

# **Losing on Competing against oneself From Philosophical Perspective of Informal fair play**

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## **Abstract**

In modern sports, there are many doubtful phenomena in which winning and losing are not clear, like winning because of doping goes unnoticed by others. The matter of this phenomenon is asked for a philosophical perspective more than anything. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify why doubtful winning is not truly winning, but losing based on the competition against oneself. To this purpose, this paper will review the concept of fair play in modern sports in the first chapter, relations between fair play and competing against oneself in the second chapter, and meaning of informal fair play in the last chapter. In consequence, this paper suggests that there is self-negation when making a judgment on winning and losing based on the competition against oneself.

**Key words:** formal fair play, informal fair play, Competing against oneself.

## **1. Introduction**

Sung Min Kang argued that "characteristics of modern sports are institutionalization, physicality, rules, competition" [ <sup>1</sup> ]. Sports are performed by physical competition based on the institutionalized rules. Afterward, winning and losing show up through these series of procedures. And winning and losing is determined by records and scores based on the institutionalized rules. In this respect, Sigmund Loland argued as follows, "Constitutive rules defined what it means to win a sports competition" [ <sup>2</sup> ]. On this view, winning and losing sports must be based on the constitutive rules by sports. Also, Robert L Simon argued that "some philosophers of sports argue that cheaters can't really win, since when they cheat they go outside the constitutive rules that define the game, and therefore they don't even play the game" [ <sup>3</sup> ]. To sum up, the constitutive rules define actions that are allowed and are not allowed. Therefore, unless Athletes obey the constitutive rules of sports, Athletes can't only win, but also be informed they are not playing the game. However, there are many cases in sports, which are unknown whether winning or losing is truly right or wrong from the perspective of the institutionalized rule. For example,

1. A player violates the institutionalized rule but wins a game without being noticed by anyone.
2. A player wins a game by doping.
3. A player wins a game without "informal fair play". [ <sup>4</sup> ]

In these cases, can we say that the wins mentioned above are truly won or loses? Although at first glance, we can say that the wins mentioned are wins based on the results and structures of the game, but it seems that the wins need to be considered from a philosophical approach concerning judging winning and

losing. In fact, the wins imply that we can't clearly distinguish the winner and the losers from the perspective of institutionalized rules, which mean the direction from standards of institutionalized rules to players' own behavior.

Therefore, this study will approach from the opposing direction. In other words, it is that the subject who does the sports makes judgment through the direction from himself/herself to his/her behavior. According to this direction, the purpose of this paper is to identify why the wins mentioned above are not truly wins but loses. In the first chapter, it is stated why the three winning above mentioned means losing to subject by looking at the fair play, which encompasses the institutionalized rules. And the limitation of the informal fair play arises from the review in the first chapter. For the limitation of the informal fair play, the second chapter will consider the relation between competing against one self and fair play. In the last chapter, the final purpose of this study regarding the limitation of the informal fair play in the first chapter is to identify two meanings of informal fair play based on the example of sports, and why winning without informal fair play is losing based on competing against oneself.

Before moving onto the next chapter, the purpose of this study is not to identify that losing is based on the competition against others and structure of sports game, but losing which is not denominated until based on competition against oneself and the perspective of fair play athletes must obey.

## **2. Consideration of Fair play on Modern sports**

This chapter focused on "The Declaration on Sport" by the International Council of Sport and Physical Education (ICSPE) and a book by Hans Lenk. It is thought that "The Declaration on Sport" is a document published by the internationally acknowledged institution. Furthermore, the reason why this study additionally reviewed the concept of fair play by Lenk is that he divided the concept of fair play into two concepts of fair play (formal fair play)[ <sup>5</sup> ], and informal fair play) which are applied to concrete sports phenomena.

First, according to preamble of "The Declaration on Sport" the relation between sports and fair play was described. "If this activity involves competition, it must then always be performed with a spirit of sportsmanship. There can be no true sport without the idea of fair play" [ <sup>6</sup> ]. These citations declared that fair play is essential on the realization of sports. Then, what is the fair play? "The Declaration of sports" abstractly describes it as follows.

Fair Play is the essence, the sine qua non, of any game or sport that is worthy of the name...Fair play requires not only strict but also glad and willing adherence to the rules, both in the letter and in the spirit. It implies respect for

one's opponent, and for oneself. Without fair play, a sporting contest can become a humiliating and a degrading experience [7].

From this viewpoint, it is considered there are two parts of fair play. First, fair play is to obey the rules. This means keeping the institutionalized rules. Thus, it amounts to the fact that to not obey the rules is to break the fairness of sports. Lenk argued those kinds of fair play as the concept of formal fair play. However, he pointed out as follow, "An athlete can very well comply with the formal rule of fairness and, nevertheless, infringe on the informal fair play expectation for spirit of chivalrous sportsmanship" [8]. In this citation, informal fair play, Lenk points out the concept of fair play which includes respect for one's opponent, and for oneself. In order to make sure to describe precisely the concept of informal fair play by Lenk, let us move into the example of the Amsterdam Olympic Fencing game mentioned in book by Lenk which is about competition between Gaudin of France and Gaudini of Italy.

When in 1928 Gaudin was touched in a fencing contest but the referee judged "non touche" he sprang forth announcing "Je suis touche" [9].

On this view, if Gaudin hadn't said that Gaudini had grazed Gaudin's jacket, Gaudin could have an advantage at 2:2. But, he did not do that. To this point, formal fair play, Lenk says the attitude of Gaudin, which could not present without respect for one's opponent, and oneself. It was considered that he could have lead by round at the advantage if he hadn't confess to the jury. It seems that he purposely followed a fair attitude. It is considered that fair play requires athletes to obey the institutionalized rules, and athletes ought to have respect for one's opponent, and for oneself. Furthermore, rationally fair play appears with attitudes of subjects through this kind of procedure. As "The Declaration on Sport" states, sports must come into existence with formal fair play and informal fair play. Given this perspective, matters of the institutionalized rules correspond with formal fair play. Thus, it could lead to result that breaking the institutionalized rules is breaking formal fair play and fairness, and breaking the rules ultimately means losing. Besides, on judging the winning and losing, it is considered that formal fair play based on the institutionalized rules functions as an obvious standard of two directions, one is from standards of institutionalized rules to players' own behavior, the other is from himself/herself to his/her behavior. In summary, even if the winnings of the first and second example, the winning is based on the results and structures of sports games, the subjects that recognize that those winnings are not truly winning, but losing, because the subjects knew that they themselves had broken the institutionalized rules.

However, another problem remains. That is about the winning of the third example which is related to informal fair play. What is winning without informal fair play? Is informal fair play functioning as the obvious standard on judging winning and losing? Regarding these questions, this study, unfortunately, suggests that the wins of the third example there are some limitations in regards to losing, just as not keeping formal fair play is definitely losing from both directions. It is because the winning and losing in modern sports is based on formal fair play (institutionalized rules), and there are no standards, which apply on how each of the informal fair play acts on winning and losing. In fact, informal fair play could not

influence winning and losing in modern sports. On the contrary, the matter of informal fair play was subordinated to matters of ethics and morality. This consideration suggests that we can't identify why the winning of the third example is losing, and the relations between the winning, losing and ethics, morality. Also, certain significance in behind consideration, will likely lead to potential dangers that athletes don't care about informal fair play on pursuing winning, because of the no relation between winning, losing and informal fair play.

Thus, for the limitations which will be solve in the last chapter, the next chapter will consider alternative approaches, which is the relations between winning, losing and informal fair play instead of both direction this study used

### **3. Relation between Fair play and Competing against oneself**

First, this chapter will consider the relationship between the acts of fair play the player is taking and mental elements, and then second, try to identify the relationship between fair play and competition against oneself.

When we judge fair play in various situations of sports we can judge it based on the behaviors of the player. Then, what is the ground to use the behavior of the player to make a judgment? In this point, Nicholas Dixon said as follows by referring to Immanuel Kant.

A venerable Tradition associated with Kant holds that I am morally responsible only for what is within my control. I am not responsible for any consequences of my actions that I did not intend and had no reason to foresee. Strictly speaking, the only human actions that are subject to moral evaluation are our intentions, which, unlike the consequences of our control [10].

Based on this view, what we can judge morally is only what we do voluntarily. Considering that the reason why acts in various situations of sport are subject to the judgment of fair play is because we are free to do those things. This suggests that the act of sports is physically expressed, but our intentions, the mental factors, are acting on behavior. Lee Jong Wang said that "since we are acting in the relationship between body and mind, and acts are manifested by the will, which is one of our spiritual elements, we can demand the ethics of the behavior" [11]. From this view, it is considered that acts in sports are not simply physical acts, but intentional acts based on our spiritual elements, and those who participate in sports are moving their body based on the purpose of themselves, each acts are based on our intentions and a variety of desires. If it is not admitted, acts of sports can be nothing more than mere moving meaningless acts regardless of one's own intention and purpose. Then, what is the relationship between the mental factors, and competition against oneself? Leslie A. Howe addresses that the notion of competition against oneself based on the phenomenology as follows in the internal domain of the subject by expanding the generally discussed concept of competition with others.

I raise a number of problems against both criteria and argue that traditional and adventure sports do both involve self-competition on at least two levels: bettering one's previous performance and resisting the desire to quit. I argue that self-reflexive competition is not so much with one's self (which is philosophically absurd), but

within one's self, between conflicting motivations and desires [12].

"Competing against oneself" Howe states that based on the process of two levels, one is related to the relation between the results of the present subject, and the results of the subject is trying to achieve for the future. Also even the relation between past result and future result is considered in that level. And the other is related to the conflict among the variety of internal desires one has. Or in other words, it is considered that "Competing against oneself" is an internal process one has to experience. Probably it is questionable for those who believe competition as the confrontation of humans. But Howe pointed out based on the phenomenology that "we can overlook the internal complexity of self, if we only recognize concept of competition against different person" [13]. Besides, Howe more precisely, argued that "Competition isn't only about A versus B, it is also about A versus A, or more exactly, part of A Versus another part of A" [14]. Let us think it through the example of a marathon. They are about to cross the finish line. Runner A has used up all their strength and runner B follows them. In that moment A has to decide whether to put forth every ounce of their energies once more or if they should give up.

This example considers that the choice runner A took was derived from their desire, motivation and intention. Also this choice makes the player realized in the sports. In this case, those who believe competition as confrontation of human would recognize the example as competition against another. But according to Howe, it is thought that the competition against oneself is made in relation between desire, motivation and intention, and in relation between present result and the result the subject is trying to achieve for the future.

In summary, it is considered that the behavior of the player which determines if it is fair play or not, is intentional behavior which integrates desire, planning and motivation inside of the player rather than unconscious behavior. And if we think that this series of processes can be explained with the concept of competing against oneself. Howe is trying to argue that is considered we finally find out one method which can be used as a substitute for the other direction instead of judging the direction of himself/herself to his/her behavior. Therefore, this paper tries to identify why the winning of the third example without informal fair play is losing from the perspective of competing against oneself in last chapter.

#### **4. Losing on Competing against oneself from Philosophical Perspective of Informal fair play**

In the final chapter, I will find the meaning of the informal fair play, to respect the player themselves and his/her counterparts, which is reviewed through the example of Pierre de Coubertin Medal and other sports. Finally, this study shows why the winning of the third example without keeping informal fair play is not truly winning, but losing from the perspective of competing against oneself based on the two meanings.

First, Italian, Eugenio Monti got the golden opportunity in the four man bobsleigh in the Winter Olympics, which was hosted by Austria. But in that instant, "a bolt from the sled of the English team was broken, and they ask for help from other countries, and eventually they were rejected. But, Monti pulled out a bolt from his own team' sled without hesitation and gave it to the English team. The result was ironically that the English

team got the gold medal and the Italian team got the bronze medal. Moreover, Monti made his own team's mechanic repair the axle on the sled of the Canadian team, when the axle of sled of the Canadian team was broken in the next game" [15]. After that, Monti said in the press that "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt. He won because he had the fastest run" [16]. And IOC gave the Pierre de Coubertin Medal to Monti who embodied and pursued true sportsmanship. Sometimes we can see that this kind of phenomenon to help our own opponent is presented in the sports world.

At Los Angeles in 1932, Judy Guinness was initially declared the winner of the final duel. She herself stated that the judge had wrongly twice in her favor, and that she had thus lost the bout against the Austrian Ellen Preis. The jury listened to her allegations and awarded the Gold Medal to Ellen Preis [17].

Another example is the female Fencing game. Although Guinness got a gold medal at first, she became a silver medalist by confessing being struck. Given two examples in the perspective of respecting one's opponent, it is considered that the acts of Monti and Guinness show are acts based on the concept of "a mutual quest for excellence" by Simon, which is be widely known. Simon said that "competition in sport conceived along lines of a mutual quest for excellence is a paradigm case of an activity in which the participants treat each other as equal. The good competitor does not see the opponent merely as an obstacle to be overcome but as a person whose activity calls for an appropriate response" [18]. If there cases were not based on a mutual quest for excellence, Monti doesn't need to lend his own sled's bolt, and Guinness doesn't need to confess being struck intentionally. However, they considered that each opponent was not a person to overcome, but an equal person like themselves based on a mutual quest for excellence.

Then, what is respect for oneself? I will raise two examples. On the last day of the marathon of the Athens Olympics in the 2004, Brazil's Vanderlei Rima was first place until the point of 37km as one of the heavy favorites. But "suddenly one of the spectators jumped out of the crowd, grabbed Lima and pushed him off the track" [19]. For this reason, Rima couldn't move for ten second, and lost their pace. Nevertheless, Rima got a bronze medal, and his face was bright when crossing the goal line. He said in interview following the race that "the color of a medal is not important. I kept my promise to get a medal and practiced great Olympic spirit. I forgive the crowd who pushed me" [20]. IOC awarded Pierre de Coubertin Medal to Rima who had run without giving up the race. In addition to that, there is one who showed the attitude of not giving up. He is Abebe. He won the marathon twice in a row with bare feet. But unfortunately, he became paralyzed from the waist down due to a traffic accident. And his famous saying is important in the development of this study. "I don't have legs to run anymore, but I have two arms...I always think about overcoming my own pain rather than competing against other and winning. It led to victory when I ran to the end without losing pain and suffering" [21].

Given two examples in the perspective of respecting oneself, it is considered that Rima and Abebe experienced an unfortunate accident; Rima had difficulty to finish the race, Abebe can't run anymore, but, they never gave up during the middle of the race and fought until end in order to do one's best. It suggested that these kind of attitudes can't be presented without respect for

oneself. And in the sports world there is a saying that the sports are not over until it is over. The moment you decide that it's over, the infinite possibilities are gone. But as long as we believe and strive for that possibility, it becomes infinite. Therefore, in this respect, it suggests that not respecting oneself is giving up their own infinite possibilities before it is over.

The last purpose of this paper, why is the winning of the third example without informal fair play not truly winning, but losing based on the competition against oneself? This question should be considered based on the subject who is related to the two meanings mentioned above. As I mentioned earlier, competing against oneself is an internal phenomenon that the subject has to undergo in order to become the new subject. Howe said that "as long as we continue to live and act and desire and make sense to understand one self and other, this internal phenomenon never end" [22]. In other words, even if the subject becomes a new subject by choosing desires, motivations, projects one had, the subject wants to be a new subject based on other desires, motivations, projects. These repetitive processes to be a new subject bring about grounds of self-negation to the subject based on the two meanings, when a subject tries to look for a new subject which didn't come into existence. Given the two meanings, we will face a moment whether to treat an opponent as an obstacle or not and to give up the game or do our own best as much as possible. In here, we can reasonably suppose two subjects. These are the subjects who pursue a mutual quest for excellence or not, and the subject who did their best as much as possible or the subject who gave up the game. However, the former wasn't concerned about the latter though, the latter yearned for the former, felt regret, and denied representing their self. It is considered that this is because the subject will find oneself unable to do so as a result although the subject can do their best as much as possible and treat the opponent as an equal person.

### 5. Conclusion

As a citation of "The Declaration on Sport", states there can be no true sport without the idea of fair play. Fair play requires strict adherence to rules not only in the mind, but in the spirit. And without fair play, a sporting contest can become a humiliating and degrading experience. What if winning and losing exists regardless of informal fair play, it will be likely to lead to potential danger that athletes don't care about informal fair play when pursuing winning, that we can't find morality and ethics in the world of sports. On this issue, this paper tried to identify doubtful winnings stated at the beginning and reviewed until now. In consequence, this paper argued the relation between winning, losing and informal fair play, suggested the possibility of the existence that there is not only losing based on the result and competition against others and the structure of the game, but losing based on self-negation, which is made by competing against oneself.

From this view, it is strongly suggested that most desirable losing we have to pursue is the positive losing that one is satisfied without self-negation. In other words, undesirable losing is the negative losing, one is not satisfied with based on self-negation. Lastly, this conclusion imposes significance on each of those who participate in sports activity where in reality winning at all costs prevails. And in advance, I look forward to not only emphasize the results by competition with others, but

also gradual change of perception on losing by competing against oneself in the setting of physical education, and general education.

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