Journal of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy

Journal homepage: *https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/JPESP/index*

Recalibrating Sport Integrity today: The power of Hunhuism Philosophy

Mugari Abisha ✉[1*]

[1]Zimbabwe Open University, Department Of Physical Education and Sport
Correspondence: E-mail: abishamugari@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T S

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the role of Hunhuism/Ubuntuism in restoring and promoting sport integrity. The findings revealed a shift towards win-centeredness rather than athlete-centeredness in sports competitions. Data were analyzed using frequency, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and thematic analysis. Results indicated that age fraud occurred most frequently, followed by match-fixing, doping, corrupt officiating, and gamesmanship, while sex falsification was least common. These unethical practices negatively affected sports development and integrity by preventing deserving athletes from competing fairly. The study emphasized that implementing Hunhuism/Ubuntuism principles from childhood to adulthood could minimize sporting misconduct. Therefore, sports organizations are encouraged to integrate these values into school curricula and sporting activities, impose strict penalties for cheating, utilize modern technologies such as biometric verification, and conduct moral awareness campaigns. Political leadership should also support policies that uphold Hunhuism/Ubuntuism as the African foundation of humanity.

How to Cite: Abisha, M. (2026*)*. Recalibrating Sport Integrity today: The power of Hunhuism Philosophy. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* 6 (2), 112-120

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article History:
Received 13 Mayb 2026
Revised 04 oct 2026
Accepted 04 Nov 2026
Available online 10 Nov 2026

Keyword:
Hunhuism/ubuntuism, morality,gamesmanship, recalibrating, Integrity Introduction,

INTRODUCTION

The sporting fraternity has been bedeviled by numerous unethical practices and is robbed of its integrity and glamour by unprecedented level of cheating and gamesmanship behaviours. Researches have pointed out that the unethical and unsportsmanship behaviour is fueled by win-centered sport officials. Mendoza Aquilar, Santillan, Gonzalez, and Gonzalez, (2018) observe that the need to advance and achieve success is deeply ingrained in human evolutions. These researchers go on to posit that the will to win is an instinct that has been maintained in the species for millions of years. Participating in sport is an activity as old as humans themselves and is subject to rules. The rules of any sporting discipline are meant to maintain smart doing, and breaking the rules knowingly is defined as gaining unwarranted advantage, that is cheating, (Helfer, 2022). Cases of sport cheating and gamesmanship tactics involve: age fraud, use of performance enhancing substances, match-fixing, sex falsification, violent behaviour, dubious officiating etc. Cheating and gamesmanship in sports represent distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, approaches to gaining an unfair advantage. Cheating involves breaking the explicit rules of the game, while gamesmanship involves using questionable tactics that skirt the rules without necessarily breaking them, (Bernstein, 2022) and (Helfer, 2022).

Immorality and unethical practices in life is against the African philosophy known as Hunhuism. African cultures view a human being, despite skin colour or race, as incomplete and unfit in society if that person has no hunhu/ubuntu. Hunhuism (also known as Ubuntu in other African cultures) is an African humanist philosophy that emphasizes community, mutual respect, interconnectedness, and collective humanity, (Mendoza, et al 2018). The core belief is often summed up as: “I am because we are." Or in Shona: "Munhu, munhu nekuda kwevanhu." (Mangena, 2016). Therefore, a positive sporting fraternity is a community that cherishes and observes upright morals and ethics which need not to be breached by participants. This Hunhuism philosophy connects very well with the spirit of Olympism which was orchestrated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin around 1889.

In 1889, French aristocrat and historian Baron Pierre de Coubertin laid down his plans for reviving and re-instigating the Olympic games, an event that had long faded into antiquity, observed (Helfer, 2022). The three core tenets orchestrated are Excellence, Respect and Friendship.

These values, known as the Olympic Values, form the foundation of the Olympic Movement and guide its efforts to promote sport, culture, and education. The first tenet, Excellence, encourages sport participants to skillfully perform sport tactics and skills that are not tainted by cheating. The second tenet, Respect, encourages sport participants to show oneness and love whenever competing with someone. Another competitor is not an enemy, but co-patriot, not an opponent, but a competitor. (Coubertin, 1889). Respect spreads its

tendrils to include obeying and honouring rules and regulations of the games, obeying the match officials' decisions and being punctual as a role model in sports activities. The third tenet is Friendship. As athletes participate in sport activities, the spirit of friendship prevailing should encompass gestures like competing fairly, accommodating your competitors' values, beliefs and expectations. Spirit of friendship among players include promoting mutual understanding, camaraderie, and solidarity among people of all backgrounds through sport, Athletes should know that The Olympic Games aim to bring people together to promote peace and unity among nations. Peace and unit cannot prevail if participants are not friendly. On another hand, sport and politics cannot be separated, because sport can be used as a device to promote peace and oneness among tribes and nations, (Mugari, 2016).

Researchers like Mangena (2016), Mugari, (2023) and Helfer, (2022) have noticed an unprecedented level of immorality that has tarnished and eroded the integrity of sport today. Schools, clubs and pharmaceutical industry can bear witness to rampant use of performance enhancing drugs. School students in sporting activities confirm the use of marijuana, doping, match-fixing and age-fraud among other sport unethical practices. Match-fixing is a practice that involves some clubs offering their defeat to an undeserving team for some unscrupulous gains. In a team, some players mostly defenders and goalkeepers may cheat by allowing an opponent team to score some goals, and in return they secretly get heft funds from the winning team, (Mugari, 2023).

Age fraud is a common practice among primary and secondary schools in Africa, particularly in sporting competitions involving different age groups. It has been reported in numerous articles and undocumented reports that age cheating has become a widespread issue in school sports. This practice occurs when children exchange birth certificates or use another person's identification documents to participate in particular sporting events or age categories. As a result, athletes who are older than the permitted age are able to compete against younger participants, giving them an unfair advantage in physical ability, experience, and performance. Such practices undermine the principles of fairness, honesty, and equal opportunity that should be maintained in sports competitions. Furthermore, age fraud can negatively influence the development of young athletes because it reduces opportunities for those who genuinely meet the age requirements to demonstrate their abilities and achieve recognition. It also creates an unhealthy competitive environment in which winning becomes more important than respecting rules and sporting values. Therefore, schools, coaches, parents, and sports administrators have an important responsibility to prevent age manipulation and promote ethical behavior among young athletes. The Olympic philosophy emphasizes that participation and sportsmanship are more important than winning. As famously stated by de Coubertin, "The important thing is not to win, but to take part" (Olympics.com/ioc/beyond-the-games).

The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. (Helfer, 2022)

METHOD

The impact, place and relevance of Hunhuism in sport

Hunhuism, (also known as Ubuntu in Southern Africa) is a traditional African moral philosophy that stresses humanity, communalism, respect, honesty, and integrity. It cannot be contested that it is older than Baron Pierre de Coubertin' philosophy of Olympism, (Müller, 2000). Hunhuism can play a transformative and ethical role in the world of sport, both in Africa and globally. In other narratives, it can better be explained as meaning 'I am because of you' (Samkange and Samkange, 1980). It is important to notice a symbiotic relationship between Spirit of Olympism and Hunhuism philosophy. They both promote respect and fair play. A morally upright player respects teammates, opponents, referees, and rules. Example, is when a footballer helps an injured opponent that is demonstration of Ubuntu. Values of Hunhu include respect (rukudzo), dignity (chiremera), (Mangena, 2016). Hunhuism promotes teamwork and unity among players and officials. Athletes work for collective success rather than personal gain. Successful African teams like the 1996 South African football team (Bafana Bafana) credited Ubuntu for their harmony and victory, (Murithi, 2006).

Solidarity (kubatana), cooperation (kudyidzana). It is imperative to mention that Hunhuism encourages inclusiveness and equality in sport. For instance, every person despite any disability must be accommodated and accorded equal recognition in sport participation. No one is left behind; sport becomes a space for everyone, regardless of gender, ability, or background.

It has been noted that hunhuism provides a framework for peace-building and conflict resolution, (Broodryk, 2006). What it entails is that if sport is done with the spirit of olympism and hunhu/ubuntu it has the potential to unite divided communities, nations, and ethnic groups, drawing on the ubuntu spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. For example, South Africa's use of sport post-apartheid to promote national healing e.g. 1995 Rugby World Cup.

What it all means is that Hunhuism has a greater bearing in sport performance since moral and ethical behaviour is encouraged. Cheating, doping violence and corruption are condemned as they harm community values. Samkange and Samkange (1980) note that integrity (kutendeseka and honesty (kuvimbika) are cherished values.

Nature of sport cheating practices

There are several practices that contradict the fundamental ideals of excellence, honesty and fair play that sport is meant to promote. Mugari, (2023) enlisted these in his study:

Match-fixing: is deliberate losing or manipulating of results. The manipulation of competition results for monetary, personal or sporting gain by athletes, sporting officials and other non-athletes such as referees, or athletes and officials. It can also refer to the manipulation of a specific aspect of an event unrelated to the final result, but for which a betting market exists, such as timing the first corner kick of a football match. Example: In 2022, the ITIA banned six Spanish tennis players from the sport after they were convicted of criminal charges related to match-fixing, which it called an "important moment for tennis in its fight against corruption" and "one of the most significant infiltrations of tennis by organised crime we have seen." The ITIA imposed sanctions on the players, with the highest-ranking player Marc Fornell Mestres banned from tennis for 22 years and six months and fined $250,000 (with $200,000 suspended).

Use of performance-enhancing drugs (doping) has hit world record in sport, and in some incidents, it is orchestrated by governments. Doping is the use of prohibited medications, drugs, or treatments by athletes with the intention of improving athletic performance. Example: In 2016, the head of an anti-doping lab in Moscow blew the whistle on a state-run initiative to provide performance-enhancing drugs to Russian athletes at the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. The sophisticated operation involved the intelligence service replacing urine from 'tamper-proof' samples bottles. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) found evidence of the scheme. In 2015, professional Counter Strike player Kory Friesen admitted to his team Cloud9 using psychostimulant Adderall during a major Electronic Sports League Competition, which had a prize of £160,000. (Dan Roan, 2016 reported)

age cheating: Age cheating, or age fraud, in sports is the use of false documentation to gain an unfair advantage in age-restricted competitions. It is a pervasive issue, particularly in youth sports and in communities with weak regulatory policies and documentation systems.

A study by Ocho, Udeme and Tammy, (2025) revealed that football has highest cases of age-fraud followed by athletics and causes of age cheating are financial incentives gained and socioeconomic influence. Age cheating typically involves an older athlete posing as a younger one to compete in youth categories, where they often have a physical and psychological advantage over their genuine peers. The research retorted that there are two ages, 'football age and real age'.

The above cited incidents are a testimony that sport is robbed by unprecedendent level of corruption and immorality which call for urgent redress. Despite a plethora of strategies in place, sport cheating is taking an upward trajectory.

Sex falsification: The sex falsification started way back as 1940s when it was discovered that some coaches were fielding male competitors against female athletes. According to Mountjoy, (2014), a Germany high-jumper, Dora Ratjen in 1936 was actually a man who competed against women. In Zimbabwe, Samukeliso Sithole's case whose real name was Mduduzi Sibanda, masqueraded as a female athlete in national and internal tournaments, yet he was a male. Therefore, it is true that sport corruption has deep roots.

Misuse of inside information for betting purposes: Using information that is not in the public domain as a basis for betting. This also includes an individual betting on an event that they are participating in. Example: in 2003, National Basketball Association (NBA) referee Tim Donaghy started betting on basketball games he was personally officiating. Gamblers known to him caught wind of the scheme and began making large bets of their own based on Donaghy's 'picks' which included information about player's physical conditions and player-referee relations that he obtained as an NBA referee, (Scott Eden, 0700am ET. July 9, 2020).

The illegal betting scheme led to a large criminal conspiracy in which millions of dollars changed hands. Donaghy was eventually sentenced to 15 months in prison for his participating in the gambling scandal.

Another shameful incidence that involves a sporting organisation is that of bribery committed by International Olympic Committee members in 1998.

Bribery: The manipulation of a decision-making process, such as host venue for important competitions, allocation of rights, or nomination for positions, through an illicit exchange. Example: In 1998, the world heard of allegations of widespread corruption within the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Charges included that IOC members had received various bribes (including cash, business favours and even college tuition for members' children) from other members to advance the bid of Salt Lake City as the site of the 2002 Winter Games. Accusations also extended to previous bid committees, (Sean Ingle,5 July 13.24 BST 2019).

Tackling sports corruption with technology

People's motivations for enjoying sport are unique to but the unpredictable nature of competitive sport is key to its attraction – for spectators and athletes alike. What thrills the spectators is the aesthetic performance and display of a skill by the players, not the win. Winning is the end result, a secondary issue. Ocho, et al (2025), stress that sport participation is more than winning medals.

Removing uncertainty is the goal of many forms of sports corruption. The manipulation of sports events to ensure an outcome for gain, be it monetary or personal, is an ingrained but growing

problem that threatens to erode the reputation of the sporting world and its competitors. In a globalised, connected world, criminals – from individual actors to international organised crime groups – have greater means to exploit the integrity of sports at a cost of harm to organisations, society and individuals.

Sports corruption is too great a problem to beat in isolation. Upholding sports integrity today requires effective collaboration between sport governing bodies, public authorities, law enforcement, betting regulation and the gambling industry. It requires members to leverage new technologies to keep pace with criminals.

Analysis Methods

This study was premised on a mixed-methods paradigm, which enabled the researcher to collect and analyze data using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of these two methods was intended to obtain comprehensive information and provide a deeper understanding of the research problem. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed to select participants who were considered relevant and capable of providing information related to the study. The final sample consisted of 100 participants from different backgrounds within the sports sector. These participants included 20 sport coaches, 20 players from different sporting disciplines, 20 heads of schools, 20 sport clubs, and 20 club administrators. The involvement of participants from various groups was expected to provide different perspectives and experiences regarding the research topic. To collect the required data, the researcher employed self-administered questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Questionnaires were used to gather responses in a structured manner, allowing the researcher to obtain quantitative information from the participants. Meanwhile, face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore participants' opinions, experiences, and views in greater depth. Combining these data collection methods allowed the researcher to obtain more comprehensive findings through the integration of numerical information and descriptive explanations, thereby supporting a broader understanding of the issues investigated in the study.

Results

Overally, it has emerged that match-fixing, age fraud, sex falsification, dubious officiating, performance-enhancing drugs are common in sport participation in all competitions and disciplines. Sex-falsification bears 5% occurrence rate and is not a much common practice in sport. Age fraud bears 50% practiced in sport competitions. Match-fixing bears 20% occurrence. Dubious officiating bears 10% and drug abuse bears 15% occurrences.

It emerged that sport immorality has devastating impact to sport development and integrity. Sport is no longer a weapon to build togetherness, peace and moral restoration among the

youths. It translates to say cheating is changing the moral trajectory nations expect from the youth, research findings expose that when a young person is taught cheating, he/she adopts this culture up to marriage life where he/she can also practice infidelity.

Hunhuism in sport has suffered mutilation by all sport stakeholders. The study concludes that upholding hunhuism is the most effective method to recalibrate sport integrity. Sport participants nurtured under strict morals display sportsmanship than gamesmanship. The majority of coaches agree that songs and derogatory language during sport competitions are also a way of cheating because of their impact in disturbing confidence of other players. The desire to win, is fueling winning at any costs. It came out that the spirit of winning with dignity and losing with dignity, no longer have place in sport these days.

CONCLUSION

The study has drawn up some strategies that the sport stakeholders could apply to counter the effects of sport immorality and recalibrate sport integrity globally. Sport systems should integrate hunhuism principles in their education system from early childhood to tertiary levels. Community leadership and the government should incorporate community-based moral mentorship for athletes. Ministry of education should enforce African philosophy (Hunhuism/Ubuntuism) as a foundation for sport integrity programmes. Government should invigorate strict laws against any sport cheating practice both at grassroots level and elite sport levels. Ministry of Sport should bring modern technologies to assist in detecting any sport cheating incidences and schools must be equipped with such advanced technologies, like MRI, BVR. Sports clubs and schools should employ the use of free phone hotlines, text-focused reporting systems, dedicated email addresses and Face-to-face reporting, (i.e., contacting a dedicated integrity officer). Above all, to avoid craving to win at all cost, coaches and trainers should embrace during trainings modern technology devices and tracking systems like polars, GPS etc. which assist them to gauge player suitability, heart rates, and motor density, so that they train their players correctly than wanting to win without following scientific training procedures.

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