

-- CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS COMUNITARIOS -- FCS -- UCLV --



11-14 MARZO. 2015  
XII TALLER INTERNACIONAL

# COMUNIDADES 2015

HISTORIA Y DESARROLLO  
«Por la perspectiva comunitaria de la equidad»

## MEMORIAS DEL EVENTO

San Juan de los Remedios  
500 Aniversario



ISBN: 978-959-312-047-0



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UNIVERSIDAD CENTRAL "MARTA ABREU" DE LAS VILLAS  
Centro de Estudios Comunitarios. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales



**Title: Sport's Manifestation of Equity across Multiple Demographics**

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**Sport's Manifestation of Equity across Multiple Demographics**

The challenges of manifesting equity across community are many. Sport, ranging from competitive to recreational is one medium that can foster and support equity across the myriad differences between people. Whether the differences are chosen or unchosen, sport can help meld those differences in the interest of the common goal of winning or joining together in the enjoyable activity referred to as sport. Sport can be considered a successful contributor to supporting healthy community if its presence improves community happiness and diminishes community unhappiness.

**Equity and Competitive Sport through Meritocracy**

Despite differences across multiple demographics such as but not necessarily limited to race, religion, political preferences, sex, and age, sport is generally accepting of persons with exceptional sporting talents. It was the sport of baseball that was pointed out by American political journalist George Will as the only true meritocracy remaining in American society. Meritocracy is defined as: "a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement" (meritocracy, n.d.). Such is the case in competitive sport: the most

talented are chosen to be part of “the” team and the top talented players on the team are designated as those who will “start” and/or play the most minutes during a contest.

If in fact, talent-based meritocracy is the prevailing factor determining one’s standing relative to sport. Beyond talent driven achievement among players, other differences such as race, religion, and age are irrelevant to determining one’s standing on the “team.” Competitive sport, in other words, is blind to the differences among people beyond talent-based achievement, which provides a platform of opportunity to all, regardless of differences.

It is competitive sport’s meritocratic basis that supports equal opportunities for all. Supportive of social inclusion, competitive sport is defined by victorious outcomes of contests, which are achieved by assembling players who have earned roster spots based on their talent. Given that a primary goal of sport teams is to win competitive contests, meritocracy becomes a point of emphasis in terms of selecting team members. This meritocratic approach, although often promoted as leadership’s commitment to fairness for all, really is a natural product of competition based sport, as it is the most skilled performers who will provide the highest chance for team victory. Talent comes in all shapes, sizes, and forms. With meritocracy comes open and equitable opportunities for all, regardless of countless human differences.

### **Equity regardless of Revenue’s Influence**

Unfortunately, though, in many facets of life, beyond competitive sport, politics it seems, determines not only social standing but also one’s perceived worth. Even in competitive sport, in the U.S. less than a century ago, persons of minority races were informally banned from participating in professional sport because of the pressures from those in control. It, however, was not legislation that made for the integration of persons of all races but rather the revenue generated from placing the most skilled players on teams, irrespective of race. Thus, it is also the influence of revenue that is generated from winning that helps drive the meritocratic grounding that paves the way for equity, regardless of differences among those interested in competing. Therefore, competitive sport’s apparent natural affinity for equity regardless of differences among those interested in participating could, in actuality, be more a function of revenue based gains from winning, reaped by administrators controlling the team. Nevertheless, competitive sport contains an equity component that is present in terms of team member selection and amount

of playing time, regardless of the reason behind it. Competitive sport, then is and should be encouraged, to help blend people who are different and thus, help bond a community.

### **Equity through Legislation**

One should not be naïve, though, in thinking that competitive sport in and of itself, can assure fairness for all, regardless of differences between people. Sometimes legislation is required to support the promotion of equity. Such was the case in 1972 when in the U.S., Title IX as part of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 included legislation that called for gender equity to be incorporated into the administration of sport. Title IX legislation was promulgated to reduce what many have referred to as the marginalization of women through non-inclusive practices including restrictive community attitudes. Although challenges do accompany attempts to legislate equity within community, equity legislation is generally a step toward reducing collective community satisfaction.

### **Merit Based Sport Participation Compared to Employment**

Sport organizations are also driven by a meritocratic achievement, although to a lesser degree than players who earn roster spots and playing time on teams. If equity is the basis for selecting employees of sport organizations, those employees should be selected based on the fact that their talent for the given position is the highest when compared to others competing for the same position. However, oftentimes, positions of employment in sport organizations are such that minimal competency standards can be met by several applicants and to achieve beyond minimal competencies does not significantly increase organizational outcomes. One could effectively argue that many general employment positions in sport organizations, e.g., support staff, require a minimum skill set and to excel beyond that minimum skill set does not directly increase organizational outcomes. Therefore, talent-based equity may be less likely to be realized when multiple applicants meet minimal standards necessary to perform a job effectively, which makes discrimination more likely to enter into the process. However, throughout the team related aspects of sport organizations, as discussed previously, merit-based equity is likely to be realized, which helps strengthen community.

### **Sport and a Sense of Value in Community**

Sport can instill a sense of value in members of a community. When members of a community are provided an equal opportunity to compete for not only positions on the team as players, but also as employees or volunteers affiliated with the organization or event, they feel a sense of value. Incorporating fairness into the management function of sport teams from the selection of players to hiring employees, instills a sense of value to those directly involved with the team that extends through to those members of the community who are observing the process from afar. An emphasis on equality and fairness across diverse peoples within sport, helps support a broader community based focus on equity if other sectors within the community outside of sport do the same.

### **Differences between People**

Sport alone does not make for an equitable community, it can, however, offer and reinforce areas necessary to build and sustain community such as respecting and appreciating differences between people. Understanding that differences between people is and will always be present is a necessary first step toward establishing and supporting an equitable community. People are born different and remain different as they grow into adulthood. Differences between people can be vast and areas of differences may be placed on a continuum, where choice and non-choice are at opposite ends of the continuum.

The placement of differences between people on a continuum is determined by the extent to which a difference is choice or non-choice related. Two non-choice differences between people are race and sex. Those of a particular race have no say in the matter; and, sex reassignment therapy aside, people have no choice in whether they are a male or female. Age is another demographic that people do not choose and cannot change, even though it happens to be in a state of perpetual change until a person ceases to exist on earth. Less clear in terms of choice are areas such as religion and political perspectives. Although persons are often born into a particular religion or political affiliation, as an adult they may recognize different options and change; although, in some cases exercising one's choice to change can be extremely difficult. More clearly on the "choice" end of the continuum are areas of likes and dislikes that can be seemingly harmless but nevertheless do constitute differences between people. Preferences in areas of entertainment, types of food, and recreational activities may not be exclusively choice related but are much more choice related than the aforementioned areas.

Whether or not differences are by choice or non-choice, they do exist between people. Non-choice based differences between people may be of particular concern when considering community development in a manner that all members can live together under a modest degree of overall satisfaction. Given that non-choice differences cannot be changed, they must be accommodated for in ways that allow for ample degrees of satisfaction across persons who are, for example, of a different sex, race, and age, as those areas are unable to be changed. Sport, competitive and non-competitive, can help manifest equity across the many aforementioned demographics.

### **Recreational Sport and the Manifestation of Equity**

Less-competitive sport such as recreational sport can also help manifest equity through participation opportunities. Recreational sport, because of its less than fully competitive nature, generally offers opportunities for all, requiring only minimal skill level, because the end goal is not to win at all costs. Given that the emphasis of recreational sport is more participation oriented than talent oriented, it is the responsibility of leadership to ensure all interested participants are afforded fair opportunities to participate. Recreational sport, as a social instrument that contributes to society (Hurd & Anderson, 2010), offers participation opportunities across multiple demographics. Not exclusively focused on winning, recreational sport is a socially acceptable endeavor that, to be equitable, must be offered to all. It is generally refreshing, relaxing, and fun and usually takes place during a person's free time. Socially acceptable, recreational sport can help meld the many differences among people forming a community.

### **Shared Experiences Supporting Communal Solidarity**

Equity calls for recreational sport to be offered to all members of society so that each member can gain the enjoyable benefits from it. Individual experiences related to recreational sport become shared experiences among the participants. The result is a common shared experience among each participant, forming a common bond that can extend beyond the sporting activity into social and professional activities, creating a communal solidarity. Competitive interscholastic sport and sport not supported by educational establishments such as youth, club, and recreational sport also contribute to community solidarity. Given the competitive focus, the meritocratic equity component remains and thus provides an inclusiveness that accepts those

whose talents are most likely to support winning. It should be reiterated, however, that sport in and of itself is not enough to create a strong prospering community but is a complement to such.

### **Equity Assessment of Community through Utilitarianism**

The goal for equity achievement within a community should be to maximize overall happiness among members of the community. Absolute happiness for *all* is unrealistic and seeking to achieve it could decrease the chances of achieving the *most* possible happiness across the community. Presumably, though, satisfactory levels of equity within a community support satisfactory levels of happiness across a community. If members of a community perceive that members are not all treated equitably or provided with equal opportunities, the community members will eventually become unhappy with their place in the community.

A cursory review of utilitarian moral theory (Bentham, 1789/1961; Mill, 1863/1957) helps provide guidance related to the manner in which sport can support collective community happiness and in turn stability. John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism is grounded in his greatest happiness principle: "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (p. 36). Mill also spoke of the necessity of a good conscience when overseeing the utilitarian approach to moral good. To that end, if overall community happiness is to be achieved through sport, or otherwise, the community leader must be of a good conscience.

Community Leadership should assume a holistic approach to healthy community building and sustenance, supported through competitive sports teams that offer a fair chance to all, based on requisite skills that support peak team performance. When developing and sustaining communities, the wants and needs of its members should be considered. Few, will argue against happiness as a universal "want"; therefore, community leadership must focus on maximizing happiness as a goal. Equity, once again, becomes a central focus, because equity across differences supports happiness across differences.

### **Sport as a Common Cause within Community**

History of sport in the United States supports the notion that communities are brought together over the local identity associated with a community based sports team. Anecdotal

evidence suggests that success or failure of the sports team may not be the most important factor in uniting communities. The horrid performance of the 1969 New York Mets Major League Baseball team demonstrates the fact that even a poor performing team can bring a city together. The 1969 Mets were known as one of the poorest performing teams in the league and became a laughing stock in New York City. Members of the New York City community, however, laughed together when the Mets went on a torrid losing streak that was filled with performance debacle after performance debacle. An immediate conversation piece even among community members who did not know one another, the 1969 Mets and community based sports teams in general bring community members together.

College sports in the United States also helps solidify communities in which the team is based. Affiliated with their respective college or university, college sports teams represent not only the local community but also the university community. On game days, residents from within the community proudly schedule their day around their university's sporting event. In the City of Columbus located in the state of Ohio, the major university is The Ohio State University. For several decades The Ohio State University football team (American Football) has provided college students and members of the community of Columbus a center for bonding. Nationally, Columbus is known as the home of The Ohio State University Buckeye's football team. During the football season, members of the community come together regardless of the vast differences among community members. Wearing Ohio State Buckeye attire (the nickname of the team is the Buckeyes) immediately blends an outsider into the community through the common bond of being a Buckeye. Of course, sustaining community solidarity goes beyond sport teams but a sport team can certainly support a commonality necessary for community bonding.

A form of "belonging" for all who are interested is provided by sport, regardless of the type of sport and whether or not it is focused on winning. For recreational sports that focus less on winning and more on participation, interested persons are afforded equitable opportunities to participate. Multiple options allow a larger degree of "belonging" and supportive of social inclusion regardless of differences between persons.

### **Sport, Equity and Human Dignity as Part of Community**



A collective sense of feeling human within a community, supports overall satisfaction and helps dismiss dissatisfaction that comes from lack of opportunity for inclusion or overt exclusion. To not be included is to not feel human, which creates ill feelings that can spread throughout a community. The social exclusion of persons of particular demographics will intensify the unhappy sentiments among the group experiencing the brunt of the exclusionary inequity. Feeling “human” as a member of a community is supported through equitable social inclusion across community members, which can take place through sporting opportunities within the community. Being afforded the opportunity and joining a sports team provides a belonging, acceptance, and recognition that might best represent what Freiler (2008) refers to as human dignity. Here again, sport plays an important role in supporting community.

### Summary

As stated previously, sport can only serve as a mechanism to manifest equity across the community; in-and-of-itself sport will not bring about unconditional community harmony. Sport is just one avenue within community that, if provided with equity as a focus, will help reinforce and reproduce equity across the community, at large. The goal, always, is to improve community, measured by the overall happiness of its members. Sport, when under conscientious leadership, who has the best interest of the community as the priority, is an effective contributor to healthy communities.

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