Violent Incidents in Greek Basketball. Referees’ Perspective on the Theoretical Models of Violence

Konstantinos Koukouris, Taxildaridis Stavros

Department of Physical Education and Exercise Science in Serres, Aristotle’s University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract

During the last 30 years a significant body of knowledge has been accumulated around the issue of hooliganism in professional soccer. However, very little has been said about violence in basketball, a sport that has the most incidents of violence after soccer and perhaps handball in Europe. Although an increasing number of violent incidents in basketball are reported in the mass media, research is limited. The sample consisted of 16 top Greek basketball referees, several of whom were distinguished even at an international level. The top referees were interviewed in a hotel prior to matches. The criteria for the choice of leading referees was based on their top refereeing experience (A1 division). Officials provide support for the notion that basketball is hostage to personal interests and is used as a means of pressure for the service of other aims. The theory for the social roots of hooliganism as well as the theory of frustration – aggression provide sufficient explanations for the interpretation of violence in basketball. Under work and family pressures young people become more aggressive and unload their disappointment in the sports ground, which they consider to be a suitable outlet.

Key Words

violence, hooliganism, referee, basketball

Introduction

Violence in sport is an issue of great concern in Greece and elsewhere. While much research looks at soccer, violence in Greek basketball is also a concern. Thus the purpose of the paper is to take a close look at violence in Greek basketball. This research was accomplished during a period when Greek basketball was threatened with financial collapse. In Greek newspapers basketball incidents are very often reported.

Basketball is a sport where physical contact and the inevitable clashes between players are taken for granted, although it must be said that the prevalence of such incidents is less than in soccer, handball, water-polo and ice-hockey and of course much less than full-contact sports such as boxing, wrestling and rugby (Smith 1986, Sneider and Eitzen 1986). Basketball, like soccer, belongs to a group of sports where violence is hidden during action. It is not obvious whether a player hits another player intentionally or unwillingly (Smith 1986, Sneider and Eitzen 1986). However, Avgerinos (1989) points out that in basketball there are strict rules which do not allow misinterpretation. In this way the work of the referees becomes easier and they are able to control the game. On the contrary, May
(2001) pointed out that the level of body contact in basketball differs from game to game because the referees vary. Just as in soccer high tackling borders on violence, basketball “body language” falls within the referee’s jurisdiction and not the police or the managers (Smith, 1986). Although basketball looks like a discipline involving no direct contact, the reality is different. The forms of violence perceived in this sport are mainly physical. Basketball is characterized by Guilbert (2004) as a hard violence sport. Professional as well as collegiate basketball players have become more aggressive because the pressure to win has increased (Lapchick 1986, DiConsiglio 2000). Serious violent incidents were reported even during high school basketball games in the USA (Garfield and Mravic, 2000). Despite frequent assaults on referees, there is very little research on this problem (Rainey & Duggan, 1998). But these assaults on referees should be dealt with in another article.

Recently several studies have examined unsportsmanlike attitudes and immoral and aggressive behaviour in basketball. Researchers with a psychology background have tried to attribute sport violence to personality differences. Duda, Olson, and Templin (1991, p. 85) concluded that “high school athletes who cared most about demonstrating their superiority in competitive sport indicated a greater approval of breaking the rules and intentionally injuring an opposing player”. In other words, “staring down an opponent and physically injuring an opponent so that he or she missed the game or was out for the entire season were deemed more legitimate among high school basketball players high in ego orientation”. Ego–oriented athletes pursue sports as a means to an end. They want to win and demonstrate superior skills in relation to others.

Proios, and Doganis (2003, p. 121) concluded that “increased experiences from active membership and decision-making processes… did not affect goal orientation”. They also concluded that age alone is a rather problematic index of moral development and does not significantly affect goal orientation. Referees were found to be profoundly task-oriented. Proios, Doganis and Athanailidis, (2004) agree with the view, prevailing in the scientific world but unpopular amongst the people, that sports do not build character and do not contribute to moral development.

Basketball players demonstrated less mature reasoning than non-athletes in response to both life and sport moral dilemmas (Bredemeier and Shields 1986a). Extensive participation in medium or high contact sports might increase aggressive behaviour. When winning is at stake the athlete might be more inclined to break the rules. Ego-oriented high school and college basketball athletes are prone to act injuriously (Duda, Olson and Templin 1991, Kavoussanu and Roberts 2001). Kavoussanu and Ntoumanis (2003, p. 513) concluded that “it is reasonable to expect that an athlete may be more inclined to break the rules in order to win a critical game, but less inclined to intentionally injure an opposing player”. Contact sport more than non-contact sport tend to augment the athletes’ aggressive tendencies. In contact sport athletes try to dominate each other. Over time these contact sport athletes become more ego-oriented and do not hesitate to break the written and unwritten rules and act immorally in order to win. If an athlete is primarily motivated to outperform others then it is probable that he/she would not hesitate to ignore the rules in order to win (Kavoussanu and Ntoumanis 2003). According to Stuart and Ebbeck (1995, p. 278) “a team which establishes that is inappropriate to curse (e.g. a referee), and which models and reinforces this norm, could influence each player in the judgment process”. The authors seem to agree with the structural developmental theory instead of the social learning theory.

Certain word terminology is used in basketball. Words such as “war on the boards” are used in competition between two basketball teams for rebounds, “war rooms” in NBA draft rooms, and “crash and burn” for a struggling offence, “dog fight” for an extremely competitive athletic contest etc (End, Kretschmar, Cambell, Mueller and Dietz-Uhler 2002). Smith and Stewart (2002) found that men who are more competitive and win-oriented report being more sexually aggressive. Incidents of violence
might be attributed to spectators’ ignorance of rules, techniques and difficulties of other games except football (Papageorgiou 1998). In USA basketball violence has very often been connected with the coloured minority. Basketball has been greeted wrongly by functionalists in multi-cultural societies e.g. USA for the incorporation possibilities of the minorities (DiConsiglio 2000, Miller 1997). Male violence is regarded as a socio-biological danger which could be suppressed or channeled elsewhere e.g. in sport (Miller 1997, Wilson 1997).

Theoretical models of aggressive behaviour

Efforts at applying general theories to violence in the athletic arena have failed (Young 1991). For this reason lately more specialized and refined theories have been applied to the study of sport violence. Most studies on sport violence have been engrossed in the study of British soccer hooliganism. Undoubtedly, this fact shows some bias on behalf of researchers, implying that there is no sport violence in other countries or in other sports (Young 1991). Below, reference will be made to the three theoretical perspectives.

1) Lorenz’ view (1966) that violence is inherent in human nature cannot explain why in some civilizations violent reactions seem to be the rule whereas in other societies there are only a few violent incidents. The human being is the only species that kills simply for pleasure (Papadopoulou and Markoulis 1986). Sport provides a secure outlet for the inevitable expression of aggressive behaviour (Coakley 1986). Since 1975, Bennet pointed out that basketball, tennis and boxing spectators seek more power and prestige for themselves than other people and also perhaps higher levels of violence. Young (1991), however, criticizes similar studies for being ahistorical, apolitical and unstructured.

2) As is well known, Dollard, Doob et al’s (1939) theory that frustration or repressive experience always leads to aggression was revised later. Apart from aggression, frustration might alternatively lead to escape, submission etc. The human being has lost affiliation with wider social groups (Stamiris 1990). His social identity is reinforced by supporting a football or other sports club. Applying this revised frustration-aggression theory to sports, it could be supported that the fans’ violent tendencies could be released through hooliganism (Coakley 1986).

3) According to the supporters of the social learning theory (Davis and Adams 1999, p. 68) a man’s behaviour is considered the product of personal expectations, attitudes, models of thought and statements about oneself which are developed through learning. As is well known, much of the knowledge about human relations is acquired through observing and mimicking others. According to Papadopoulou and Markoulis (1986, p. 55) when aggressive behaviour is a source of self–respect and pride, fans behave aggressively to get satisfaction. By applying this theory of social learning through sport to spectators we assume that spectators who can endure the defeat of their team will transfer this tendency to other aspects of their life (Coakley 1986).

The social background of hooligans

Despite extensive research on the social background of hooligans, no definite conclusions have yet been reached. First of all, other European countries will be mentioned, and later on the situation in Greece will be examined. The central core of the Leicester School’s civilizing theory is the supposition that the working class has gradually incorporated the social values of the higher social classes and by doing so has become increasingly less violent. Dunning, Murphy and Williams (1998) and Reilly (1996) point out that the main core of football hooligans consists of young people from the rough sections of the working class.
In contrast to Taylor (1982), who sees hooliganism as a scuffle between the working class and the middle class, Dunning, Murphy and Williams (1998) and Reilly (1996) regard hooliganism as an internal working class phenomenon. Clashes with police are not the hooligan’s target per se but the epilogue of a scuffle among working class people, thus being in effect a working class scuffle. Giulianotti (1989) also disagrees with the researchers of the Leicester School because he believes that working class youths are not immune from the catalytic influence of mass media, and also they have to interrelate with middle class youths in small towns. Again in contrast to the Leicester school, King (1997) believes that violence in English soccer started in the 1960s among the more prosperous sections of the working class. For King the hard core of hooligans work in sedentary jobs and are influenced by the traditional working-class culture. In contrast to the most widely held view that people from lower class strata participate in violent incidents, which start initially as victory celebrations, festivals or carnivals, McPherson, Curtis and Loy (1989, p. 298) state that middle class people participate to a greater extent than other social classes as a result of suppression by legal, ethical and social values.

According to van de Brug (1994) in the Netherlands the militant fans on the whole have a lower social class background than their parents. In other words, there is a downward mobility trend amongst Dutch hooligans which is related to unemployment, instant gratification, alcohol and drugs. Also, in contrast to the situation in Britain, the ultras (fanatic followers) in Italy are not exclusively working class but represent various social classes (Podaliri and Balestri 1998).

As regards hooliganism in Greece, according to Papageorgiou (1998, p. 63) “The majority of the founding members of these fans’ associations did not have a permanent job, they were working as occasional laborers or desk clerks. Many of them participated in the subcultures of downgraded urban suburbs with a strong juxtaposition against the repressive machinery of the state”. The earliest analysis of the social class background of Greek hooligans was carried out by Kourakis (1988). In his conclusion Kourakis (1988, p.66) points out that the explanation for the tendency of these young people towards violence in general “must basically be sought out in the psychological peculiarities of those individuals and in the psychological problems in which they are entangled which often result from broken-up families and job instability as well as from their hostile social environment in general, this leading them to fulfil their unfavorable prognostics (theory of self-fulfilling prophecy)”. According to Kourakis (1988), the educational level of the parents of organized fans in Greece is higher than that of the general population. These results seem to agree with the conclusions of Podaliri and Balestri (1998) and McPherson, Curtis and Loy (1989). So empirical research in Greece does not support the Leicester school theorists.

First of all we will refer to hooliganism in Europe, and then hooliganism in Greece will be discussed separately. Although many social movements, including hooliganism, are initially non-organized, unstructured and transitional, they later develop into an institution and are represented by official organizations, which in turn give power and stability to the movement (McPherson, Curtis and Loy 1989, p. 280, Young 1999, p. 9). The review of literature is consisted almost entirely of references to professional soccer. There is a dearth of references to amateur soccer, professional and amateur basketball etc.

Taylor (1982) described hooligans as unruly unemployed youths who constitute a threat to the working class suburbs. By their actions, they push the working class to support the draconian regulations of the state against youths in general. According to Taylor, fear of hooliganism in effect becomes a tool in the hands of capitalism. In contrast, Dunning and his associates (1986), while accepting that hooligans come from rough sections of the working class, do not interpret the fear of hooliganism as being a result of capitalist guidance. Reilly (1996) agrees with Dunning and his
associates from the Leicester school that football is associated with a violent manly style and that, through football, working class youths exhibit an old-fashioned behavior which is outmoded in society in general.

Although an extensive body of literature has accumulated on the issue of hooliganism in British and European professional soccer, there is a dearth of information on violent incidents in basketball and especially in amateur basketball, a fact which explains the lack of reference to basketball in the available literature. Some of the key questions posed to the referees included the following: Do you believe that basketball provides a safe outlet for the necessary and inevitable expression of violent behaviour (Coakley 1986)? Do you believe that the players resort to violent behaviour because they are influenced by some significant other people who function as models of behaviour? Do they learn violence? (Schneider and Eitzen 1986). How about the possibility that vigorous physical exercise in sport makes people less violent by producing physiological or biochemical changes in the body (Coakley 1986)? Do you believe that those who get involved in violent incidents come from the lower or the upper social classes? Why does basketball (like soccer) constitute such an attractive place for the expression of such behaviour (Dunning, Murphy and Williams 1998)?

Other incentives of this study are to find out if there are any distinguishable changes in the forms of violence between basketball in the past (before the landmark year of 1987) and modern basketball and if there are any differences between Greek and European basketball championships regarding the phenomenon of violence. What do Greek referees think about the theories of violence? What do referees believe about the social class background of hooligans? Do referees believe that the existing violence in basketball reflects violence in society? What are the major manifestations of hooliganism in Greek basketball stadia? An attempt will be made to answer these questions. In this study the ‘Greek version’ of sport violence in basketball is studied. There are only few research attempts in the area of soccer hooliganism in Greece, let alone basketball hooliganism (Lappas 2005). In the review of literature there was very little reference to referees’ opinions and therefore we cannot draw questions based on the existing literature. The personal experience of referees is important in this research but it is not examined in comparison with fans’, players’, or coaches’ attitudes because of a lack of financial support and a lack of psychological support by the Federation or State Institutions. Up to now we have some percentages showing the range of aggressive acts against referees and others, but we are lacking qualitative information about how and why the aggressive acts happened. This is a realistic formulation of the study’s aims.

Methodology

The participants

Basketball was selected because it has the most incidents of violence after soccer and perhaps handball. Most researchers on sports violence in Europe have studied soccer exclusively and the only studies on the subject of violence in basketball inevitably originate from North America. Initially a group of researchers examined more than 1527 documents consisting of amateur basketball match results and 225 documents with professional basketball match results during one season, all identifying matches with violent incidents. The researchers applied content analysis. Themes were identified. Later, the interviewing sample consisted of 16 top basketball referees considered to be the best in Greece, some of them being distinguished even at an international level. Because of the in-depth character of the interviews, the explanatory nature of analysis and the limited number (25) of top class basketball referees in Greece, the sample of 16 basketball referees was considered representative.
and corresponded absolutely to the criteria for the choice of the sample (leading records in refereeing circles).

**Research Methods**

The method of analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative. Violence in basketball can best be examined through interpretative methodology, especially by applying the phenomenological approach (Whitson 1976). As Puig and Morrell (1996) pointed out, the acquisition of results in research is related to the methodology used. Depth-interviewing as a method was chosen because it was the only way to get the insight of referees about such a delicate issue. The first three interviews were also a pilot study. As a result questions were reformulated. The interviews were semi-structured with open questions which allowed the referees to express their views freely, and to use their extensive experience in basketball. The interviews lasted between one and three hours. All the interviews were recorded and meticulously transcribed over 90 pages. The researcher attempted to fully understand the world of the subject without interrupting his/her train of thought, a factor considered important by Puig and Morrell (1996). The questions posed accrued from the review of literature and an empirical knowledge of the sport. Interviews were held either in the offices of the local Referees’ Association or in the referees’ work offices. All precautions were taken (such as pseudonyms, 1st referee, 2nd referee) so as to maintain the anonymity of the subjects. Some of the key questions posed to the referees were mentioned earlier. The researchers have data from just one of the many groups involved in violence and we don’t claim that these data represent an holistic approach to the problem. On the contrary, as we have stated right from the start this is the referees’ perspective.

**Method of analysis**

One of the aims of the analysis was to create categories of reasons given by referees. The categorization of data into sentence-forms (Jones 1985) and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Cote and Salmela 1996) were used. The concentration of units of meaning which accrue from "properties" and, in the final analysis, "categories" were used in the main part of the study. During the codifying process of the first stage of the interview analysis, the researchers worked together and attempted to specify, "What fits with what?" in their effort to work out the data (Robson 1993). During the second stage the researchers applied labels to groups of words, whereas during a third stage the initial labels were schematized into groups, enabling the researchers to formulate a small number of issues or plans. All interviewees involved in the study received the initial results by mail and made comments. There were two main researchers involved in compiling the data.

**Results**

From the analysis of game-sheets reported by referees the most frequent incidents involve damage of property and hurling of objects onto the pitch against referees and players (N=21 or 9.3% of the total number of games), fans swearing at and threatening the referee (N=15 or 6.7%), fans insulting the city of the opposing team (N=7 or 3.1%), physical assault of the referee by fans (N=6 or 2.6%) etc. Some violent incidents appear equally in both amateur and professional basketball, whereas other incidents appear primarily in either one or the other. In the First Amateur Division there were only four incidents reported in 180 games (2.2%). In the Second Amateur Division 16 incidents in 383 games (4.2%). The majority of violent incidents in amateur basketball involve insulting or threatening the referee by players (N=14 or 0.9%), insulting or threatening the referee by club managers or
physiotherapists (N=8 or 0.5%), insulting the referee by coaches (N=7), fans (N=6) and fighting amongst players (N=5).

After categorizing the violent incidents it was found that some incidents appear primarily in professional not amateur basketball. These are: 1) Insulting the city of the opponents and physically assaulting players and fans; 2) Insulting the coach by fans. Well-known coaches in professional basketball become the target of the fans; 3) Brawl between opposing hooligans. When fans of the opposing team share the same section of the sports hall then serious incidents might happen. Hurling objects at fans of the other team might have serious consequences leading to brawls; 4) Constant vexations of the players by the sound engineer. A technologically advanced way to stop the efforts of the opposing team is to use the special sound effects every time the opposing team is on the attack. Among the sound effects, there is usually a voice encouraging the fans to support their team more strongly; 5) Technical problems of the sports halls. Newly-built gym-centers primarily designed for basketball games which cost millions of euros have deficiencies which interfere with the smooth conducting of games e.g. lack of proper exit corridors for the teams, loud speaker installations which are positioned next to the guest team benches on purpose to cause disturbance. From the analysis of interviews a categorization of referees’ views is attempted here.

Possible changes in the forms of violence

As the referees explained the differences between the past and the present are numerous. In the past 1) “basketball was played and administered by people who loved the sport” (13th referee); 2) those who were involved in basketball were familiar with each other; and 3) there was more "respect” and "solidarity” in society (4th referee). Nowadays however, 1) various ignorant people with a determination towards self-advancement have taken control of basketball; 2) there is a lack of homogeneity amongst spectators in the grounds; and 3) "respect does not exist, solidarity does not exist” (4th referee) in society. The referees referred to the following factors as causing an increase in violence after the changes that happened from the 1970’s onwards: 1) Fans are not interested in a sport per se but in supporting a certain club and following the sporting activities of that club irrespective of the sport they watch. In other words, fans are transferable amongst soccer, basketball, volleyball, handball etc.; 2) The transfer of fans from city to city causes trouble; 3) The social problems of unemployment and drugs are all-powerful; 4) The continuous benefits of fans supplied by the administrators; 5) The mass psychology of individuals in a mob. Le Bohn described the change of psychology of an individual in the mob. On the contrary, a positive change has been the increasing professionalism of players and their higher education. After the decline of basketball in Greece which coincided with the first years of the 21st century there were some changes in the phenomenon of violence. Firstly, following the recent reduction in the number of attending fans “the public understands basketball and the rules of refereeing better” (12th). Secondly, with the professionalization of athletes the phenomenon of violence between players has been reduced to a great extent. In general it could be said that basketball followed a parallel road to soccer, but in basketball things are “more tidy” (14th) and the educational level of players higher. In addition in the past "the referee was unprotected and an easier victim” (11th) than he is nowadays.

Theoretical explanations for violence in basketball

Theory of human instincts

The results are categorized according to the referees’ answers. The referees’ opinions about the
The phenomenon of violence are shared. The opinions of supporters of this theory ranged from an outright positive view e.g. "the ground is a battle" (10th), "violence exists in all levels of our life" (8th), "violence is law" (14th) to the discrimination of aggression as "positive and ugly aggressiveness" (6th) or the aggressiveness as a valve of safety, as "a medium to get rid of personal problems" (12th). The fervent supporters of this theory consider that "team sports create violence by their very nature" (10th). The crucial point is whether this violence "remains in the sportsground space and does not create problems or exceeds the limits" (10th) thus creating problems with the fans. These referees believed that sport provides a legitimate outlet for the aggressive instinct. A full quotation illustrates the above-mentioned points:

"Man is aggressive by nature, I take this for granted. We have evil inside us. If God weren’t in man’s life we would have been like the cavemen. The jungle law would prevail, the most powerful would survive…. Basketball is an aggressive sport by nature. Even the defence is not passive but aggressive. We try to stop the opponent achieving his target by committing a foul" (14th ref.).

Opponents of this theory

On the other hand, referees who deny the theory of human instincts believe that there are "diminishing numbers of isolated aggressive individuals" (9th) and that "few persons are aggressive by nature" (16th). They consider "basketball as an entertainment game" (1st) basically for the players since "fans do not practise sports" (3rd). It is considered that fans do not attend matches in a mood predisposed to violence, but in order to support their club. A referee expressed the very optimistic view that "we have reached the point, at least in basketball, where fans applaud the winning club in away matches” (9th).

Theory of social learning

The overwhelming majority of referees believe that players are influenced by coaches, older model players and club administrators. Young players want to resemble their models and are influenced by key-persons. The behavior of star players is particularly important, and the younger a player the greater the influence. There are powerful "key persons" who "can say a word and stop a fight" (6th). Even the ending of violent episodes depends on key persons like a club chairman or a star player" (6th). These significant other people can protect the physical integrity of rival players. "If a star player behaves in this way and is not condemned" then a young player might reach the conclusion that this sort of behaviour "is effective and thus he can behave in this way too" (6th).

The coaches apply tremendous pressure on players, "they ask them to give 100% of their effort" (9th). In the professional sector their participation time counts a great deal. Thus, many first-class players protest to a referee for fouls even in friendly games and try to justify themselves in front of the coach if they fail a shot “by pretending a foul”. The above-mentioned points appear in the following cognitive map of significances:
The young and inexperienced players are misguided by club administrators and coaches because "when the fish stinks from its head, it all goes rotten" (12th). It is not possible for a coach to commit improprieties, to threaten, to act violently, and a new player not to be influenced. The coach is "the best controller" (14th) of the game. With his behavior he alleviates or outrages the fans and the players.

Certain young players imitate other star players or coaches by demanding fouls insistently from a referee. "A human being mimics others" (10th), but of course many things also depend on the character of an athlete (2nd). The crucial issue is whether misconduct remains unpunished. If it remains unpunished then it will be repeated. However, because "the professional players are club employees they are more careful" (11th). The above-mentioned points appear in the following cognitive map of significances:

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**The opponents of the theory**

A minority of referees believe that athletes can react to their coaches' and teammates' urges and that violence occurs only in extreme cases. One referee believes that the professional players are "strong characters" (7th). Not only are they not influenced by their coaches’ strong advice but they do in fact deter violence. In other words, a referee believes that violence might erupt after a recruit becomes a "real player". "The cases of players clashing in Greece are very limited" (3rd). It is considered that those who cause violent episodes are aggressive personalities by nature. The
integrated player can reject his former model players. There are only a few negative model players in basketball.

**Frustration-aggression theory**

Referees provide overwhelming support for the frustration-aggression theory. Under the pressure of work and family responsibilities young people become aggressive and unload their disappointment/frustration in the sports ground, which is considered to be a suitable ground for this aim. Unemployed people are in the worst position because they spend their free time attending matches. On the contrary, for basketball players the benefits are enormous because "sport relaxes the neurological system" (12\textsuperscript{th}) and helps a player to forget and escape daily worries.

Caring for a family demands substantial expenses and parents must do their utmost to supply their family with necessities such as food, accommodation, education etc. Consequently, "disappointment is enormous" when somebody tries hard but cannot "enjoy basic things" (14\textsuperscript{th}). This is due to the poor labour relations, even limited law protection" (14\textsuperscript{th}). Inevitably a fan unloads his disappointment in the sports ground by participating in acts of violence. These points appear in the following cognitive map of significances:

Figure 3. Cognitive map no 3.

![Cognitive map](image)

The inability to channel hard labour and energy in the workspace can prompt an unemployed person "to feel hatred for society and particularly for the ruling class because he/she does not have work whereas others do" (4\textsuperscript{th}). A young person might find "refuge in drugs" in order to face "the blind alley of unemployment" and their "existential emptiness" (4\textsuperscript{th}). The different treatment of law offenders in the sports ground helps fans "to remove their impetus"(10\textsuperscript{th})". Similar law infringements in a city street would lead "straight to the court" (10\textsuperscript{th}). The sports ground is a space where "culprits can be hidden relatively easily amongst the crowd "(10\textsuperscript{th}).

For the unemployed young people "the best release of their frustration is in the sports ground terraces while they are hidden in the crowd of people" (3\textsuperscript{rd}). While in the grounds the fans are often "bare- chested" (11\textsuperscript{th}) outside the sports ground they wear a scarf up to their nose to protect themselves from cold weather. One wonders how the fans can show their bare chests with the winter temperatures so low. On the other hand, “there is not much energy left for a working person to visit the sports
ground and shout” (4th). It is generally recognized that sports offer players "alleviation" and escape from the everyday routine. "Sports lead you to other realities, and escapes from aggressiveness” (8th). It is considered that active participation in sports helps in the reduction of violence and referees wish everybody were actively involved in sports.

A full quotation illustrates the above mentioned points:

"An unemployed person is full of anxiety because he can’t channel his energy and vitality. He is full of hatred, hatred for society and especially for the ruling class, for the government because he doesn’t have a job whereas others do. He swears all the time, he becomes antisocial and violent. Unemployment is a cul-de-sac, drug-taking is an escape. He would attend sport matches in order to fill that void inside him, he shouts, he swears, he becomes violent” (4th ref.).

Opponents of this theory

On the other hand, a referee with experience of both basketball and soccer considers the level of sport education of basketball fans very high. They are "intelligent individuals who will protect their sport” (9th). Not only do they not offload their stress in the grounds, they also protect their space from a minority of hooligans.

The players’ social class background

The change in the social background of basketball athletes has led to an increase in violence. While in the past (before 1987 in Greece) basketball was a sport of the urban middle classes, recently it has become much more popular and widespread. The “invasion” of fans and players with a working class background has led to an increase of violent incidents in general. As a referee mentioned about the past:

"In the past decades there was no violence against referees because basketball was a sport for the few, whereas soccer was more popular. It was played in neighborhoods. Only few people had money to spend on basketball. Those playing basketball in those years were comfortable financially” (3rd).

Discussion

Breaking away from the tradition of researching violence only in European soccer, in the present study basketball, the second major sport in Greece, is examined. Instead of examining the hooligans’ attitudes or the administrators views on the issue, in this study the referees’ perspective was analysed. Armstrong and Harris (1991, p. 454) advise not to trust “the official statistics which must be regarded as very inadequate tools at best with which to determine the actual social characteristics of those involved”. The problem of sport violence is created by the fact that both clubs want to win, sometimes even by violent methods, but by definition only one of the two clubs can win. A club’s prestige also depends on the use of violence because "violence also means showing face” (10th). As regards solutions to the problems of violence significant others such as parents and coaches should discuss ethical dilemmas with players (Smith and Stewart, 2002). Henceforth, the socialization process of young athletes and the way they are taught how to interpret success and failure is important.
Theoretical interpretation of the phenomenon

Taking into consideration the extensive empirical background, the theory of social learning is widely considered the most persuasive interpretation of aggressive behavior (Papadopoulou and Markoulis 1986). The repetitively proved positive cross-correlation of aggressiveness and watching TV, of negative family interaction models and certain forms of cohort interaction constitute sufficient background for corrective interventions (Papadopoulou and Markoulis 1986, p. 96). However, the most sufficient explanation for hooliganism can be achieved from a combination of theories that were developed in Britain (Young 1991, p. 562). Sports violence happens in various forms and frames. Any effort to use one theory only in order to interpret all forms and expressions of sport violence cannot lead to anything but failure (Young 1991, p. 579). From an analysis of the referees’ comments the theory for the social roots of hooliganism as well as the theory of frustration–aggression provide sufficient explanations for the interpretation of violence in basketball.

Several of the referees emphasized the unemployment problem as leading many individuals to violence in the grounds. "Anonymity and the crowd" offer to the outraged and disappointed young people possibilities for violent outbreaks. The unemployment of young people is one of the most fundamental problems in Greek society. According to official statistics young people aged 15-29 represent 52% of the total number of unemployed people (258,000 from the total of 491,000 in 2000). The percentage of unemployment is continually rising (12.5% in comparison to 9.7% a decade ago). Long-term unemployed people constitute the majority of unemployed people (57%). In this category, young people (up to 29 years of age) are also in the majority. Only 5% of unemployed people aged up to 29 receive unemployment benefit. Under these circumstances unemployed people's frustration might lead to violence in sport.

Social background of hooligans

Even though most referees believe that the majority of hooligans have mixed social class background, nevertheless half of them refused to make some sort of class segregation because they consider this to be “racist”. They relate violence to individual psychology and not social psychology, without any reference to social classes. In other words they adopt a classless interpretation of violence phenomenon that contributes very little to its understanding. Even if most hooligans emanate from the working class, in essence club administrators raise the level of violence by supporting the fanatic fans with free tickets, free transport and free food. The state is against the collaboration of professional soccer and basketball clubs with illegal Fans’ Associations. Nevertheless, many basketball clubs are indirectly managed by Fans’ Associations who act as pressure groups. The consideration of the sports arena where there is impunity (10th) is supported by King’s theory (1997). As is well known the cultural as well as the sport consumption is based on the cultural background of individuals (Wilson 2002). The social contact networks are reproduced through the different preferences of various social classes (Wilson 2002).

The violent male styles are compatible with violence in basketball. Despite the modernizing process of Greek society and economy, in certain areas such as soccer and basketball the dominant values are different. Piperopoulos (1988) justifies the appearance of violent incidents according to three dimensions: 1) Having demolished the false idols created by adults and while being in psychological commotion young people resort to antisocial behavior (the clash of values theory); 2) The rapid change of Greek society from an agricultural to an industrialized society has brought along new customs, new values and new ways of relating to other people. As a result people have lost their orientation in life and are reduced to a state of anomie (theory of psychological disorganization);
Finally, 3) The increase in expectations for improved living conditions has led to a tough rivalry and a dramatic disappointment because of unfulfilled desires. These unfulfilled expectations have led in turn to antisocial behavior (theory of revolutionary, geometric increase of expectations).

As May (2001, p. 386) concluded: “How can we suggest to youth that they compete fairly and with a decorum of sportsmanship when there are countless examples of misconduct throughout all realms of everyday life? High-profile incidents of competitive misconduct in schools, business and sport reaffirm to youth the importance of doing whatever it takes to win”. The role of the coach in players’ avoiding unsportsmanlike behavior such as hitting with their elbows, use of vulgar language against the opponents or pushing an opponent underneath a basket, is important (May 2001). To improve sportsmanship standards and cooperation are desirable.

In basketball, however, the reverse is true, with fewer incidents in lower divisions and most incidents appearing in the Premier League. Soccer players on the whole belong to the lower social strata whereas basketball players come from the middle class. Whereas most people are familiar with soccer rules, the limited knowledge of basketball rules amongst fans might also lead to violence. In addition, the fast evolution in the basketball score makes fans more patient and restrained. The more limited space of a basketball game pitch in comparison to soccer’s open stadiums might help in terms of crowd control and the overcoming of unpleasant and antisocial behavior. Finally, as a suggestion, basketball fans need to be better informed about the rules of the game in order to avoid misinterpretations and the violent incidents that may follow. Comparisons between soccer and basketball are unavoidable because most literature on this topic is based on soccer.

Reliability of research

Jones (1997) proposed a mixed methodology in the study of sports fans, which has a number of advantages. The quantitative analysis of violence per sport and per division supplements the qualitative analysis showing the extent of episodes during sporting events. Jones (1997) reported the disadvantages and advantages of using only one method in the study of sports fans. While the quantitative data can be used in order to measure psychological factors e.g. what is right or wrong (cognitive dimension of perceptions) or what is good or villain (emotional dimension), their appropriateness for in-depth interpretation is limited. As Stuart and Ebbeck (1995, p. 278) point out “future research may yield different results by investigating multiple methods of assessing moral behaviours”. As the authors Kavoussanu, and Ntoumanis (2003) state, “as with all aspects of human interaction, moral functioning in sport is a complex phenomenon influenced by many variables. Motivational orientations constitute only one such influence, and ego-orientation may be only one of a range of variables that mediate the relationship between participation in some sports and moral functioning. Other potential mediators include moral reasoning and one’s aggressive tendencies, and more research is needed to examine these variables”. If such a complex phenomenon is influenced by many variables, why should the researchers use quantitative positivistic methods and not qualitative interpretative methods?

The use of multiple methodological tools can be developed in a completed way. According to Young (1991, p. 574), "the research which is based on such an approach produces deeper sociological explanation and comprehension". Some categories have accrued from this study. The results of this study can be used in the future for the construction of a questionnaire measuring attitudes towards violence which could be delivered to referees. The interpretative humanitarian approach can be applied to a limited number of people, mainly those with a high level of intellectual and psychological state such as the referees of A1 division (Davis and Adams 1999). For the supporters of the traditional
positivistic methods which focus their attention on the causal relations amongst variables, it is difficult for everybody to accept or reject the vaguely fixed intellectual fabrications of the phenomenological model.

Henwood and Pidgeon (1997) refer to the following criteria for the assessment of the research quality. Theory should be incorporated well in the various levels of abstraction and generalization. The categories must be the cornerstones of the emerging theory. The researcher is not independent of the subjects studied but there is an interdependent relationship. The results of good qualitative research should be easily recognizable from the subjects who gave the data. These criteria were met by the referees. In qualitative research we should consider not the generability but the transferability of the study. The categories which emerged in this study blended with theory. According to Sparkes (1998), qualitative research cannot be regarded as just another variation of positivism, neither could it be judged using the same criteria. The production of knowledge should be useful to those involved in the study (Altheide and Johnson 1998). Without doubt the results of this study will be useful for basketball authorities (this is proved in a letter by FIBA). Robson (1993) recognized the shortcomings when a single method of research is used. Triangulation demands the use of many methods. The research would be stronger if we were able to introduce additional “triangulable” evidence. In future, questionnaires should be delivered to referees to fully benefit from their experiences. The problem deserves a multi-stakeholder approach which the design of this study doesn’t provide because of financial and time limitations. The voices of the spectators, coaches, police and administrators could be combined with the voices of referees in the future. We acknowledge that we have no data on the social background of those who commit violence and the communities from which they come. What we do have is the referees’ views about the social background of those who commit violence. This is one of our aims and it has not been presented elsewhere.

Conclusion

During the last 30 years an extensive body of literature has accumulated on the issue of soccer hooliganism. Surprisingly, very little has been said about basketball hooliganism. However, basketball provides fertile ground for the expression of collective behavior. Greek basketball, precisely like football is plagued by frequent incidents in the grounds, unacceptable behaviour by administrators, financial crisis and the extended abstention of sports fans. The most serious incidents of violence happen when violence escapes from within the sports ground and unfolds outside.

The theory on the social roots of hooliganism as well as the theory of frustration–aggression provide sufficient explanations for the interpretation of violence in basketball. Referees provide overwhelming support for the frustration-aggression theory. According to referees, under work and family pressures young people become more aggressive and unload their disappointment in the sports ground, which is considered to be a suitable setting for this aim. Incidents such as brawling between opposing fans, insulting players and the city of the opposing team, throwing objects and disturbing the match with noise by the sound engineer occur more frequently during professional games.

Basketball, precisely like football, represents honour on a local, regional and national level for millions of people. Because hooliganism has deep historical roots, it is highly improbable that it will disappear in the near future. It is high time to hold a serious public debate on the confrontation of violence in Greece and to take the conclusions of research on the topic into serious consideration.
REFERENCES


