

Do Sports Build or Reveal Character?— An Exploratory Study at One Service Academy

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Abstract

Whether participating in sports builds character and if character can be measured continues to be a debated, though important, topic. Almost daily we read or hear about athletes displaying poor character. Most research shows that as the level of sport competition increases, the level of character decreases. However, participating in sports, at any level, can and should build positive character.

An insightful three-part exchange between Gough, Stoll, and Holowchak, discussed the merits and feasibility of measuring character through sport. Gough and Holowchak argued that the construct of “character” is too elusive and that empirical attempts to measure it lack validity. Stoll disagreed with Gough and Holowchak and developed an instrument that measures character in sport. We agree with Stoll for two reasons:

1. *The problem of character in sport is too big to be ignored.*
2. *Attempts to measure character contribute to efforts to address the character in sport problem.*

These two reasons resulted in a research effort to develop a valid and reliable instrument to measure the character of individuals participating in sport. The research resulted in the validation of a user friendly, less time consuming, psychometrically sound instrument that measures character in a sport setting.

The missions at the service academies in the United States (United States Air Force Academy; United States Coast Guard Academy; United

States Military Academy; and United States Naval Academy) state that these institutions educate and prepare junior officers who will become leaders of character. For example, the vision of the Air Force Academy is to be “the Air Force’s premier institution for developing leaders of character” (U.S. Air Force Academy, 2007). The U.S. Military Academy’s vision is to be the “nation’s premier leader development institution” (U.S. Military Academy, 1999).

To achieve these lofty aspirations, leaders and faculties of these institutions emphasize character development at the forefront of all learning experiences of students. Therefore, the officers and civilian faculty are expected to teach, discuss, model, and reinforce core values, like integrity, loyalty, and respect, as integral to the character development experiences of their students.

The importance of character [“i.e., those moral qualities that constitute the nature of a leader and shape his or her decisions and actions” (USMA Circular 101-1, p. 15)], is a central and an essential aspect of what these institutions advocate and seek to build. It could be argued that this emphasis on graduating men and women of character separates the service in academies from other institutions of higher education. Other university administrators state that their institution’s graduates have learning experiences that positively influence character development; the service academies emphasize character development throughout all aspects of the preparation of future officers.

To emphasize this further, the United States Military Academy seeks to commission officers who are “exceptionally effective leaders who

embody the highest standards of moral-ethical behavior. Officers that not only do things right, they do the right things” (USMA Circular 1-101, p. 17). This point was reinforced by Arthur J. Schwartz, Director of Character Development Programs at the John Templeton Foundation, when he stated, “The U.S. Military Academy’s strong commitment to character development and the strength of its program make it a model for colleges and universities nationwide” (U. S. Military Academy, 1999).

While this character development mission is stated at each of the service academies, it is less clear the degree to which it is achieved, even though all programs are expected to contribute. One of these programs deals with the physical development of future officers, some of which occurs through sports. It is not known whether sports build character, as claimed at most competitive levels although not universally accepted as occurring, or whether sports at the service academies simply reveal the character of the participants. In order to explore whether sports at the service academies contribute to character development, this exploratory study examined two research questions. One, what are the existing levels of character of athletes at one service academy? Two, does the character of athletes differ by sport, competitive level, amount of contact of the sport, year in college, or gender?

Background about the Service Academies and their Sports Programs

The service academies provide four inter-related programs—academic, military, physical, and moral-ethical—all of which are expected to contribute to developing leaders of character. While the moral-ethical development of graduates is a major part of students’ four-year experiences, it is not a stand-alone program. Rather, moral-ethical development is an essential component of the other three programs and interwoven into every aspect of students’ education. Classroom instruction, group projects, interactions with officers, civilian faculty, and staff, military training, physical development, athletics, and honor codes

uniquely contribute to the moral/ethical culture and the development of leaders of character.

For decades, the academies have claimed that athletics play a major role in developing many of the moral-ethical attributes essential for military service. So, every student attending the service academies is expected to be an athlete and required to participate in competitive sports at the intramural, club, or varsity level. It is believed that through participation in sports, future officers will encounter conditions, challenges, and emotions similar to those they may face in combat situations (Anderson, 1988). Mental, emotional, and physical stress, the fluidity and uncertainty of situations, and the necessity to work as members of teams are some of the similarities between athletic competitions and combat. This commitment to and advocacy for athletics was summarized by General Douglas MacArthur (2006) when he stated, “Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds, upon other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory.” Another West Point graduate and current collegiate basketball coach agrees,

Athletics gives you an opportunity to: one, encounter uncertainty. It gives you an opportunity to encounter competition, a bad call, a bad break, a lucky break. It gives you a chance to experience life in a competitive world and then figure out how you are going to win, while all that is happening. You can’t go back to your room and research it. You can’t do all those things that you can do in academics.... for that period of time that you are competing, you have to instantaneously react, be instinctive, who are you, what character do you have, do you do it with honor, do you do it with integrity, do you do it together? Do you win? Do you lose? How do you react?” (Krzyzewski, 2007)

The character development programs at the service academies are developmental. So, seniors are held to higher standards than are freshman.

Besides having formal classroom instruction and seminars using ethical dilemmas, the service academies use real world vignettes and experiences to encourage students to discuss and observe how they will respond in given situations. Reflective and theoretical discussions that relate directly to each student's experiences in responding to ethical dilemmas are the primary means of developing moral judgment.

Theoretical Construct

The construct of character is based on principles, which are universal rules of conduct. Thus, an athlete's behavior in a sporting context can be subjectively viewed as right or wrong. This is in sharp contrast to the relativist point of view that right is circumstantial or varies depending on the situation. Although there will always be debate about the characteristics of a person of character, some traits are universal. In the 1996 State of the World Forum at the Institute for Global Ethics, involving over 250 participants representing 40 countries and more than 50 different religions, respondents to a survey identified that truth, compassion, responsibility, freedom, and reverence for life were considered the "most important values in daily life" (Marrella, 2001, p. 11). Thus, a person of character has some universal meaning.

At each of the service academies, character development is central. The military and civilian faculties who teach in the educational programs and lead the extracurricular experiences of students keep character development interwoven throughout the 47-month programs. The character of students can be developed through interactions with principled faculty and other officers who serve as role models for moral values.

It is important when working with a construct as broad as character to limit and narrow its scope. This study limits the construct of character to behaviors that show respect and integrity. A person of character acts based on moral values that show respect and integrity in a sport setting (or a lack of character if the behaviors are disres-

pectful or lack integrity). That is, each person's character is revealed through behaviors, as they are responsible for the consequences that result from good and bad behaviors (Matthews, 2007). So, if the behavior of a student at one of the service academies does not reflect values like respect and honesty, then the student lacks character. Each student's attitude and beliefs are important, but his or her actions are most important.

The character of each young adult arriving at the services academies has already begun to be shaped through their learning opportunities and developmental experiences. Each student's character is then influenced by experiences within the contextual factors of an academy, the curriculum, and extracurricular activities. By design, a major part of that development occurs on athletic playing fields during mandatory competitive sports.

Review of Literature

Piaget, according to Sapp (1986), suggested a structural and cognitive developmental approach (constructivism) to moral development and equated morality with the idea of justice and claimed that an orientation towards justice was the way individuals attempted to morally reason. Piaget defined morality as rule-governed behavior (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995). Piaget's research concluded that individuals go through a step-by-step, subconscious, cognitive progression in their moral development. They pass through different hierarchical stages of moral reasoning or development, each building on previous knowledge and experiences (Lifton, 1991).

Kohlberg's cognitive developmental approach to moral development used Piaget's findings as a basis. Lifton (1991) argued that to Kohlberg each individual had an underlying set of rules and conceptual presuppositions (i.e. innate beliefs or understandings), with development occurring as a distinctive passing from one stage to the next. Piaget and Kohlberg described moral behavior in terms of justice, or attempting to discover what was most fair.

Kohlberg (1981) contended that humans moved

through six stages (experiences) and developed more mature, educated, and sophisticated moral reasoning strategies. Kohlberg stated that a person's age was not necessarily a primary factor in his or her moral development. Development was chronological, but could occur at any time, either by chance or as a result of an educational program. The pinnacle of moral development was characterized by a person who acted based on an absolute standard of right.

Research dealing with sport has used Kohlberg's work as a basis for understanding moral reasoning and character development (Bredemeier & Shields, 1984; Stoll & Beller, 1993). Lickona (1991) and Lumpkin, Stoll, and Beller (2003), in applying Kohlberg's ideas, emphasized that moral development focuses on moral knowing or thought, moral emotion or feelings, and moral acting or behavior. The moral reasoning process moves from knowing to feeling to acting.

Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test (DIT) built on and added to the work of Piaget and Kohlberg. This instrument, which required participants to respond to hypothetical dilemmas, assessed moral judgment as the basic structure by which people view and made decisions about their rights and responsibilities. Rest, like Kohlberg, did not believe that moral judgment and morality necessarily correlated with character or behavior. Rest argued that behavior was determined by numerous complex factors, and that moral judgment only played a small role in the explanation of moral behavior. Rest's "Four Component Model of Moral Action" addressed the decision-making process involved in moral actions (Rest, 1984). His components were processes, not traits, and his model served as a way to analyze how a course of action (behavior) was produced (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995; Rest, 1984).

Hahm (1989) drew upon Piaget's findings in developing an "Interactional Model" of moral development. She asserted that moral development was a socialization process that started by fulfilling self-interests (assimilation), moved to fulfilling the interests of others (accommodation), and then finally reached a balance point (equili-

bration) where moral decision making balanced the needs of the self and others (Lifton, 1991). Unlike those who have asserted that moral development started independently of any socialization process (cognitive developmentalists), Hahm believed that moral values were developed as a result of contextual demands (Langdale, 1986). At the service academies, some of the contextual demands are in the competitive sport setting.

It has long been claimed that sports build character. That is, through participation in sports, athletes will learn and display positive character traits, such as integrity, self-discipline, respect, responsibility, self-control, and sportsmanship. While parents want to believe this and coaches are expected to support this lofty expectation, there is little evidence to support this claim.

Rather, there is evidence that sports do not build character (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Bredemeier, 1995; Bredemeier & Shields, 1984; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Hahm, 1989; Priest, Krause, & Beach, 1993; Silva, 1983). These and other researchers have found important patterns of erosion in character through athletic competition. First, the longer in number of years an athlete has competed in sports, the lower his or her moral reasoning or display of positive character traits (Bredemeier, 1985; Bredemeier, 1995; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Wandzilak, Carroll, & Ansorge, 1988). Second, at higher levels of competition, an athlete's moral reasoning or display of positive character traits lessens (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Beller, Stoll, & Calmeiro, 2004; Bredemeier & Shields, 1985; Hahm, 1989; Priest, Krause, & Beach, 1993; Rudd & Stoll, 2004). This means that athletes as they move from youth sport to interscholastic sport to intercollegiate sport demonstrate lower levels of moral reasoning. Third, male athletes display lower levels of moral reasoning or positive character traits than do female athletes (Beller, Stoll, & Calmeiro, 2004; Bredemeier, 1985; Klieber & Roberts, 1981; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Silva, 1983). Fourth, athletes in team sports show lower levels of moral reasoning or positive character traits than do athletes in individual sports (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Miller & Jarman, 1988; Priest, Krause, & Beach, 1993;

Silva, 1983).

One relevant study affirming these trends was the 1989-1993 longitudinal study at the U.S. Military Academy (Priest, Krause, & Beach, 1993). These researchers reported significant differences between individual and team sport athletes in moral reasoning and a decrease in ethical value choices over a four-year period. Varsity team athletes' scores, both as incoming freshman and just before graduation, on the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory were lower than those of other athletes, including intercollegiate individual sport and intramural sport participants. These findings suggested that athletes in team sports and individual sports competed in different ethical cultures. This reinforces the finding cited above that athletes in team sports have lower levels of moral reasoning.

Since character development within sport is not an automatic outcome, is it possible to develop character through participation in sport? But, for this to occur, coaches and administrators must teach, model, and reinforce character (Hellison, 2003; Klieber & Roberts, 1981; Thompson, 1995). Coakley (2007) recommended building character within a sport setting where participants are rewarded more for how they play than for winning.

Methodology

The instrument used for this research was developed, piloted, and tested over a three-year period (Doty, 2005). The result was a valid, reliable, user friendly, time sensitive, realistic, and psychometrically sound instrument (see Table 1). The initial steps in instrument development included creating a blue print of items, with input from focus groups, experts in measurement and educational psychology, which helped to define and describe the construct (character in sport) being measured. These items were written, discussed, analyzed, and revised numerous times. Face or logical validity was measured by the appearance of reasonableness. Exploratory factor analyses verified factorial validity. Convergent validity was established by testing for correlation

with an instrument that should be similar to the one being developed. The instrument was pilot tested three times in intercollegiate athletics programs (Test 1 involved 45 males and 31 females; Test 2 included 170 males and 23 females; Test 3 had 98 males and 8 females). Reliability of the instrument was substantiated with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging between .867 - .733 for the three pilot tests.

All students (ages 17-25) at one of the service academies received the instrument via the Internet and completed this survey anonymously. The participants were asked to check the competitive level (intramural, club, or varsity) and sport they participated in during fall of 2005 along with their gender and collegiate year. Respondents, by completing the survey, were participating voluntarily and fulfilling the institution's human subject's requirements. The total number of responses was 2296 out of 4184 (55%). Surveys were discarded as invalid when a respondent marked the same response for each item, there was a consistent pattern to the responses that indicated the respondent was simply checking boxes, or the validity items were answered incorrectly. In this study, 81 responses were discarded because they met one or more of these criteria. This left a total of 2217 respondents (1846 males and 371 females), or 53% of the population.

Means and standard deviations for each of 15 items that measured character were analyzed. The means were ranked by competitive level and sport for the survey items to determine if the mean scores for any team were more frequently in the top five or bottom five of the levels of character. Probabilities were analyzed to determine whether these appearances occurred by chance or were indicative of higher or lower levels of character by competitive level and sport. ANOVAs tested for differences between means for the competitive level, sport, gender, class, and contact level of the sport. T tests were used to compare the highest sport means with the lowest sport means to determine if there were any significant differences.

Table 1

AGREE SLIGHTLY AGREE SLIGHTLY DISAGREE DISAGREE
 1 2 3 4

<i>Sport Participation Survey</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Teamwork is important for winning.				
2. I would taunt my opponent.				
3. A team must have a good coach to win.				
4. I would spit on my opponent.				
5. Luck is a part of winning.				
6. It is important to shake hands with my opponent after a game.				
7. I have never been in a game where any rules were violated.				
8. Referees' decisions will affect a game's result.				
9. Intramurals are a waste of time.				
10. I would deliberately injure my opponent to help me win.				
11. A team must have a "star player" to be a winning team.				
12. Respecting my opponent gives me a better chance of winning.				
13. The team that prepares the best should win the game.				
14. "Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing".				
15. I have never seen or heard someone taunt or trash-talk an opponent.				
16. Respect is an important attribute for a winning team.				
17. Football is a more violent sport than ice hockey.				
18. I must respect my opponent to play my best.				
19. Basketball is a non-contact sport.				
20. I would trash-talk my opponent.				
21. Soccer is a non-contact sport.				
22. I compliment an opponent for a good play.				
23. It is "OK" to run up the score against an inferior opponent.				
24. Basketball players are better "athletes" than baseball players.				
25. I would "bend the rules" to win.				
26. It is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.				
27. It is not up to players to enforce rules (it's the referee's job).				
28. Integrity is an important attribute for a winning team.				
29. Intercollegiate athletics are bad for a university.				
30. I would retaliate if I was given a "cheap shot" by my opponent.				
31. Skill in a sport is more important than hard work.				
32. I play fair.				
33. Being a good sport (showing sportsmanship) is important to winning.				
34. "Every student an athlete, every student challenged."				

The authors operationally labeled each sport by level of contact as based on the combination of frequency and intensity of contact as stated below (sports without a gender specified include both genders). The absence of contact characterized these teams: biathlon; men's crew; women's crew; men's cross country; women's cross country; men's golf; orienteering; powerlifting; rifle; sailing; skiing; sport parachute; men's swimming and diving; women's swimming and diving; men's tennis; women's tennis; men's track and field; women's track and field; triathlon; men's volleyball; and women's volleyball. The low contact category, when contact with an opponent is rare and seldom purposeful, included the sports of men's baseball, mountaineering, and women's softball. When contact with an opponent was frequent and maybe purposeful, the identified teams were: men's basketball; women's basketball; fencing; men's gymnastics (contact with apparatus); women's lacrosse; men's soccer; women's soccer; team handball; and men's water polo. Those teams with high contact, or when contact with an opponent was frequent, aggressive, and purposeful, included these: men's boxing; men's football; men's ice hockey; judo; men's lacrosse; martial arts; men's rugby; women's rugby; and men's wrestling.

Results

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the specific items associated with respect and integrity for students in varsity, club, and intramural sports. That is, the goal was to quantitatively reveal the existing levels of character of athletes at one service academy relative to sport, competitive level, amount of contact of the sport, year in college, and gender. By providing detailed feedback to coaches, players, and decision makers, then areas of concern relative to the development of character could be addressed.

Table 2 provides the teams by level and sport with the top 5 and bottom 5 means for each survey item that measures character. Athletes in club fencing, club sport parachute, club men's volleyball, and varsity men's golf had 6 out of 15

means in the top 5 of each item, which has a probability of 0.0024. Athletes in varsity men's ice hockey had 13 of 15 items in the bottom 5 means and varsity men's football has 11 of 15 items in the bottom 5 means, with the probability of these occurring by chance 0.00000003. Athletes in varsity men's lacrosse and varsity men's wrestling have seven means in the bottom five; club martial arts has four. Athletes in varsity men's ice hockey and varsity men's football had the lowest means on 4 of the 15 items.

When the highest mean for each item is compared with the lowest mean for each item, there are significant differences ($p = .05$) between every mean, except for item #33. As respondents become more senior in their collegiate years, their scores drop, which shows lower scores on character. Mean scores (the highest character score being 4.00) by year are: freshmen—3.11; sophomores—3.09; juniors—2.99; seniors—2.97. The average character scores of seniors are significantly lower than those of freshmen ($F = 14.2$). The average character scores for males (3.25) are significantly lower ($F = 121.9$) than those for females (3.01). As the level of contact increases, the mean character scores decrease: none—3.19; low—3.13; medium—3.00; high—2.97. There is a significant difference ($F = 42.42$) between the low mean (in high contact sports) and the high mean (in non-contact sports). Below are listed the key results by competitive level:

Intramural Sports

- Athletes in biathlon (both genders) and men's wrestling consistently score higher (but not significantly) in character than do athletes in the other intramural sports.
- Athletes in men's football and soccer (both genders) have 2 of 15 in the bottom 5 responses ($p = .2826$). The athletes in these sports score lower than athletes in other intramural sports, but the differences are not significant.
- Athletes in the three team sports score significantly lower on 13 of 15 items than do athletes in the three individual sports.
- There are significant differences in the responses on 10 of 15 items between athletes in non-contact sports and athletes in sports with medium and/or high contact.

Table 2

Highest and Lowest Means as Indicators of Character by Sport, Level, and Amount of Contact

In the columns on the left, teams with the largest number of *high* means are shown in *italics* and teams with the highest number of *low* means are shown in **bold**. In the columns on the right, the *highest* mean character scores are noted in *italics* and *lowest* mean character scores are noted by sport level and for level of contact in **bold**. (Any sport without a specific gender designation is open to both females and males.) This rating scale was used: 1 = agree; 2 = slightly agree; 3 = slightly disagree; and 4 = disagree.

Q2. "I would taunt my opponent." (shows a lack of respect for your opponent)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Tennis	3.80	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	2.45	<i>Club</i>	3.20
<i>Club Sport Parachute</i>	3.68	Club Martial Arts	2.57	Varsity	3.03
Club Orienteering	3.67	Varsity Men's Football	2.64	Intramural	2.89
Club Cycling	3.64	Intramural Men's Football	2.66		

Q4. "I would spit on my opponent." (shows a lack of self-respect and respect for your opponent)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Club Boxing; Club Cycling; Club Equestrian; Club Sailing; Club Cheerleaders; Club Men's Water Polo; Varsity Women's Volleyball	4.00 tie	Club Mountaineering	3.59	<i>Club</i>	3.88
Club Fencing; Club Men's Volleyball; Club Sport Parachute	4.0 tie	Varsity Men's Football	3.59	Varsity	3.82
		Club Martial Arts	3.65	Intramural	3.81
		Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	3.68		

Q10. "I would deliberately injure my opponent to help me win." (shows a lack of respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
<i>Varsity Men's Golf; Club Men's Volleyball</i>	4.0 tie	Club Martial Arts	3.14	<i>Club</i>	3.71
Club Sailing; Club Men's Water Polo	4.0 tie	Club Judo	3.18	Intramural	3.68
Varsity Men's Tennis; Varsity Women's Tennis	4.0 tie	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	3.23	Varsity	3.63
		Varsity Men's Football	3.29		

Q14. "Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing." (shows a lack of integrity)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Club Men's Water Polo	3.50	Varsity Men's Football	1.81	<i>Club</i>	2.84
Club Triathlon	3.41	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	1.85	Intramural	2.78
Varsity Rifle	3.22	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	1.91	Varsity	2.39
Club Sailing	3.21	Varsity Men's Baseball	2.00		

Q18. "I must respect my opponent to play my best."

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Rifle	1.22	Varsity Men's Tennis	2.55	<i>Club</i>	1.79
Varsity Men's Gymnastics	1.40	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	2.41	Varsity	1.98
Varsity Men's Swimming/Diving	1.49	Varsity Men's Wrestling	2.35	Intramural	1.99
<i>Club Fencing</i> and Club Sailing	<i>1.50 tie</i>	Club Men's Wrestling	2.30		

Q20. "I would trash-talk my opponent." (shows a lack of respect for opponent)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Rifle	4.00	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	2.45	<i>Club</i>	3.34
<i>Varsity Men's Golf</i>	3.75	Varsity Men's Football	2.53	Intramural	3.07
Club Cycling	3.71	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	2.71	Varsity	3.03
Club Orienteering	3.62	Intramural Men's Football	2.81		

Q22. "I compliment an opponent for a good play." (displays respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Club Equestrian	1.38	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	2.76	<i>Intramural</i>	1.80
Varsity Women's Volleyball	1.54	Varsity Women's Basketball	2.63	Club	1.86
<i>Club Men's Volleyball</i>	1.55	Club Women's Lacrosse	2.50	Varsity	2.16
Club Orienteering	1.57	Varsity Men's Football	2.43		

Q23. "It is 'OK' to run up the score against an inferior opponent." (shows a lack of respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Softball	3.23	Varsity Men's Wrestling	1.81	<i>Intramural</i>	2.27
Varsity Women's Tennis	3.00	Club Men's Rugby	1.97	Club	2.31
Club Men's Water Polo	2.90	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	2.00	Varsity	2.41
Varsity Men's Tennis	2.64	Varsity Women's Volleyball	2.08		

Q25. "I would 'bend the rules' to win." (show a win-at-all-costs mentality)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Cross Country	4.00	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	2.73	<i>Club</i>	3.52
Varsity Women's Softball	3.85	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	2.95	Intramural	3.39
Varsity Men's Cross Country	3.83	Varsity Men's Football	3.03	Varsity	3.32
<i>Club Men's Volleyball</i>	3.82	Varsity Men's Wrestling	3.10		

Q26. "It is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." (shows an understanding of integrity)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Tennis	1.20	Varsity Men's Football	2.61	<i>Club</i>	1.98
Club Women's Team Handball	1.33	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	2.51	Intramural	2.08
Club Judo	1.64	Varsity Men's Baseball	2.50	Varsity	2.25
Varsity Women's Volleyball	1.69	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey and Club Women's Lacrosse	2.36 tie		

Q27. "It is not up to players to enforce rules (it is the referee's job)." (shows an understanding of integrity and responsibility)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Tennis	3.40	Varsity Men's Lacrosse	2.29	<i>Club</i>	2.88
Club Marathon	3.35	Varsity Men's Football	2.29	Intramural	2.74
Club Equestrian	3.31	<i>Club Men's Volleyball</i>	2.36	Varsity	2.62
<i>Club Sport Parachute</i>	3.23	Club Judo	2.36		

Q28. "Integrity is an important attribute for a winning team."

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
<i>Club Sport Parachute</i>	1.09	Varsity Women's Basketball	1.62	<i>Club</i>	1.31
<i>Club Fencing</i>	1.10	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	1.59	Varsity	1.39
<i>Varsity Men's Golf</i>	1.13	Intramural Soccer	1.51	Intramural	1.44
Club Cycling	1.14	Club Wrestling and Club Powerlifting	1.50		

Q30. "I would retaliate if I was given a 'cheap shot' by my opponent." (shows a lack of respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Women's Volleyball	3.15	Varsity Men's Gymnastics	1.80	<i>Club</i>	2.58
Club Equestrian	3.15	Varsity Men's Baseball	2.00	Varsity	2.50
<i>Club Fencing</i>	3.05	Varsity Men's Wrestling	2.10	Intramural	2.39
Varsity Men's Tennis	3.00	Intramural Men's Football	2.18		

Q32. "I play fair." (shows integrity and respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
<i>Club Men's Volleyball</i>	1.00	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	1.59	<i>Club</i>	1.21
Club Cycling	1.07	Club Cheerleaders	1.40	Intramural	1.25
Varsity Women's Softball	1.08	Varsity Men's Wrestling	1.39	Varsity	1.28
Club Boxing	1.09	Varsity Men's Football	1.36		

Q33. "Being a good sport (shows sportsmanship) is important to winning." (shows integrity and respect)

Highest	Mean	Lowest	Mean	Sport Level	Mean
Varsity Men's Gymnastics	1.20	Varsity Men's Wrestling	1.80	<i>Club</i>	<i>1.39</i>
Club Marathon	1.24	Varsity Men's Soccer	1.65	Varsity	1.50
Club Men's Team Handball	1.24	Intramural Team Handball	1.64	Intramural	1.54
<i>Varsity Men's Golf, Club Crew, and Club Cheerleaders</i>	<i>1.27</i>	Varsity Men's Ice Hockey	1.64		

- For 11 of 15 items, there are significant differences between the higher character scores of freshmen and those of seniors; there are significant differences between the higher character scores of freshmen and those of juniors for 9 of 15 items.
- Females score higher in character than do males on 11 of 15 items.

Club Sports

- Athletes in fencing (both genders), sport parachute (both genders), and men's volleyball have 6 of 15 in the top 5 character responses ($p = .0024$).
- Athletes competing in martial arts (both genders) have 4 of 15 in the bottom 5 responses ($p = .0604$).
- Athletes playing women's lacrosse and judo (both genders) have 3 of 15 in the bottom 5 responses ($p = .1570$).
- Responses from athletes in team sports have 13 of 15 of the highest character items in comparison with athletes in the other two competitive levels.
- The responses of athletes in the 7 team sports are significantly different on 1 of the 15 items from those of athletes in the 15 individual sports.
- There are no significant differences on any of the items by year.
- Females score higher in character than do males on 11 of 15 items.

Varsity Sports

- Athletes in men's golf have 6 of 15 in the top 5 highest character responses ($p = .0024$).
- Athletes in rifle and women's tennis have 5 of 15 in the top 5 highest character responses ($p = .0128$).
- Athletes in men's ice hockey have 13 of 15 items in the bottom 5 lowest character responses ($p = .000000001$) and have 4 of the 15 lowest character scores ($p = .0003$).
- Athletes in men's football have 11 of 15 in the bottom 5 responses ($p = .00000003$) and 4 of the 15 lowest character scores ($p = .0003$).
- Athletes in men's lacrosse and men's wrestling have 7 of 15 in the bottom 5 lowest character responses ($p = .0006$).
- Men's baseball players have 3 of 15 in the bottom 5 lowest character responses ($p = .1570$).
- Athletes on these teams have 13 of 15 of the lowest overall mean character scores; all except 1 of these is in a men's sport.
- Athletes have 9 of 15 of the lowest total mean scores in comparison with athletes in the other levels of competition.
- Athletes in the 8 team sports score significantly lower on 8 of the 15 items than do the athletes in the 8 individual sports.
- Athletes in high contact sports score significantly lower on 12 of 15 items than those playing non-contact sports.
- Athletes in high contact sports score significantly lower on 5 of 15 items than athletes

competing in low and medium contact sports.

- On 4 of 15 items, there are significant differences between the higher character scores of freshmen in comparison with sophomores and/or juniors.
- Females score higher in character than do males on 10 of 15 items.

Discussion

The research previously cited suggested that males in varsity, team, and contact sports scored lower in character than females and competitors in other levels of sport, individual sports, and non-contact sports. Also, the longer a person has competed in sports, the level of character displayed decreased. Seemingly, on a daily basis the media report on unethical behaviors and character issues among athletes in male, varsity, team, and contact sports.

The results of this exploratory study in part supported the findings of Priest, Krause, and Beach (1993), who examined 631 cadets at the U.S. Military Academy over their four years undergraduate experience. They concluded,

...participation in athletics is associated with a decrease in ethical values in sport...sports norms that stress winning at all costs may override athletes' willingness to use general moral principles for resolving ethical dilemmas in athletic competition....athletes are more willing to take advantage of any game situation that increases the likelihood of victory regardless of the ethical implications. (p. 17)

The current study yielded an interesting bimodal picture of athletes in varsity sports both confirming and refuting prior studies. At one end of the continuum, athletes in men's ice hockey, men's football, men's wrestling, and men's lacrosse were much more likely to score lower in character than were club or intramural athletes. At the other end of the spectrum, varsity athletes in men's golf, women's tennis, and rifle (both genders) had the overall highest mean scores in

character. Overall, athletes competing in club sports had the highest overall mean scores. This may be attributed to many club sport athletes having fewer years of experience playing these sports and the predominance of individual and non-contact club sports.

Athletes playing contact sports showed less character, while those who competed in non-contact sports had the largest number of the highest mean character scores. Male athletes in the high-contact, varsity, and team sports of ice hockey, football, and lacrosse scored the lowest. Athletes in men's club rugby and women's club rugby, which are high-contact team sports, did not have consistently low character scores. This could be explained by the more sportsmanlike culture of this sport as well as the fact that few team members had prior experiences competing in this sport prior to joining one of these teams. This finding supports the research that shows that the longer the number of years of competing in sports, the lower the display of positive character behaviors (Bredemeier, 1985; Bredemeier, 1995; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Wandzilak, Carroll, & Ansonge, 1988).

Athletes in the high contact sport of club martial arts scored the lowest in character of any club sport. The intramural sports with medium or high contact were more likely to show low character scores than were those competing in low or non-contact intramural sports. These findings supports the premise that the aggressiveness inherent in high-contact sports may be the most important factor influencing whether athletes display ethical conduct in sport. The culture of a contact sport may demand and reward how physically aggressive athletes play as well as if they were willing to circumvent the spirit and letter of the rules to gain competitive advantages.

Athletes in three non-contact, varsity sports (men's golf, women's tennis, and rifle for both genders) scored very high in character. Responses of athletes in these individual, non-contact sports did not indicate a tendency to display lower character behaviors. This study confirmed the

findings of Beller and Stoll (1995), Dunn and Dunn (1999), Miller and Jarmen (1988), Priest, Krause, and Beach (1993), and Silva (1983) that athletes in individual sports displayed more ethical attitudes and behaviors in sport than did athletes who competed in team sports.

While there were no significant differences by year for athletes in club sports, freshmen playing intramurals consistently scored higher in character than did juniors and seniors. This seemed to indicate that students over their four years behaved in less ethically responsible ways. That is, rather than sports building character, intramural experiences may have eroded these athletes' (in the survey group) ethical conduct. This finding was not supported by previous studies.

Since athletes in some varsity sports scored high in character, while others recorded the lowest scores, there were minimal significant differences by year. The fact that older athletes in primarily four varsity men's sports (three team and one individual, but all high contact) displayed lower character supported the results of Bredemeier (1985), Bredemeier (1995), Rudd and Stoll (2004), and Wandzilak, Carroll, and Ansorge (1988). Also, the small number of items with significant differences by year could be attributed to athletes in mostly individual, non-contact, varsity sports who did not show reductions in ethical attitudes and behaviors over time.

The character scores of females across the three levels of sport were significantly higher than those of males on most items. This confirms the findings of Beller, Stoll, and Calmeiro (2004), Klieber and Roberts (1981), Rudd and Stoll (2004), and Silva (1983) that sport fostered more unethical attitudes and behaviors in male athletes than in female athletes.

Conclusion

These data suggest to the service academies in the United States that participating in sports does not automatically result in the development of character. The results of this exploratory study

seem to indicate that some athletes may display less character as they continue in athletics. This study found that athletes who played team sports, were males, and were seniors, and especially athletes in a few varsity high-contact sports were less likely to show ethical behaviors in sports. Because the officers and faculty at the service academies take a developmental and holistic approach in developing character, they need to be aware that some competitive sport experiences may be hindering the development of character.

These findings suggest that administrators and coaches at the service academies need to be aware of "bracketed morality." According to Bredemeier and Shields (1995), this term describes the increase in athletes' justification of violent behaviors, cheating, taunting, gamesmanship, and exploiting the rules to gain competitive advantages. This term suggests that athletes may rationalize that their unethical behaviors are acceptable as long as they are not punished by officials. In many sports, the norm has become that athletes, coaches, and fans condone and advocate athletes' behaving in these ways if it helps them win. Through bracketed morality, athletes defend their behaviors even though outside of sport they would not condone such actions by others or engage in these themselves.

Leaders at these service academies, inside and outside of sport, may need to consider questions like these: "Should a hockey player at the United States Air Force Academy be any different in his behavior during a hockey game than a hockey player from the University of Minnesota?"; or "Should a lacrosse player from the United States Naval Academy be any different in his behavior than a lacrosse player from Johns Hopkins University?" If the answers to these questions are "yes," then the results of this study call for further investigation into whether sports at the service academies are making positive contributions to character development.

If longitudinal data confirm the exploratory findings of this study, then the argument could be made that educational programs are needed to

enhance the development of character through sport. These efforts could include educating coaches on specific steps they could take to both increase the awareness of the ethical challenges in sport, courses of action they can take to mitigate the problems, and providing student-athletes with classes on character development.

Because character development and competitive sports experiences are major parts of students' lives at the service academies, it is further suggested that coaches at these institutions should educate about and reinforce moral values and ethical behaviors, especially for athletes in varsity, men's, high-contact sports. Sport administrators and service academy leaders should hold coaches accountable for the behavior of athletes. Perhaps language can be added to a coach's contract to address athletes' behaviors. Also, coaches need to use teachable moments in sports (such as during an intense, competitive situation when an athlete fails to act in a fair or sportsmanlike manner) to explain, discuss, model, and reinforce what respect and integrity look like and what behaviors are expected of leaders of character. The failure to emphasize the development and display of ethical behaviors in a sport setting will result in sports continuing to detract from respect and integrity, values essential for future officers and all citizens.

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