

A STUDY ON THE IMAGE OF SPORT (2)

— Sport Image among Bolivian University Students —

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Summary

The image of sport and of sport mass media among Bolivian university students was researched with a questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions about their interests and participation in sport, the image of sport, and the image of sport mass media. The results revealed that 1) Bolivian university students have keen interests in sport and their participation in sport is also very common, 2) They have daily contact with sport through newspaper and television, 3) Sport is regarded as an activity of positive value, 4) And mass media sport coverage is considered to provide up-to-date and reliable information and entertainment. It can be concluded that both the image of sport and that of sport mass media are very positive in Bolivia. Also the results were compared to those from a questionnaire given to Japanese university students.

Keywords: sport, image, mass media

Introduction

Nowadays sport has become a common activity. In daily life we have various opportunities to have contact with sport. One kind of contact with sport is participation in it. In Japan, for example, sport activities among children and adolescents are becoming more and more popular both inside and outside school and university. Also among adults it is common to participate regularly in sport activities, individually or by joining a sports club.

The other kind of contact with sport is the indirect one through the mass media. We have contact with sport through newspapers, magazines, radio, and television everyday. In Japan almost all the national newspapers devote some pages to sport and there are more than five sport newspapers which are edited mainly on

sport information. Also there are many sport magazines both general and devoted to specific sports. The news programs of radio and television always have a section related to sport events and provide us with information on sport. Through these forms of mass media we can obtain various information on sport, from world-wide sport events to regional activities, and from descriptions and records of the events themselves to details of athlete profiles or marginal matters of the events. The fact that a flood of information is continuously given to us reflects our keen interests in sport.

Another function of mass media is the transmission of sport events. Mass media not only supply us with information on what happened and what will happen in the sport world, but also make it possible for us to have sport experiences as audience.

Various kinds of sport, for example, baseball, football, sumo, golf etc., are transmitted on television, many of them in the form of live coverage. Especially at weekends there is not one day in which television stations do not have any transmission of sport in their programs. Through the transmission of sport events on television, we can see various kinds of sport, not only domestic ones but also international ones, without going to the stadium or the arena. Furthermore television provides us with experiences which we cannot have in the stadium or the arena, using many television cameras and techniques like replay, stop motion, slow motion, zoom-up and so on.

Image of Sport Living with so much information and experience of sport around us, what image do we have of it and how has that image been formed? Sport can be defined as an activity that is based on physical exercise, involves competition, and is practiced for fun. When we see or hear the word "sportsman", we imagine the words which denote positive values, such as youth, effort, and fair play. It indicates that the sport has been regarded as an activity which has positive images.

In the world of sport we can observe some changes or problems which could affect the traditional image of sport. One of them is the problem of doping. With the increase of medical and pharmaceutical knowledge, many drugs and methods for doping have been developed and are used. Despite tighter control of doping and stricter sanctions, there is no sign of its disappearance. We do not have a clear basis to argue to what point drug use can

be allowed and at what point it should be banned. But the word "doping", to some extent, is always accompanied by the impression of something "unfair" which contradicts sportsmanship.

Also the rising trend of professionalism in the world of sport could affect the image of sport. There now exist professional players in many kinds of sports. Professionalization has even reached up into rugby which was the stronghold of amateur sport. Originally sport was based on the intrinsic motive to enjoy the activity itself, but the professionalization of sport emphasizes more the economical aspects and casts shadow on one of the virtues of sport; "devotion". We expect extraordinary performance from professional athletes, but at the same time we expect them to be devoted to the sport.

Another problem is hooligans in football. It is pointed out that they have no relations with football fans and they only intend to cause troubles irrespective of the game, and they are nothing to do with the football game itself (Van Limbergen et al., 1989). But it is not difficult to imagine that hooliganism has influences on the image of football as a related phenomenon.

In addition, we can mention the commercialization of sport, scandals related to the decision of venues for the olympic games, and so on, as the factors which could affect the image of sport.

When the image of sport is discussed, it has to be recognized that one factor involved in sport is violence itself, as a consequence of the nature of competition. Clear examples of this are boxing and other professional martial arts. The objective of

these kinds of sport is to knock the opponent down. However, violence is not only seen in the combat sports. Also in ball games in which physical contact occurs among players, violent plays are frequently observed. The evaluation of violent acts in sport is not simple. They are, to some extent, allowed by the rules. And sometimes they are regarded as the index of effort or motivation needed for success (Coakly, 1988). Especially among the ice hockey players of North America, violence is closely related to manliness and violent play is more important than respecting the rules (Weinstein et al., 1995).

Previous psychological research on the image of sport has focused on the influence that the observation of violence in sport has on the aggressive behaviour of the observers (Lefkowitz et al., 1973; Russel et al., 1988; Russel and Pigat, 1991). But there are few studies which refer to the image itself and the formation of it.

Image of Sport and Mass Media We cannot ignore the influence of mass media when the formation of the sport image is analysed. It is because, as mentioned above, almost all the information on sport is obtained through mass media and we have opportunities to see the sport events much more on television than directly in the stadium or the arena. Among mass media television is seen as most important in relation to the development of sport. On the relationship between sport and television, Brown (1977) stated: Sport was recognized to be "the perfect form for television, at once optical and entertaining, performed live and superficially without a

script, peopled with heroes and villains, full of action and human interest and laced with pageantry and ritual". Television has developed rapidly having sport as a good partner. The relationship between television and sport is mutual. Sport has a certain influence on television. For example, the programming of television is sometimes decided in accordance with the time schedule of sport events. At the same time the television affects the sport. The revenue of television rights keeps on increasing, and sometimes the management of sport events is economically very difficult without its transmission on television. So the television, in many cases, has the initiative in the organization of the sport events. One example of this is air time. Many sport events have become multi-regional or international, and they are transmitted not only for the people of the region where the events take place but also for people in other regions or countries. And sometimes the air time is decided not by the circumstances of the athletes who participate in the event and its spectators in the sport field but by those of the television audience (Lever & Wheeler, 1993). Also there are some cases in which television affects the nature of sport itself. The adoption of the rally-point system in volleyball is an example of the revision of a rule because of the influence of the transmission of the game on television.

In the analysis of the influence of mass media, two factors have to be taken into consideration. One is the verbal components of the information. In printed media like newspapers and magazines, title of the article, description of the play or event,

and the caption of photographs will have to be examined, and in television and radio the narration of the announcer and the commentary of analysts should be a subject of discussion. There are some studies which refer to the analysis of the verbal content and its influence upon the readers or television viewers (Young and Smith, 1988; Sullivan, 1991). Sullivan (1991) indicated that there are two kinds of narration; one is "descriptive narration" which tells the game story in objective, judgemental, and historical ways, and the other is "dramatic narration" which emphasizes events that may amuse viewers seeking to enhance the suspense inherent in sport contests. It is important to note that the function of narration is not only to tell what is occurring precisely and objectively. This will be true also in printed media.

Another factor is the visual one. The photographs in newspapers and magazines and the screen image of television are the important means through which the sport as physical exercise is conveyed to us in more direct ways. There is no doubt that its contents affect the formation of the sport image. The visual images are unilaterally given to us by mass media, and we do not have choice. Photographers of newspapers or magazines take a vast number of photographs at each sport event, but only a few of them are placed in the newspaper or magazine. Also in television many cameras are used to transmit each event and at each moment various scenes are recorded. But usually only one of them is shown on the screen. Here it has to be discussed what kind of

visual images the editors or directors select to show us from among the images available to them. There are a few empirical studies on this point (e.g. Stoddart, 1994).

Purpose The general purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between the visual images of sport and the formation of sports image. To begin with, we carried out research in several countries with a questionnaire on interests in sport, the image of sport, and the image of sport mass media. The results with Japanese university students can be found in Hirata (2000). Here the results with Bolivian university students are reported and they are compared to those from a similar questionnaire given to Japanese university students.

Methods

The questionnaire used in this study was almost the same as that used in Hirata (2000). However this time the questionnaire was made in Spanish and the questions about sport newspaper were omitted from the questionnaire.

The questions included in the questionnaire were as follows. a) About the interests and the participation in sport: First, the respondents were asked on the regular participation in sport (and the kind of sport), the most interesting sport, reading sport pages of newspapers, reading sport magazines, and watching the transmission of sport on television. In the questions of reading newspaper/magazine and watching television, three response categories were used: 1) not at all (or

rarely), 2) sometimes, and 3) frequently. In the case in which the respondents chose the second or the third alternative, they were asked to mention the name of newspaper or magazine that they read most or one to three kinds of sport that they watch most. b) About the image of sport: First, the image of sport in general was asked. The question was “Among the words which denote the characteristics of sport, which one does come to your mind when you hear the word ‘sport’ ?” Also the respondents were asked of the image of the sport in which they are interested most in the same way. c) About the image of sport mass media: To the respondents who replied that they read newspaper/magazine and watched television sometimes or frequently, the image of those media was asked in the same way as of the image of sport. And d) An open-ended question: Finally their opinions about sport in general and about this research were asked in open-ended way.

The questionnaire was given to the students of Universidad Mayor de San Andres of La Paz, Bolivia in August 1999.

In the university we explained the purpose of this research to the students individually and asked them to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed and returned immediately.

In total 202 students (101 males and 91 females) participated in the research. The age of respondents ranged between 18 and 40, and the average was 21.9.

Results

Interests in Sport As to the regular participation in sport activities, 157 respondents (77.7%) replied that they were participating regularly in some kind of sport. Percentage of participation was a little higher in males (82.9%) than in females (71.4%). The kind of sport in which they participate most was “football” in males (68.5%) and “volleyball” in females (50.8%).

As the most interesting sport, 15 kinds of sport were mentioned. The most frequent responses were “football” (38.6%), “volleyball” (18.3%), and “basketball” (17.3%).

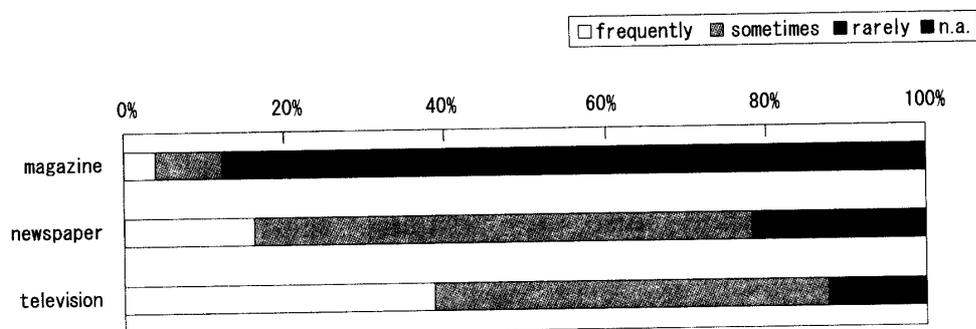


Fig. 1. Contact with sport mass media (n=202)

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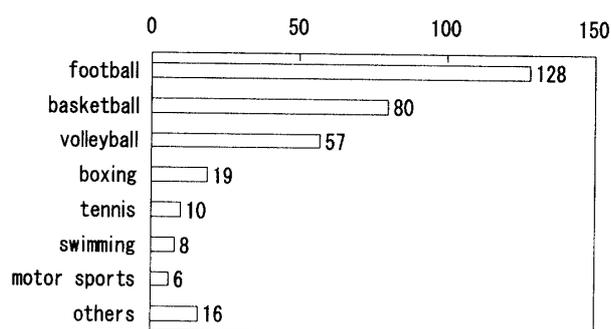


Fig. 2. Kinds of sport watched on TV (n=177)

The results of reading sport pages in newspapers and sport magazines and watching the transmission of sport on television are shown in Fig. 1. The results show that the reading of sport magazines was uncommon; only 25 respondents (12.4%) answered that they read them sometimes or frequently. In contrast to that, reading sport pages was much more common; 158 respondents (78.2%) replied that they read sports pages sometimes or frequently. Watching sport on television was also common among the respondents; 177 of them (87.6%) answered that they watch sport sometimes or frequently on television. The kinds of sport watched on television are shown in Fig. 2. The most popular sports on television were football (72.3%), basketball (45.2%), and volleyball (32.2%). In the results obtained, some kinds of sport which are rarely transmitted on television in Bolivia were mentioned. It suggests that some respondents, contrary to the instruction of the questionnaire, responded considering not only the transmission of sport events but also sports which are reported on in sport news programs. In general male students had more contact with sport through mass media than female students. The percent-

ages of reading sport magazines and sport pages and watching sport on television were 18.0%, 84.6%, and 90.1%, respectively in males, and 5.5%, 70.3%, 84.6%, respectively in females.

Image of Sport In the questionnaire the respondents were required to give the words that figuratively express the sport or the sport mass media. But many words that were not epithets were found among the responses. So it is better to regard the responses as the words "associated" with each theme. Synonyms were grouped before the counting of the responses.

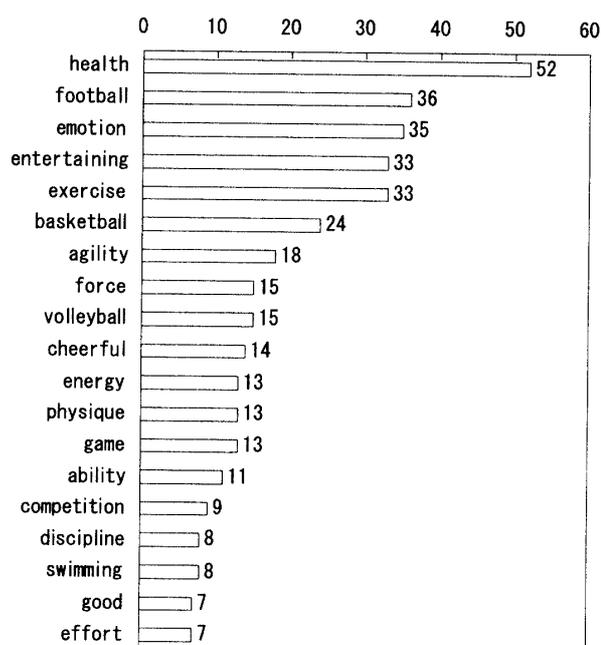


Fig. 3. Image of Sport (n=202)

Regarding the words associated with "sport", 450 responses were obtained. The principal responses are shown in Fig. 3. The most frequent response was "health". The word was mentioned by 25.7% of the respondents. The responses next to it in frequency were as follows: "football" (17.8%), "emotion" (17.3%), "entertaining" (16.3%), "exercise" (16.3%).

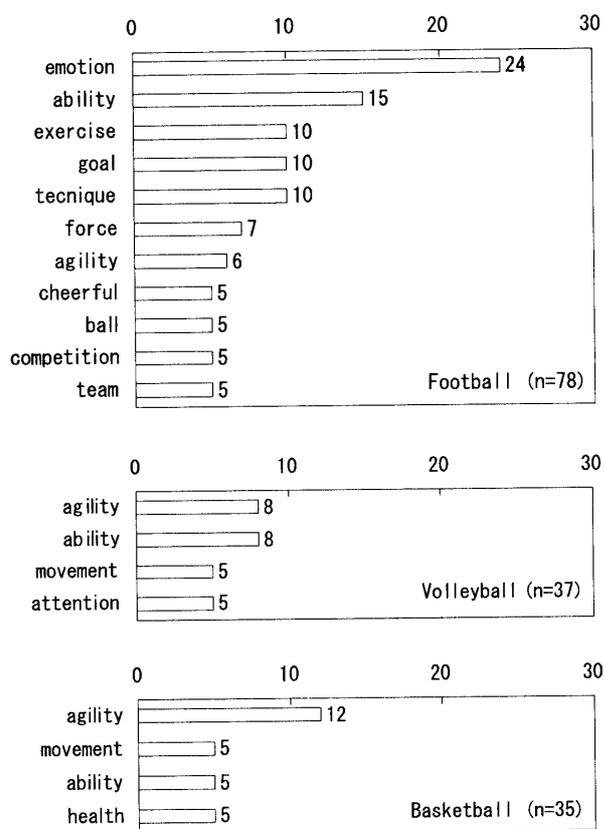


Fig. 4. Image of football, volleyball, and basketball

The principal responses on the image of the three kinds of sport which the respondents are most interested in are shown in Fig. 4. The principal responses to "football" were "emotion" (30.7%), "ability" (19.2%), "exercise" (12.8%), "goal" (12.8%), and "technique" (12.8%). The principal responses associated with "volleyball" were "agility" (21.6%), "ability" (21.6%), "movement" (13.5%), and "attention" (13.5%), and those associated with "basketball" were "agility" (34.3%), "movement" (14.3%), "ability" (14.3%), and "health" (14.3%).

Image of Sport Mass Media

The results of the image of sport mass media are shown in Fig. 5, 6 and 7. On the image of sport magazines, 56 responses were

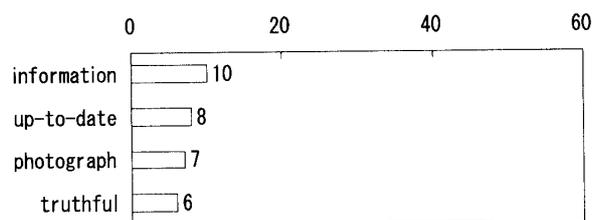


Fig. 5. Image of sport magazines (n=25)

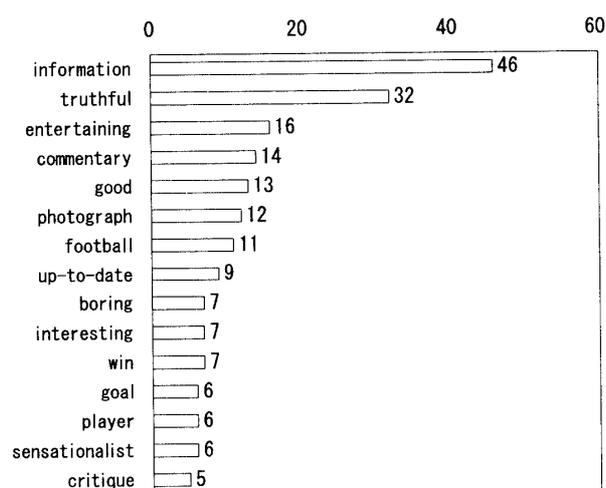


Fig. 6. Image of sport pages of newspapers (n=158)

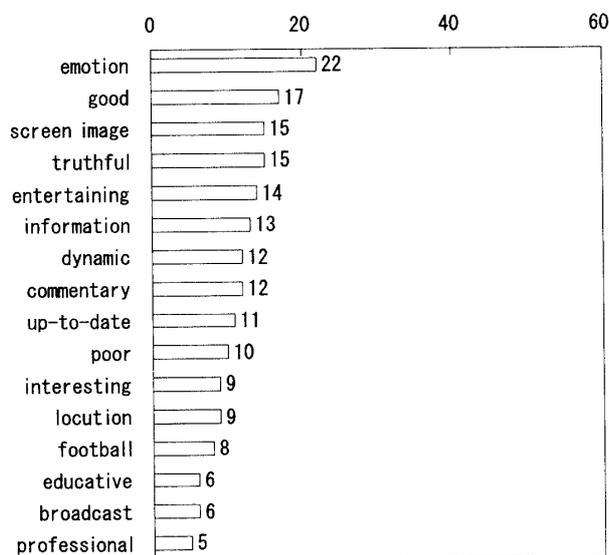


Fig. 7. Image of sport transmission on TV (n=177)

obtained from 25 students who replied that they read them sometimes or frequently. The most frequent responses were

“information” (40.0%), “up-to-date” (32.0%), photograph (28.0%), and “truthfulness” (24.0%).

On the image of sport pages in newspapers, 158 respondents who answered that they read sport pages sometimes or frequently gave, in total, 278 responses. Main responses were as follows: “information” (29.1%), “truthful” (20.3%), “entertaining” (10.1%), “commentary” (8.9%), “good” (8.2%), “photograph” (7.6%), “football” (7.0%).

On the image of the transmission of sport on television, 293 responses were obtained from 177 respondents who replied that they sometimes or frequently watch the transmission of sport. The most frequent response was “emotion” (12.4%), and the following words came next: “good” (9.6%), “image” (8.5%), “truthful” (8.5%), “entertaining” (7.9%), “information” (7.3%), “dynamic” (6.8%), “commentary” (6.8%), “up-to-date” (6.2%).

Answers to the Open-ended Question

To the open-ended question, 132 out of 202 respondents gave their opinions about sport and about this research. On sport 115 of them replied that sport is good for health, is entertaining, or is a good activity, and that they, especially young people, should practice it. On the other hand, there were critical opinions about the situation of sport in Bolivia. Twenty-five students answered that Bolivia lacks basic conditions for sport, and that sport needs more support, especially from the government. Also 10 students replied that not only football but also other kinds of sport should be given attention and more emphasis. And about this research, 25 students answered

that this sort of research is good or important, and that there should be more research on sport.

Discussion

Interests in Sport The results showed that 77.7 percent of the respondents practice some kind of sport regularly. This percentage is very high compared with that of Japanese university students in the previous research (Hirata, 2000) in which only 34.4 percent replied that they participate regularly in sport activities.

As to the contacts with sport through mass media, here we compared sport magazines, sport pages of newspapers, and transmission of sport on television. Among them, watching sport on television and reading sport pages of newspapers were very common. Most of the respondents replied that they watch sport on television and read sport pages sometimes or frequently (87.6% and 78.2%, respectively). These percentages are higher than those of Japanese students (81.3% and 56.4%, respectively). Also to the open-ended question many respondents answered that it is good to participate in sport activities, especially for young people. Hirata (2000) reported that Japanese university students are very interested in sport but regular participation in it is not so common. On the other hand, the results obtained here indicate that Bolivian students have a keen interest in sport and many of them regularly participate in it. Meanwhile reading sport magazines is uncommon in Bolivia. Only 12.3 percent replied that they read it frequently or

sometimes. It seems that in Bolivia, sport magazines are relatively expensive and newspaper and television are more economical and accessible.

On the kind of sport in which they have most interest, many students mentioned "football" (38.6%). Also volleyball and basketball were very popular. The kind of sport that they like was very closely related with the sex of the respondents. While many male respondents (68.3%) showed preference for football, many female students (37.4%) had more interests in volleyball. These results coincide with those of participation in sport. Of 92 male respondents who participate regularly in sport, 63 (68.5%) play football, and of 65 female students practicing sport regularly, 33 (50.8%) play volleyball. The data on the kind of sport watched on television indicate a preference for football. About 72% of the respondents answered that they watch football on television. So it can be concluded that in Bolivia on the whole, football is the favorite sport, but also volleyball is very popular among females.

Image of Sport The most frequent answer to the question of the image of sport in general was "health". The words related to the physical exercise like "exercise", "agility", "force", and "physique" were also mentioned by many respondents. In relation to the characteristics of sport for enjoyment, the words such as "emotive", "entertaining", "cheerful" were often stated.

Within individual sports, "football" was the most frequent response. These results indicate that sport is considered as an activity that is based on physical exercise

and is of positive value. It coincides with the traditional definition of sport as mentioned before. And in Bolivia sport is associated very closely with "football". The results obtained here, in one aspect, differ from those of Hirata (2000) with Japanese students. In Japan, similarly as in Bolivia, sport is considered to be an activity of positive value. At the same time Japanese students think that sport is not an easy activity. That is, for the Japanese people sport is an activity in which effort is needed. But in the results from Bolivian students, the responses that are related to this aspect of sport like "effort", "difficult", and "exhausting" were hardly mentioned. So it can be said that the image of the sport is largely positive in Bolivia. This is confirmed by the answers to the open-ended question, where many students indicated that sport is a good activity. The difference in the image of sport between Bolivia and Japan reflects how people perceive the sport in each country. It seems that in Japan the traditional Japanese martial arts (Budo) have an influence on the perception of sport. Maybe the Japanese people tend to think that the principle of the traditional Japanese martial arts, where the principal objective is to train the mind and the body, also holds true in sport in general. That is, they practice the sport primarily to train their mind and body. On the other hand, for the Bolivian people, sport is an activity principally to be enjoyed, which in consequence brings them the health.

The image of football which is the most popular sport in Bolivia overlaps with that of sport in general. The most frequent

response was "emotion". Also the words related to the physical exercise such as "ability", "exercise", "technique", "force", and "agility" were mentioned frequently. For Bolivian people football can be said to be a physical activity which causes much emotion.

Image of Sport Mass Media The most frequent response to the question about the image of sport pages in newspapers was "information". Also the words related to a positive evaluation, such as "truthful", "entertaining", "good", "up-to-date", and "interesting", were mentioned frequently. To the contrary, negative responses, like "boring" and "sensationalistic", were very few. These results suggest that many Bolivian students regard the sport pages as a medium for obtaining sport information and that they have a good impression of them. A difference in the image of the sport pages between Japan and Bolivia is that the word "headline" or words related to it, which many Japanese students mentioned, were rare in the results from Bolivian students. The headlines of newspapers have a function to emphasize a certain aspect of the article and to get the attention of the readers. Hirata (2000) suggested that the use of headlines with exaggerated or sensationalistic expressions is common in Japanese newspapers. The results obtained here indicate that the headlines in the Bolivian sport pages do not impress so strongly as those in Japanese newspapers, or that the use of "dramatic" headlines is not so common in Bolivia.

The image of sport magazines was similar to that of newspapers; the most frequent response was "information". So

sport magazines are also regarded principally as the source of sport information.

The results on the image of the transmission of sport on television were somewhat different from those of the other media. Here the word "emotion" was most frequent and the response "information" was not given as much as of newspapers and magazines. These results indicate that while Bolivian students read the sport pages in newspapers and sport magazines mainly to obtain information about sport, they watch sport transmissions on television principally for enjoyment. And on the whole the respondents have positive impression of television similarly to their impressions of other media. Hirata (2000) reported that the transmission of sport on Japanese television is characterized by dramatic narration. But such responses were not observed in the data from Bolivian students. It seems that dramatic narration is not so prevalent in Bolivia as it is on Japanese television. To clarify the origin of the differences in the image of sport mass media between Bolivia and Japan, a close examination of the contents of articles or broadcasts will be necessary.

In this study it was shown that Bolivian university students have keen interests in sport and their participation in sport is also very common. They have daily contact with sport through newspaper and television. Sport is regarded as an activity containing positive values. Many of them think that sport is good for health and that they have to practice it more. The sport mass media are considered to provide updated and reliable information about sport and sources

of entertainment. It can be concluded that both the image of sport and that of sport mass media are very positive in Bolivia.

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