these behaviors result in negative consequences for the opponent and reflect an absence or diminution of sportspersonship (Boixadós, Cruz, Valiente and Torregrosa, 2004, Palou et al. 2013 and Ring and Kavussanu, 2018).

Arnold (1999) highlighted the importance of sports to provide particularly rich contexts for personal growth. On the one hand, there is a shared belief that sport contributes to the moral development of young athletes, because the foundations of sport reflect concern for fairness and well-being. In this sense, sport is an appropriate developmental context for teaching and learning fair play and sportspersonship. On the other hand, it is argued that sportspersonship is worsening in youth sports, due to parents’ and

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coaches' emphasis on winning at all cost and overemphasis on success, as it happens in professional sport (Cruz, 1998, Cruz, Boixadós, Valiente, and Torregrosa, 2001 and Pilz, 1995).

The literature indicates that sport participation does not automatically lead to character development and the promotion of sportpersonship. However, the results of a review of empirical studies show mixed effects depending on different variables such as: age, type of sport (i.e., contact sport versus no-contact sport), and whether the sport is played recreationally versus competitively and the sport context, (Shields and Bredemeier, 2007). As Weiss et al. (2008) and Shields and Bredemeier (2007) have summarized, the question of whether sport builds sportpersonship or promote cheating and gamesmanship depends on the quality of adult leadership, the types of experiences afforded to participants in sport competitive environments and the players' moral attitudes (Lucidi, Zelli, Mallia, Nicolais, Lazuras, and Hagger (2017). The positive developmental outcomes are likely to occur only when competent agents of change –coaches, parents, referees...– design appropriate activities, provide adequate role models, reinforce fair play behaviors and take advantage of teachable moments (Cruz, Ramis and Torregrosa, 2016). In summary, the social environment in which an athlete operates can have deep effects on the development of moral functioning.

The European Erasmus+ Project Psytool aims to support actions in the field of youth sport. The main purpose of this project is to take full advantage from the implementation of sport psychology as a strategic tool to create new educational materials and training modules for Agents of Change, using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to impact target beneficiaries (Cruz et al. 2017 and Jaenes et al., 2017). One of the aims of The PSYTOOL program was to test the applicability of a package of lessons in different Agents of Change, especially grassroots coaches, and assess its effects on the level of sportpersonship, cheating and gamesmanship in the soccer players of their teams. Therefore, the specific objectives of this study were twofold: 1) assess the level of sportpersonship, cheating and gamesmanship before and after the education of coaches as agents of change in football players between 13-18 years old of two clubs of Spain and Portugal; and 2) study the relationships between sportpersonship, cheating and gamesmanship in the aforementioned player.

## Method

### Participants

The athletes' sample included 189 male football players, 121 from a first division team of Spain and 68 from a first division team of Portugal; 132 of them (69,9%) aged 13-15, and 57 (30,1%) aged 16-18. The coaches sample included 10 coaches from the Spanish team and 10 coaches from the Portuguese team, aged between 23-37 years ( $M= 29.3$ ;  $SD=4.29$ ).

### Instruments

**Cheating.** The Predisposition to cheating in sports questionnaire (CDED for its name in Spanish *Cuestionario de Disposición al Engaño en el Deporte*, Ponseti, et al., 2012), based on the Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire (AMDYSQ-1, Lee, Whitehead and Ntoumanis, 2007) was used to evaluate cheating. It consists of six items and was reported to have two factors: Predisposition to acceptance of

cheating (e.g., "I would cheat if I thought it would help me win"), and Predisposition to acceptance of gamesmanship (e.g., "Sometimes I waste time to unsettle the opposition"). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. Reliability of cheating subscale was .79 and gamesmanship subscale was .75.

**Sportpersonship.** The Spanish version (Martín-Albo, Núñez, Navarro and González (2006) of the Multidimensional Sportpersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS) of Vallerand et al., (1997), was used to measure sportpersonship. This scale is composed of 25 items structured in 5 subscales, each composed of 5 items; Commitment, (e.g. "I do not give up after mistakes"), Social conventions (e.g. "I congratulate the opponent after a loss"), Rules and referees (e.g. "I respect the rules"), Opponents (e.g. "I don't take advantage of an injured opponent") and Negative approach (e.g. "I criticize coach's instructions"). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. In the Vallerand et al (1997) study, the internal consistency scores (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the five factors ranged from .71 (the Commitment subscale) to 0.86 (the Social Conventions subscale), except for the Negative Approach subscale, which had an alpha value of .54. Martin-Albo et al. (2006) provided support for the reliability of the scales of Commitment (.71), Social conventions (.81), Rules and referees (.74), Opponents (.71), whereas the scale of the Negative approach (.65) should be investigated further.

**Psytool Educational Pack.** The Psytool Program consisted of a package of 10 self-contained lessons pertaining to various important issues in sports. The lessons ranged from the importance of Sports Psychology and its impact in sports to sportpersonship and gamesmanship in sports, ethical principles in sports, racism and discrimination in sports, gender in sports, aggression in sports, etc. Each lesson was structured in a similar way, with a summary of each lesson's contents, the importance of the contents, case studies that can be debated and suggested readings. There is also a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of each lesson, regarding the materials of the lesson, as well as a series of evaluation questions regarding the lesson's materials. At the end of the program, coaches answered the Disposition to Change Questionnaire (See García Mas, Rosado, Serpa, Marcolino and Villalonga, 2018, in this issue).

### Procedure

After gaining approval for the study protocol from the university ethics committee, pre and post intervention administration of both questionnaires to players was done. Coaches completed the ten lessons of the Psytool program between mid-season (i.e., early March) and the end of the season (i.e., June). Ethical permission was also obtained from coaches and parents for the participation of their children in the study. The researchers met with each coach at the end of a training session and participants completed the questionnaires that took from 15 to 20 minutes.

## Results

As seen in Table 1, the descriptive statistics for the variables of cheating indicate that, on average, at the start of the season, the young football players were characterized by a moderate acceptance of cheating ( $M= 3.76$ ;  $SD 1.37$ ) and high acceptance

of gamesmanship ( $M=4.16$ ;  $SD= 3.07$ ). With respect to the variables related to sportpersonship, players showed a high acceptance of Rules and referees ( $M=4.51$ ;  $SD= 0.74$ ) and Respect for the opponents ( $M= 4.10$ ;  $SD= 0.99$ ) and a moderate acceptance of Social conventions ( $M= 3.54$ ;  $SD =1.19$ ), Commitment ( $M= 3.34$ ;  $SD= 1.26$ ) and the Negative approach ( $M= 2.92$ ;  $SD= 1.47$ ).

The ANOVA results yielded a statistically significant decrease between the scores of the pre- intervention and post- intervention on the Cheating ( $t=6.95$   $p<0.001$ ) and Gamesmanship ( $t=9.59$   $p<0.001$ ) scales.

Regarding self-reports about respect for Social conventions and Commitment scales tests showed a statistically significant increase between the pre- and post-tests on young footballers

( $t -4.65$   $p<0.001$  and  $t= -12.75$   $p<.001$ ).

The ANOVA tests show a statistically significant decrease from the pre- to the post- interventions self-reports on the Rules and referees scale ( $t=10.89$   $p<.001$ ), the Opponents' scale ( $t 12.34$   $p<0.0001$ ) and the Negative approach ( $t=2.89$   $p (<.004)$ ).

The results of correlations among the five MSOS subscales show positive correlation values among subscales, except for the Negative approach subscale with the Rules and referees ( $-.11$ ) and Commitment ( $-.35$ ) subscales, which were negative (See Table 2). The MSOS subscales revealed negative correlations with the cheating scale, except the Negative approach subscale that has no correlation. The Social conventions and Rules and referees subscales displayed negative correlations with the Gamesmanship subscale.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA differences in the Pre-Post intervention condition

	Pre (n=189) <i>X (DS)</i>	<i>F(p)</i>	Post (n=189) <i>X (DS)</i>	<i>F(p)</i>	<i>t(p)</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>	<i>r</i>
<b>Cheating</b>	3.76 (1.37)	.16 (.68)	2.85 (1.10)	.00 (.93)	6.95(<.001)	1.01	.45
<b>Gamesmanship</b>	4.16 (3.07)	2.5 (.11)	3.07 (1.09)	.04 (.82)	9.59(<.001)	1.39	.57
<b>Social Conventions</b>	3.54 (1.19)	.18 (.66)	3.92 (.79)	.86 (.35)	-4.65(<.001)	-.67	.32
<b>Rules and Referees</b>	4.51 (.74)	.10 (.75)	3.88 (.59)	2.2 (.13)	10.89(<.001)	1.58	.62
<b>Commitment</b>	3.34 (1.26)	.83 (.36)	4.57 (.43)	1.2 (.27)	-12.75(<.001)	-1.85	.68
<b>Opponents</b>	4.10 (.99)	4.2 (.04)	3.13 (.69)	.05 (.82)	12.34(<0001)	1.79	.66
<b>Negative Approach</b>	2.92 (1.47)	.91 (.34)	2.57 (.67)	.00 (.97)	2.89(<.004)	.42	.20

Table 2. Pearson correlations between the results of MSOS and CDED subscales in post-intervention conditions ( $N= 189$ )

Social. Convent.	Rules and Referees	Commitment	Opponents	Negative Focus	Cheating	Gamesmanship
<b>Social Conventions</b>	.46**	.36**	.46**	.13	-.22**	-.20**
<b>Rules and Referees</b>		.37**	.33 **	-.11*	-.40**	-.17*
<b>Commitment</b>			.086	-.35**	-.16**	.03
<b>Opponents</b>				.16**	-.28**	-.10
<b>Negative Focus</b>					.13	-.05

## Discussion

Regarding the questionnaire of predisposition to cheating in sports, the findings are consistent with previous research showing more acceptance of gamesmanship than cheating, but in our study we have found a higher level of acceptance of cheating and gamesmanship than in the studies of Palou et al. (2013) and Bermejo, Borràs, Haces and Ponseti (2018) with young soccer, basketball and handball players and Ring and Kavussanu (2018) with college athletes competing in individual and team sports. This result could be explained by the fact that our participants play in soccer academies of two important clubs of the Premier League in Spain and Portugal, that emphasize the importance of results. The interesting finding of this study is that Psytool program for coaches, as agents of change, was quite effective on the elite young soccer players, producing a decrease in self reports of behaviours regarding cheating and gamesmanship comparing the pre and the post intervention

measures. At the end of the season, players were less likely to cheat in matches, and to waste time trying to rile up their opponents.

When analysing the results of the MSOS questionnaire, we have obtained high scores in the scales of Respect for rules and referees, Respect for opponents, Social conventions and Commitment and moderate scores in the Negative approach subscale. These results are similar to the ones in the studies of Martín-Albo et al. (2006) and Vallerand et al. (1997), except that in our study we have obtained a higher score in the opponents' subscale in the pre intervention phase. Analysing the effects of the Psytool lessons, the increases in self-reported behaviours towards the social conventions subscale and self-reported behaviours of engagement in practices, games and personal development (Commitment subscale), were in line with what was expected. In Respect to the rules and referees scale, we found a decrease in the self- reports from the pre- to the post intervention results. This seems to suggest that athletes

had less respect for the decisions of referees and the rules of the sport along the competitive season. The results of opponents' scale showed a decrease from the pre- to the post intervention reports. This is indicative of a decrease in pro-fair play behaviours from players, such as helping adversaries getting up from a fall, or lending an adversary some piece of equipment, but the scores at the end of the season were similar to the ones obtained in the Martin Albo et al. (2006) and Vallerand et al (1997) studies. These last results are not in line with our expectations, suggesting that there is not a straight connection between the education of the Psytool agents of change, and the changes in the self-reports of the young football players. This may be due to the importance that some players, that is ego-oriented players, give to results at the end of the season. In fact, some studies have found that levels of fair play decrease in ego-oriented players (e.g., Gonçalves, Silva., Cruz, Torregrosa., and Cumming, 2010), but in our study, we have not assessed players' motivational orientation.

The positive correlations among the subscales of MSOS provide additional support for the construct validity of MSOS, except for the Negative approach subscale with an inadequate internal consistency in different studies Martin Albo et al. (2006) and Vallerand et al (1997). As expected, there is a moderated negative correlation between the subscales of MSOS and the scale of Cheating, except for the Negative approach. Furthermore, there is also a moderate negative correlation between the scales of Social conventions and Rules and referees with the scale of Gamesmanship.

### Research limitations and future research directions

One limitation of our study could be the scope of the program outlining a task motivational climate to promote sportpersonship. Maybe future intervention should de-emphasize ego goal involvement in order to increase fair play behaviours from players, such as helping adversaries getting up from a fall, because ego orientation critics outline the importance of cheating and aggressive play as a mean of attaining the goal of winning (Gonçalves et al. 2010 and Lochbaum et al. 2016, Ring and Kavussanu, 2018). In fact, Tractlet, Romand, Moret and Kavussanu (2011) had found that ego orientation in young athletes is a positive predictor of moral indifference towards antisocial behavior in young athletes.

Another limitation is that the program is addressed only to one of the agents of change (i.e., the coach) and future interventions should examine the role of the motivational climate created by parents of young football players (Wangsson, Stenling, Gustafsson and Augustsson, 2016).

Our position, from a cognitive-behavioral point of view, is that the effects of sport participation in young athletes' sportpersonship depend basically on the influences of the different socialization agents: parents, coaches, peers, referees, and officials (Boixadós, et al., 1998; Cruz, Ramis and Torregrosa, 2016). So, if we want to change the values in youth sport and avoid cheating, gamesmanship and violence, sport psychologists have to work not only with coaches, but also with parents, sport organizers, officials, referees and peers in order to empower them as agents of change, as the European Project Psytool tries to do.

### *EFFECTOS DE UN PROGRAMA DE ENTRENAMIENTO BASADO EN LA PSICOLOGIA CON ENTRENADORES DE FÚTBOL DE INICIACIÓN EN LA DEPORTIVIDAD Y LA DISPOSICIÓN AL ENGAÑO DE FUTBOLISTAS JÓVENES*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Psytool, Fairplay, Engaño, Astucia, Entrenadores de base, Fútbol.

**RESUMEN:** El objetivo de este trabajo fue evaluar la deportividad, la astucia y el engaño en una muestra de futbolistas antes y después que sus entrenadores realizaran 10 lecciones del programa Psytool sobre estos temas. Los participantes fueron 20 entrenadores y 189 futbolistas masculinos de 13 a 18 años de dos clubes de primera división de España y Portugal, a los que se les administraron el Cuestionario de Disposición al Engaño en el Deporte (CDED) y la Multidimensional Sportpersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS). Los resultados indican que al comienzo de la temporada los jóvenes futbolistas muestran una aceptación moderada del engaño y una alta aceptación de la astucia, mientras que después de la intervención con los entrenadores disminuye significativamente tanto la aceptación del engaño como la de la astucia. Respecto a la deportividad, a comienzo de temporada los futbolistas muestran una alta aceptación del respeto por las reglas y los árbitros así como por los adversarios y una aceptación moderada de las convenciones sociales y el compromiso deportivo. En cambio, a final de temporada disminuye el respeto por las reglas y árbitros y por los adversarios y aumenta el respeto por las convenciones sociales y el compromiso. Así pues, la intervención fue eficaz en diversos aspectos, aunque no en todos, debido probablemente, a que sólo se intervino con uno de los agentes de cambio: los entrenadores.

### *EFEITOS DE UM PROGRAMA DE TREINAMENTO BASEADO EM LA PSICOLOGIA COM TREINADORES DE FUTEBOL EM ESPORTIVISMO E DISPOSIÇÃO AO ENGAÑO EM JOVENS JOGADORES DE FUTEBOL*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Psytool, Fair play, Engano, Astúcia, Treinadores, Futebol

**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste estudo foi o de avaliar os níveis de desportivismo e comportamentos de astúcia e batota numa amostra de praticantes de futebol, antes e depois dos seus treinadores realizarem o programa de formação Psytool, composto por 10 lições. Os participantes foram 20 treinadores e 189 praticantes de futebol entre 13-18 anos de idade de dois Clubes da primeira divisão de Portugal e Espanha, aos quais se aplicaram os questionários de Predisposição para a Batota no Desporto(CDED) e a Multidimensional Sportpersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS). Os resultados indicam que, no começo da temporada, os jovens futebolistas demonstram uma aceitação moderada de comportamentos engano, e uma alta aceitação de comportamentos de astúcia, mas que esta aceitação diminui significativamente depois da intervenção com os treinadores, tanto nos comportamentos de engano, como nos de astúcia. No que toca aos comportamentos de desportivismo, no início da temporada, os futebolistas demonstram uma alta aceitação e respeito pelas regras e árbitros, assim como pelos adversários e uma aceitação moderada das convenções sociais e compromisso desportivo. Por outro lado, no final da época, existe uma diminuição do respeito pelas regras, árbitros e adversários, mas um aumento o respeito pelas convenções sociais e compromisso desportivo. Desta forma podemos afirmar que a intervenção foi eficaz em vários aspetos, ainda que não foi em todas as variáveis, provavelmente porque a intervenção apenas foi realizada com um dos possíveis agentes de mudança: os treinadores.



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