

## GAMESMANSHIP TRAITS MANIFESTED BY UNIVERSITY ATHLETES IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Modern day athletes have devised many questionable tactics of winning games which are although ethically wrong but are outside the ambits of game rules. These tactics are technically termed gamesmanship. This study focused on determining the level of gamesmanship manifested by university athletes in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed to get the true state of gamesmanship in Nigerian universities. The population consisted of four thousand and two active athletes out of which four hundred and sixteen were randomly sampled through balloting technique. A self-designed questionnaire which had four point scales was subjected to factor analysis to determine its content and construct validity. The Crombach alpha statistics was used to determine the reliability index of the instrument. A reliability index with coefficient alpha of 0.61 ( $p < 0.05$ ) was adjudged reliable for the study. The item means and t-test statistics were employed in the analysis of data collected. The results show a high manifestation of gamesmanship by all athletes. There are significant differences between male and female, and between contact and non-contact sport athletes. It is concluded that the high manifestation demands an urgent and serious attention from sport administrators and coaches to correct gamesmanship tactics in sport.*

**Keywords:** Gamesmanship, manifestation, university athletes.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports provide a social environment to acquire personal social values and behaviour contributing to good character and good citizenship. Sport subjects its participants to the deliberate and intentional activity of cultivating moral judgment and fair play through compliance with the rules of the game. One of the goals of this process is for individuals to build sports-manlike behaviour. Moral

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values, which are cultivated through sportsmanship, include honesty, fairness, fair play, justice and responsibility (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2002). Sport ethicists are becoming more concerned about the nature of character manifested by athletes during play, Dodge and Robertson (2004) observed that ethical behaviour of sports participants concerning gamesmanship has become a topic that has elicited much attention in many countries the world over. Sports administrators and sports governing bodies nationally and internationally are concerned about ethical issues bordering on athletes' tactics and maneuvers employed in winning games. They use tactics not covered by the rules and other technical maneuvers to win games. Such activities are popularly called gamesmanship in sport.

The term gamesmanship was first used in the sporting world of tennis. The user (Potter, 1947) perceived that a lesser skilled opponent was able to defeat a more skilled player by applying some unhealthy strategies such as constant distraction, complaining about lines, delaying service, tying up their laces, inciting the crowd, making strange body movements and many other ungentlemanly dupable acts. These actions were intended to break the flow and concentration of the more skillful and focused opponent without actually resorting to cheating or breaking the rules. According to Potter (1947), the inspiration for gamesmanship surfaced during doubles tennis match in which he and his partner were being trounced by a couple of cocky undergraduates. After one crucial exchange, his partner stepped up to the net and inquired of their opponents whether the ball was in or out. The answer had a disarming effect that Potter concluded that the etiquette or sportsmanship of young university players was questionable. It was this masterful use of understatement that resulted in the use of the term Gamesmanship.

Gamesmanship is defined as the art or practice of using tactical maneuvers to further one's aim or better one's position. In sports or game, it involves aggressive, often dubious tactics such as psychological intimidation or disruption of concentration, to gain an advantage over one's opponent (Josephson, 2004). Gamesmanship is further defined as the use of dubious (although not technically illegal) methods to win a game often in a sport. Such tactics are common in sports such as golf, football, soccer, hockey, basketball and athletics. Gamesmanship as the intention to compete beyond the limit allowed by the rules, if that is achievable without penalty. Jones and Pooley (1982) see gamesmanship as cheating in disguise. They opine that gamesmanship was synonymous with cheating. Cheating in sports is a departure from the rules and norms of the game in question. Eitzen and Sage (1998) defined cheating as "a violation of the rules to gain an unfair advantage on an opponent". These definitions, though simplistic, illustrated the win-at-all-Cost ethics in sports. Thus, gamesmanship in this study is the art or practice of winning games by questionable and dubious means

without breaking the rules but violating their spirit. The gamesmanship attitude in sport include encouraging and sanctioning clever and effective ways of rule bending, evading and breaking the rules when it provides a competitive advantage, is part of the game in question (Jones & Pooley, 1982). Thus, gamesmanship foster negative character values that need to be corrected if sport is to be structured to promote good character.

It means gamesmanship may not be technically wrong but ethically destroys the game (i.e. violates the spirit of the rules). If accepted, in sport, it means that ethics should be ruled out of sports. Ethics is the sub-discipline of philosophy that is concerned with issues of right and wrong. An important aspect of ethics in sport is dealing with ethical dilemmas - situations where the course of action is unclear or where reasonable people cannot agree on what ought to be done or not done. Challenging situations that present themselves in the course of athletic contests in which there is not one right answer but instead a degree of “rightness” in both sides of the issues. One of the factors that have constrained attention being paid to gamesmanship in sport is the lack of agreement by ethicists on conceptual issues. Shogan (1988) posited that sport was not structured to monitor ethical behaviour, but only legal behaviour that relates to adherence to rules. Since breaking the rules in cases such as a “good foul” considered being game strategy, doing so is not necessarily considered to be an issue of ethics. Sport officials can only act on rule infractions, not whether the intention behind the gamesmanship was ethical or not.

Gamesmanship are actions in sports that shields unethical character manifestations which are not seen to be technically wrong but destroys the spirit of the game. Gamesmanship acts manifest themselves in many forms. It occurs when a player attempts to profit from an unfair advantage, or when he disguises an unjust act done on purpose; when he commits any unsporting act contrary to “the spirit of the game”, or when he resorts to psychological intimidation against his opponent. Players have become very adept at psyching up opponents by holding, pulling their shirts, shoving them, taunting, tripping them while the referee is otherwise occupied. Goalkeepers play the trick of raising a boot and one knee high when rushing out and jumping up to catch the ball. These actions are often practiced among university athletes in the Niger Delta during inter faculty games and Nigerian University games preliminary sport competitions.

Potter (1947) identified many gamesmanship techniques. Breaking the flow of the opponents’ play is a common technique applied by players. It consists of naïve devices such as tying up a shoelace in a prolonged manner after the opponent had served two or three aces in tennis. It also includes the extended nose blow with subsequent mopping up not only of the nose and surrounding surfaces but imaginary sweats from the forehead and neck. In the game of soccer, a player

may purposefully delay the start of the game by intentionally standing over the ball to prevent the opposition taking a free kick. Players often adopt these tactics by exploring every opportunity to unfairly waste (or gain) time for their team. One typical example of delaying to break-flow is seen weekly in Italian soccer. Players deliberately converge towards the area of a free kick, especially if it is near their penalty area. Players from both sides suddenly surround the referee. Such tactics is done on purpose. It gains time for their goalkeeper and defenders to regroup and position themselves to their advantage.

Gamesmanship theory justifies the tactics of pretending one was fouled or injured even when the player knows he/she was not. These tactics includes intentionally standing in your opponent's line of sight and then suddenly moving when you realize you are in the wrong place, causing your opponent to over think and intentional mistakes. Players take every possible opportunity to undermine the authority of the referee during games. These according to Josephson (2004) are intentionally misleading behaviours that precipitate engagement in chaotic bidding. They are designed to gain unfair advantage over opponents resulting in gamesmanship in sports. The information emanating from the study on gamesmanship manifested by university athletes in terms of sport-type and gender will enable coaches, and other sport administrators to identify the forms of gamesmanship displayed by athletes and may design strategies that will address them; as well as identify and address gamesmanship tendencies within each sport culture with related rules and sanctions.

The purpose of this study is to determine the status of gamesmanship of University athletes' in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Specifically, the study will determine the level of gamesmanship exhibited by gender and by sport type among University athletes in the Niger Delta.

## **2. METHODS AND MATERIALS**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The descriptive survey design was employed in the study of gamesmanship manifested by university athletes in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It involves the collecting of data in the natural setting in order to answer research questions and test hypothesis concerning the current status of the subject of the study.

### **2.2 Participants**

The population consisted of four thousand two hundred and six (4206) university athletes from the Niger Delta area who participate in Nigerian university games.

The sample consisted of four hundred and sixteen (416) university athletes in Niger Delta. The athletes were sampled through simple random sampling using the balloting technique. Athletes were gathered during their training session and the balloting exercise took place. Trained assistants visited the athletes during training sessions in their various universities.

### 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

A questionnaire titled university athletes gamesmanship questionnaire was constructed and validated for the study. The 4-point rating scale was used in scoring the items with options of strongly agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Statements that connote high gamesmanship are weighted 4,3,2,1 while statements that connote low gamesmanship were reversed 1,2,3,4. The content and construct validity of the instrument were estimated using factor analysis. The varimax with Kaiser normalization methods principal components analysis (PCA) and the extraction method were used in extracting the content and construct validity. The items on gamesmanship questionnaire had a rotated component matrix ranging from 0.50 to 0.86 and rotated sum of square loading of 67.37% an indication of fairly high content validity. The Crombach alpha was used to determine the reliability index of the instrument. A reliability index with coefficient alpha of 0.61 ( $p < 0.05$ ) was adjudged reliable for the study. The item means and t-test statistics were employed in the analysis of data collected.

## 3. RESULTS

**Table 1: Level of gamesmanship manifested by contact and non-contact sport participants**

S.No.	Items	Sport Types					
		Contact N=198			Non- Contact N=216		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Players deliberately distract opponents in sports to make them loose focus.	2.69	.98	H	2.75	1.0	H
2	Players deliberately waste time after referees decision to gain advantage.	2.65	.82	H	2.70	.83	H
3	Players intentionally inflict injury on opponents	2.64	.88	H	2.79	1.61	H
4	Players use obscene gestures to opponents when they are angry	2.64	.82	H	2.63	.82	H
5	Players challenge the authority of	2.64	.96	H	2.85	1.61	H

	referees to intimidate them.								
6	Athletes always cause obstruction to slow down opponents speed.	2.53	.85	H		2.73	.84	H	
7	Players deceitfully insult opponents to put them off	2.73	.97	H		2.93	1.30	H	
	Grand mean	2.71	0.50						

Criterion mean  $\bar{x} = 2.50$ , H=High gamesmanship ( $\bar{x} > 2.50$ ) L=Low gamesmanship ( $\bar{x} < 2.50$ ).

Generally, since all the mean scores of contact and non-contact sport athletes are above the criterion mean of 2.50, it indicates a high manifestation of gamesmanship among them ( $2.71 \pm 0.50$ ).

**Table 2: t-test comparison of level of gamesmanship manifested by contact and non-contact sport participants**

Source	Sport type	N	Mean	t-value	df	Critical t	p	Decision
<i>Gamesmanship</i>	Contact	198	19.75	-0.96	414	1.96	0.34	N.S
	Non-contact	218	20.06					

$p > 0.05$  Level of Significance, NS= not significant.

Table 2 above shows that the  $t$ -value is -0.96 while the critical value is 1.96. Since the calculated  $t$ -value is lesser than the critical  $t$ -value the difference is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is accepted. It implies that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of gamesmanship manifested by contact and non-contact sport participants in the Niger Delta

**Table 3: Level of Gamesmanship manifested by Gender of University Athletes**

S. No.	Items	Gender					
		Male N=212			Female N=204		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Players deliberately distract opponents to make lose focus in sport	2.96	.84	H	2.47	.07	H
2	Players deliberately waste time after referees decision to gain advantage	2.79	.81	H	2.55	.83	H
3	Players intentionally inflict injury on opponents	2.73	.81	H	2.71	.73	H
4	Players use obscene gestures to opponents when they are angry	2.74	.72	H	2.53	.90	H
5	Players challenge the authority of referees to intimidate them.	2.91	.85	H	2.59	.69	H
6	Athletes deceitfully obstruct opponents to	2.78	.76	H	2.49	.91	H

slow down their speed in sport.

7	Players deceitfully insult opponents to put them off	3.08	1.20	H	2.59	.05	H
	Grand mean	2.71	0.50				

Criterion  $\bar{x} = 2.50$ , H = High gamesmanship ( $\bar{x} < 2.50$ ), Low gamesmanship ( $\bar{x} > 2.50$ )

As shown in table 3 above, All the mean scores presented on the above table are higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 implying a high manifestation of gamesmanship by male and female university athletes in the Niger Delta ( $2.71 \pm 0.50$ ).

**Table 4: t-test comparison of gamesmanship manifested by gender of university athletes**

Source	Gender	N	Mean	t-values	df	Critical t	Sig. p
Gamesmanship	Male	212	13.55	3.023	414	1.96	0.03
	Female	204	12.92				

$p > 0.05$  Level of significance, S= Significant.

As shown in the above table, the  $t$ -value (3.023) is higher than the critical  $t$  (1.96) which indicates a significant difference. The significant  $p$  is 0.03 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. The hypothesis is rejected. The result implies that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of gamesmanship manifested by gender of university athletes in the Niger Delta. On comparing the summative mean, female athletes (12.92) manifest higher gamesmanship than males (13.55).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Contact and non-contact sport participant's manifests high gamesmanship. Athletes accepted that both contact and non-contact sport participant engage in activities such as players deliberately distracting opponents in sport to gain advantage. Similarly, players accepted that they waste time after the referee's verdict, inflicting injury on opponents, using obscene gesture on opponents and deceitfully insulting opponents to disorganize emotionally.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of contact and non-contact sport participants in level of gamesmanship manifested by university athletes. Beller and Stoll, (1992) research result, differ from the result of the present study. They found that contact sport athletes manifested higher gamesmanship than non-contact sport participants. Tsai and Fung (2005) found that non-contact sport athletes have higher regard for game rules than contact sports participants. Research findings seem to agree that contact sport athletes

have greater potential of raising questionable issues of gamesmanship in sport (Kavussanu & Robertson, 2001). It appears that contact and non-contact sport participants are operating at the same level of gamesmanship in the Niger Delta

Male and female university athletes manifested high level gamesmanship. The finding is similar to the result of Sylva (1983) in which rule violating character was seen as being legitimate among males and females sport participants. There is significant difference in the mean scores of gamesmanship manifested by gender of university athletes. Female manifested higher gamesmanship than males. The result is consistent with the report of Rudd and Stoll (2004); Beller and Stoll (1995) in which there was a significant difference between male and female. However, in their research females displayed a higher moral maturity as males displayed higher gamesmanship. Similarly, Tsai and Fung (2005) found a significant difference between male and female but in their case males manifested a higher tendency of winning through questionable skills in sport. The reason for women manifesting higher gamesmanship could be attributed to the fact that female athletes are becoming more morally calloused, lack of respect, honour, and dignity towards fellow competitors, rules and spirit of the rules (Stoll & Beller, 1997).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

There is high manifestation of gamesmanship among university athletes in the Niger Delta. This is warning signal to coaches and sport administrators who explore the use of tactics which are not technically wrong but unethical because they violate the spirit of the game.

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