

A STUDY ON THE IMAGE OF SPORT (3)

— Sport Image among Spanish University Students —

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Summary

The image of sport and of sport mass media among Spanish 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) Spanish university students do not have so much interest in sport, and their participation in sport activities is not so common, 2) They have contacts with sport more through television, 3) Sport is regarded as an activity that has positive values but requires efforts, 4) And mass media sport coverage is centered on football, and many of the respondents are weary of it. It can be concluded that the image of sport is very positive in Spain, and that the sport coverage by mass media is football-centered and many people are critical of it.

Keywords: sport, image, mass media

Introduction

Nowadays sport has become a common activity. In daily life we have various opportunities to participate in sport activities, individually or by joining a sport club. Also we have contacts with sport through newspapers, magazines, radio, and television everyday. Through these mass media we can obtain various information on sport, from world-wide sport events to regional activities. The fact that a flood of information is continuously given to us reflects our keen interests in sport. Furthermore, television makes it possible for us to have sport experiences as audience. Various kinds of sport are transmitted on television, many of them in the form of live coverage. 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. 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. Same as the word “sportsman”, the word “sport” has a positive connotation. It shows that we have had positive images on sport.

In the world of sport we can observe some changes or problems which could affect the traditional image of sport. The most obvious trend in the world of sport is

professionalism and commercialism. As problems we can mention doping, hooliganism in football, scandals related to the decision of venues for the Olympic games and so on. All of them are incompatible with the traditional view on sport, and it is very possible that they affect the image of sport.

Another factor which is related to the image of sport is violence. Violence is seen not only in combat sports but also in many kinds of sport. The evaluation of violent acts in sport is not simple. They are, to some extent, allowed by the rules, and in some kinds of sport like ice hockey they are positively evaluated (Coakly, 1988; 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

Considering its important role between sport and us, we cannot ignore the influence of mass media when the formation of the sport image is analysed. Among mass media television is seen as most important in relation to the development of sport (Brown, 1977). The relationship between television and sport is mutual (Lever & Wheeler, 1993). Each of them has developed rapidly having the other as a good partner.

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. 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). Another factor is the visual one. The visual images are 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. 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 sport image. To begin with, we carried out a 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 and Bolivian university students can be found in Hirata (2000) and Hirata and Foster (2001), respectively. Here the results with Spanish university students are reported.

Methods

The questionnaire used in this study was the same as that used in Hirata and Foster (2001).

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 Autonoma de Madrid in July 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 212 students (138 females and

74 males) participated in the research. The age of respondents ranged between 18 and 40, and the average was 21.1.

Results

Interests in Sports As to the regular participation in sport activities, 89 respondents (42.0%) replied that they were participating regularly in some kind of sport. Percentage of participation was higher in males (56.8%) than in females (33.3%). The kind of sport in which they participate most was “football” in males (45.2%) and “aerobics” in females (17.4%).

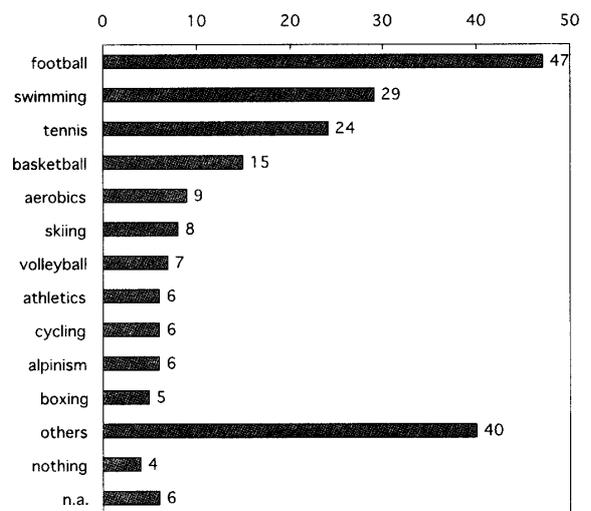


Fig.1 Most interesting kinds of sport(n=212)

The results on the kinds of sport in which the respondents are interested most are shown in Fig.1. As the most interesting sport, 35 kinds of sport were mentioned. The most frequent responses were “football” (22.2%), “swimming“ (13.7%), and “tennis“ (11.3%).

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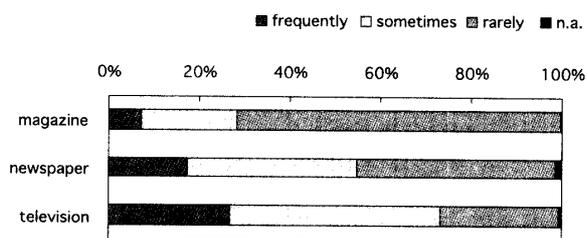


Fig.2 Contacts with sport mass media(n=212)

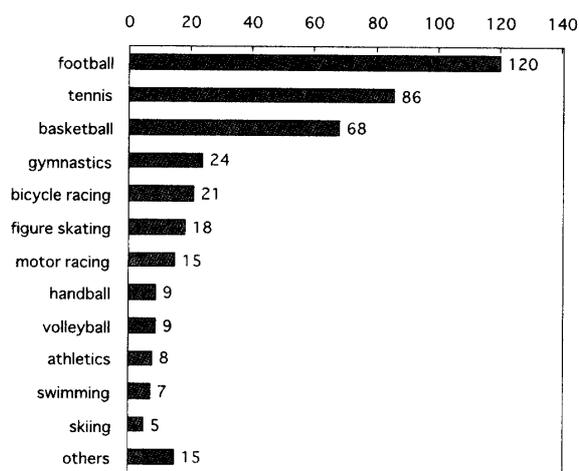


Fig.3 Kinds of sport watched on television(n=212)

The results of reading sport pages in newspapers and sport magazines and watching the transmission of sport on television are shown in Fig. 2. Among contacts with three kinds of sport mass media, reading of sport magazines was least common; only 60 respondents (28.3%) answered that they read them sometimes or frequently. Reading sport pages was more common; 116 respondents (54.7%) replied that they read sports pages sometimes or frequently, and watching sport on television was most common among the respondents; 155 of them (73.1%) answered that they watch sport sometimes or frequently on television. The kinds of sport watched on television are shown in Fig. 3. The most

popular sports on television were football (56.6%), tennis (40.6%), and basketball (32.1%). In general male students had more contact with sport through mass media than female students. The percentages of reading sport magazines and sport pages and watching sport on television were 35.1%, 68.9%, and 77.0%, respectively in males, and 24.6%, 47.1%, 71.0%, respectively in females.

Image of Sports In the questionnaire the respondents were required to give the words that figuratively express the sport or the sport mass media. But same as in the previous researches (Hirata, 2000; Hirata and Foster, 2001) 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.

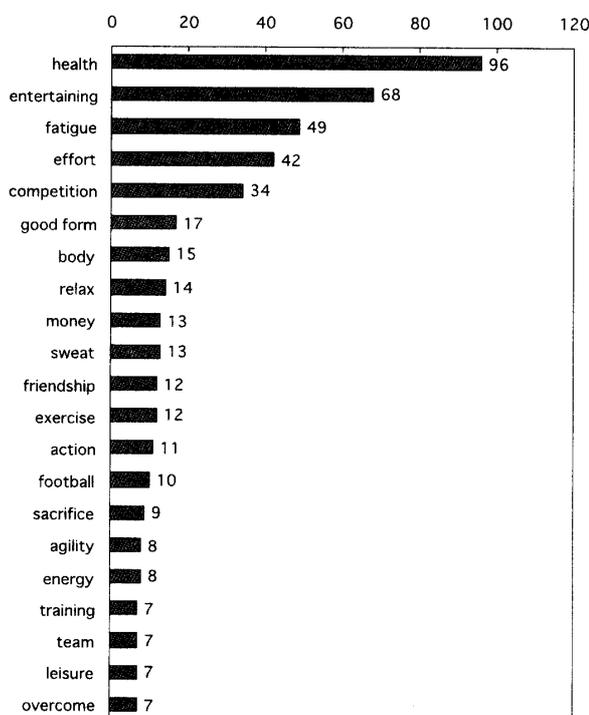


Fig.4 Image of sport(n=212)

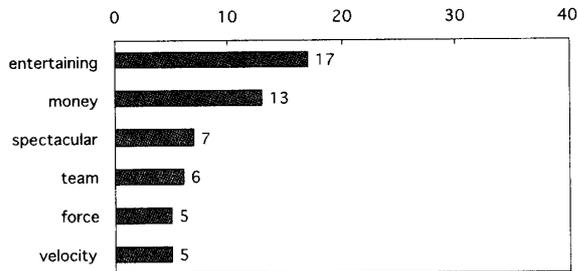


Fig.5 Image of football(n=47)

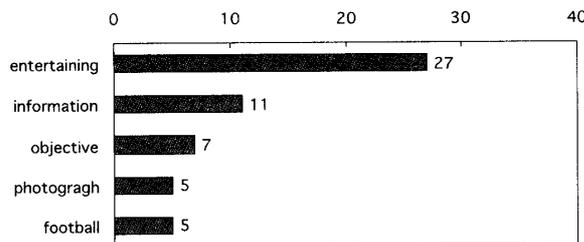


Fig.6 Image of sport magazines(n=60)

Regarding the words associated with “sport”, 582 responses were obtained. The principal responses are shown in Fig. 4. The most frequent response was “health”. The word was mentioned by 45.3% of the respondents. The responses next to it in frequency were as follows: “entertaining” (32.1%), “fatigue” (23.1%), “effort” (19.8%), “competition” (16.0%).

The principal responses on the image of “football”, which the respondents are most interested in, are shown in Fig. 5. The principal responses were “entertaining” (36.2%), “money” (27.7%), “spectacular” (14.9%), and “team” (14.9%).

Image of Sport Mass Media The results of the image of sport mass media are shown in Fig. 6, 7 and 8. On the image of sport magazines, 113 responses were obtained from 60 students who replied that they read them sometimes or frequently. The most frequent responses were “entertaining” (45.0%), “information” (18.3%),

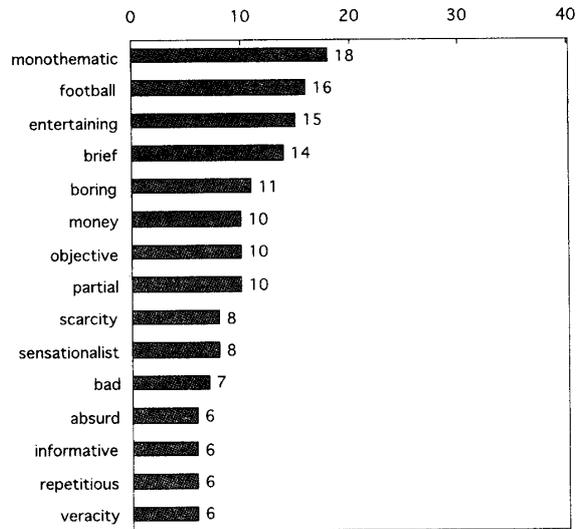


Fig.7 Image of sport pages of newspaper(n=116)

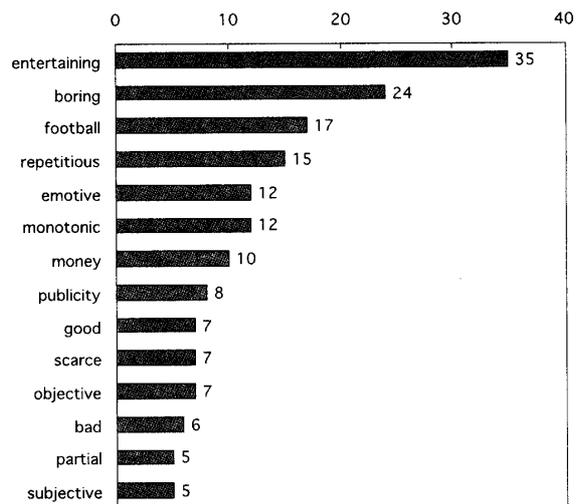


Fig.8 Image of sport transmission on television(n=155)

and “objective” (11.7%).

On the image of sport pages in newspapers, 116 respondents who answered that they read sport pages sometimes or frequently gave, in total, 238 responses. Main responses were as follows: “monothematic” (15.5%), “football” (13.8%), “entertaining” (12.9%), “brief” (12.1%), “boring” (9.5%), “money” (8.6%), “objective” (8.6%) and “partial” (8.6%).

On the image of the transmission of

sport on television, 285 responses were obtained from 155 respondents who replied that they sometimes or frequently watch the transmission of sport. The most frequent response was “entertaining” (22.6%), and the following words came next: “boring” (15.5%), “football” (11.0%), “repetitious” (9.7%), “emotive” (7.7%), “monotonous” (7.7%), and “money” (6.5%).

Answers to the Open-ended Question

To the open-ended question, 54 respondents gave their opinions about sport. Negative answers against football or football-filled mass media were given by many respondents. Twenty eight of them answered that too much attention and importance are given to football by mass media or more importance should be given to other kinds of sport. On the other hand, there were affirmative opinions on sport itself. Twenty-one students replied that sport is good or they like it.

Discussion

Interests in Sport The results showed that 42.0 percent of the respondents practice some kind of sport regularly. This percentage is not so high as the percentage of Bolivian university students (77.7%) is, and is slightly higher than that of Japanese university students (34.4%). It indicates that, similarly as in Japan, the regular participation in sport activities is not so common among Spanish university students.

As to the contacts with sport through mass media, we compared sport magazines, sport pages of newspapers, and transmission of sport on television. The

results obtained here coincide with those of Japanese and Spanish university students in that they have contacts with sport more through television than through other media and that reading sport magazines is least common. In the questionnaire we asked about the transmission of sport on television. But besides transmitting sport events directly, television, like other media, provides us with information of sport in its news programs. Considering it, it can be said that among mass media television has the most important role in our contacts with sport. The percentages of contacts with sport mass media were, as a whole, a little lower than those of other two countries. These results show that in Spain interests of university students in sport are not so high as in Japan or Bolivia.

Also there were differences between males and females both in the participation in sport and in contacts with sport mass media. In both male respondents showed higher percentage than female respondents. It indicates that male students have more interests in sport than female students, which coincides with the results of Japanese and Bolivian university students.

On the kind of sport in which they have most interest, many students mentioned “football” (22.2%). Swimming and tennis were popular, too. Here also there was a difference between male students and female students. Male students showed preference for football (39.2%). The preference of male respondents for football was confirmed by results on the regular participation in sport activities. Out of 42 male students who participate regularly in

sport, 45.2% play football. On the other hand, more female students had interests in swimming (18.8%) and tennis (14.5%) than in football (13.0%).

The data on the kind of sport watched on television indicate a preference for football. Football was mentioned most both by male and female students. In total about 77 % of the respondents who watch sport on television sometimes or frequently answered that they watch football. So it can be concluded that in Spain, same as in Bolivia, football is the most popular sport.

Image of Sport The most frequent answer to the question of the image of sport in general was "health". The words like "good form" and "relax" were also mentioned by many respondents. It indicates that, same as in Japan and Bolivia, sport is considered to be very closely tied with health. The second word mentioned most was "amusement". This answer together with others like "entertainment" and "leisure" corresponds with the characteristics of sport for enjoyment. Also the word "competition" which is one of the principal characteristics of sport was mentioned by many students. It can be said that Spanish university students consider sport to be an activity that is good for health, to be practiced for enjoyment, and to involve competition. On the other hand, the words "fatigue" and "effort" were third and fourth, respectively, in frequency. These words together with others like "sacrifice" and "sweat" indicate that sport is considered to be a not-easy activity.

The image of football which is the most popular sport in Spain overlaps with that of sport in an aspect. The most frequent

response was "amusement" and the word "spectacular" was third in frequency. It can be said that the respondents play football or watch the game of football principally for enjoyment.

Image of Sport Mass Media The most frequent responses to the question about the image of sport pages in newspapers were "monothematic" and "football". It indicates that many respondents think that sport pages of newspaper are occupied by football. The evaluation of sport pages of newspaper is dualistic. On one hand, many respondents mentioned the words like "amusing" "objective" "informative", and "truthful". On the other hand, the words of negative evaluation such as "boring", "partial", "sensationalistic", "bad", "absurd", and "repetitious" were mentioned by many respondents. It seems that the evaluation of sport pages depends on the attitude of each respondents to sport. The sport pages of newspaper are recognized by many people to be centered on football. And those who like football are satisfied with that. But those who does not like it are weary of reading articles on football.

By contrast, the image of sport magazines was principally positive. The most frequent responses were "amusing", "information", and "objective". The difference in the image between sport pages of newspaper and sport magazines is considered to come from the fact that while newspapers are read not only by those who like sport or football but also by those who does not like them, sport magazines are bought and read only by those who are interested in sport in general or in each kind of sport.

The results on the image of the transmission of sport on television were, in a sense, similar to those of sport pages of newspaper. On the content of transmission, the word "football" was frequently mentioned. On the evaluation of the transmission, both the responses of positive evaluation such as "amusing", "emotive", "good", and "objective", and those of negative evaluation like "monotonous", "boring", "repetitious", "bad", "subjective", and "partial" were mixedly obtained. These results indicate that, same as sport pages of newspaper, transmission of sport on television is centered on football and that its evaluation depends on the attitude of the respondents to sport or football.

In the introduction, we mentioned the visual and verbal components in the contents of sport mass media as the factors which could affect the formation of our image on sport. In the results obtained responses concerning these components were hardly obtained. The word "photograph" on the image of sport magazines, and the words "commentary" and "commentator" on the image of transmission of sport on television were mentioned by a few respondents. These results may show that the respondents are not conscious of these components.

One aspect of the results obtained which is worth noting is that the word "money", which was hardly obtained in the results with Japanese and Bolivian university students, was mentioned by many respondents on the image of sport, of football, of sport pages of newspaper, and of transmission of sport on television.

Especially its percentage was very high on the image of football. This word is obviously related to the commercialization of sport. As written above, it is one of the major trends in the sport world. In many countries sport has had closer ties with business, and the money has become one of the main topics in the sport world. Spain is not the exception. In mass media this topic is being taken up frequently, and the people are aware of the close ties between sport and money. The results obtained here are considered to reflect such a situation of the sport world.

In this study it was shown that among Spanish university students regular participation in sport activities is not so common. Same as Japanese and Bolivian university students, they have contacts with sport more through television than through sport pages of newspaper or sport magazines. As a whole their image on sport is positive. They think that sport is good for health and provides them enjoyment. At the same time they consider sport to be a not-easy activity, which needs mental and physical efforts. The sport mass media in Spain is centered on football. And their image depends on the attitude of the respondents toward sport or football. While those who like football are satisfied with football-filled mass media, those who does not like it are weary of them. Also the word "money" was mentioned by many respondents to the questions on the image of sport and of each of sport mass media. It is considered to reflect the trend of commercialization of sport in Spain.

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