Chapter 5
From Rivalry to Antipathy Amid Sports Enthusiasts in Individual Sports: A Case of the Seles–Graf Rivalry

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ABSTRACT
The main focus of the chapter is to bring out the extremes—immoderations and intemperance—in sports rivalry by primarily considering the case of Monica Seles’ stabbing on court by a crazy Steffi Graf fan in 1993. Rivalries among players eventually extend to fans to bring about diverse dark shades (hostility and violence) among the latter. An outcome of being a part of a fan base is extreme devoutness and fervor towards one’s own favorite player while considering partisans of an adversary group as an “outgroup.” Sports rivalries customarily create a safe environment to support the creation of ingroup and outgroup, although in fanatical situations, real fights do break out among rival fans. The chapter shall delve into these aspects and consider a distinct case of extreme fan behavior as an upshot of arch rivalry in sports world. The authors shall further examine the role of different stakeholders in bringing about a healthy playing environment and fostering positive fan behavior that shall bring laurels to the game.

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INTRODUCTION

Sports and Society

Sports has a special place in society and heavily participated in by many. The participation is not limited to people who are players or people who have financial interest in the sport. A large number of people for whom sport has no direct bearing on their lives take a keen interest in it. Coakley (2017) argues that sports is a social construct, a part of the social world created by people as they interact under particular social, political and economic conditions. When sports participants win, it is shared by many people who have nothing to do with the actual sport itself but treat this success as a form of cultural identity and equate it with winning in their own lives. Similarly, when the participants lose, it is seen many a times as having failed or being let down, although there aren’t any direct losses. The direct losses are borne by the players or their employers. People relate to the identity of being a fan and belonging to fan groups. This group belonging helps people’s self-identity and esteem. Social Identity Theory says that people try to maintain a positive concept of themselves and want to be favourably viewed by others. To this end, people form social groups with others having similar interests (Tajfel, 1981).

The fans attach such large significance to sporting outcomes that their reactions to these results are extreme. People identify with teams and athletes to such an extent that the outcomes of games influence moods, identities and even a sense of well-being (Coakley, 2017). Mahendra Singh Dhoni, a current member of the Indian Cricket team and former Indian captain is one of the most celebrated and loved cricketers in India. He is the most successful Indian cricket team captain and arguably the best captain any team has produced. He led India in 331 matches (the highest number an international team was led by a player) and won 53.78% of those matches (Pabari, 2017). Under his leadership, India has won three world championships; the Twenty20 World Cup in 2007, the One Day International (ODI) World Cup in 2011 and the ICC Champions Trophy in 2013. It is therefore natural that there have been multiple instances when fans breached security to run up to Dhoni and touch his feet. In contrast and to the surprise of many, in an ODI cricket match against England in July 2018, Dhoni scored 58 runs off 37 balls, in the process completing 10,000 ODI runs as well; but he was booed by the crowd and later applauded when he got out. This was because he wasn’t playing aggressively and scoring runs quickly enough and India lost the match. In a similar incident in 2013, MS Dhoni’s house was pelted with stones after fans were angry with his decision to bat first in a match against Australia. Such instances of vandalism have been reported against other cricket players in Indian subcontinent too. Fan involvement and public emotion are high for individual sports as well. Olympics is a spectacle of many sporting events...
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