

Running-up the score: the athletes' experience

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Abstract

Problem Statement: When sporting participants enter the playing field, all are expected to play fairly and to the utmost of their ability, skills, and talent. However, an interesting situation arises when one team is far superior to the opponent. In that case, should athletes still be encouraged to play their best, even when this might result in a one-sided outcome? Running up the score occurs when a team or athlete continues to extend a lead when the outcome of the game is already certain. Attempting to avoid running up the score, might mean that participants are not giving their best effort; or are not trying to score. The majority of researchers have been generally opposed to running up the score. However, while philosophical explorations of running up the score have shed light on the practice, they have over-looked the experiences of the participants. **Approach and methods:** This research explores i) the effect consistently experiencing one-sided losses has on players dropping-out of sport, ii) feelings of humiliation when opposing teams run-up the score, and iii) the experience of the parents of the players in overmatched contests. Data was collected from players, coaches, and parents of ringette players using informal interviews and an online survey. Ringette is an ice hockey-like game played by girls. This research includes a review of the literature examining running up the score, an exploration of when it might be permissible, an examination of the Blues' season including a survey of the athletes' attitudes and experiences during the season, and finally solutions to help avoid running up the score. **Results:** Results of the study suggest that experiencing one-sided losses does not dramatically affect the players. Players did not drop-out of the sport, they rarely felt humiliated, and they did not seem to be as affected by the losses as much as their parents did. **Discussion:** Superior teams should utilize nonpatronizing methods to handicap the team and employ them in a way that does not humiliate the opponent. These teams could use strategic easing by playing less competent players, playing players in different positions, playing to an opponent's strengths, trying to end the game sooner by running out the clock, or by practicing new strategies and tactics.

Key Words: youth sport, ringette, dropping out of sport, humiliation, parents in sport.

Introduction

When participants enter the playing field, all are expected to play fairly and to the utmost of their ability, skills, and talent. However, an interesting situation arises when one team is far superior to the opponent. In that case, should athletes still be encouraged to play their best, even when this might result in a one-sided outcome? Running up the score occurs when a team continues to extend a lead when the outcome of the game is already certain. Attempting to avoid running up the score, might mean that participants are not trying their best; or are not trying to score. The culture of sport seems to suggest that participants should always play their best, the view being that it is dishonorable to treat an opponent as if they are not worthy of your full effort. However, many researchers challenge this view in the event of an uneven contest. Running up the score has been explored by a number of researchers (Dixon, 1992, 1998, 2000; Feezell, 1986, 1999; Hardman et al., 1996; Sailors, 2010; Taylor & Johnson, 2014). The majority of those who have studied this area are generally opposed to running up the score (see Feezell, 1986; 1999; Hardman et al., 1996; Sailors, 2010; Taylor & Johnson, 2014).

Very little research on running up the score has been published in the past decade. Much of the published research focuses on elite sport while the focus of this research is on youth sport. Philosophical explorations of running up the score shed light on the practice but have over-looked the experiences of the participants. This research examines running up the score from the perspectives of the athletes on the losing side of the uneven contest. Messner and Musto (2014) found that fewer than one percent of sport sociology papers have examined youth sports through the experiences of the participants. In particular, this research maintains three research objectives: i) the effect consistently experiencing one-sided losses has on players dropping-out of sport ii) feelings of humiliation when opposing teams run up the score compared to feelings of humiliation when teams do not play their best in an effort to avoid running up the score iii) and the experience of the parents of the players in overmatched contests compared to the experience of the players themselves.

Opposition to running up the score

One of the first to consider running up the score from an academic perspective was Keating (1964). His approach mirrored the amateur view that arose during Victorian times that participants play to improve skills and

to have fun. The idea was to concentrate on the intrinsic pleasure of playing, while not humiliating or embarrassing an opponent (Keating, 1964). Similarly, Arnold (1983) advocated for concern for an opponent which would preclude running up the score and potentially embarrassing or humiliating the opposition. This view supported the idea that an honorable victory in competitive sport included the virtues of self-control and modesty. Likewise, Fraleigh (1984) assumed that participants knew that intentionally running up the score was a negatively sanctioned act. He wrote about the “right action in an uneven contest” arguing against tactics that increased the chance of a lopsided victory (p. 180). Feezell (1986) maintained that running up the score “violates the nature of what sport is about” (p. 2). According to Butcher and Schneider (1998), fair play included respecting the opponent, and for Santana (2017) and Feezell (1999), respecting the opponent included avoiding victory by a wide margin. Hardman and colleagues (1996), McNamee (2002), Sailors (2010), and Taylor and Johnson (2014) were all in agreement.

Some authors argued that sporting context and culture are important when examining running up the score (Fraleigh, 1984; Dixon 1992; Hardman et al., 1996). Researchers maintain that time-based sports like hockey, basketball, football or ringette are worse for running up the score than non-timed sports like baseball (Dixon, 2000; Sailors, 2010). In non-timed sports, teams have greater opportunity to mount a comeback because of the absence of time constraints. In addition, specific sports have certain traditions regarding running up the score. For example, it is common in youth football to encourage teams that are winning by a wide margin to avoid passing the ball, running trick plays or blitzing (pressuring) on defense (Sportssignup.com, 2013). Similarly, full-court pressing (aggressive pressuring on defense) in basketball and other strategic ways of increasing a large lead are frowned upon (Sailors, 2010). In baseball, it is considered unsporting to steal bases or bunt to advance runners while having a commanding lead. In that situation, a baseball coach may advise players to swing at every pitch and not to take extra bases on a hit (Fezzell, 1999).

The level of the sport is also a consideration. Dixon (1992), one of the first to explore running up the score in detail, argued that it is much less acceptable in youth sport where the emphasis is on fun and participation, compared to competitive elite or professional sport where it may be viewed as more acceptable (Dixon, 1992). Santana (2017) argued that running up the score is not acceptable at the high school level in many sports including football, baseball, and basketball. Coaches have even been fired or suspended for overwhelming the opposition (Associated Press, 2006; Horn, 2009; Payne, 2015).

When running up the score may be acceptable

Other researchers accept running up the score as part of the game. For example, Dixon (1992, 1998, 2000) felt that while running up the score might be condemned, there is nothing wrong in honoring the game by playing your best. Doing so demonstrates respect to the sport and your opponent. Some authors feel that playing your best throughout the contest is the only way to get a true gauge of how competitors compare (Dixon, 2000; Torres & Hager, 2005). Zhang (2017) suggested that while most teams do not intentionally run up the score, there is nothing wrong with it. Torres and Hager (2005) argued that a team that wins a soccer game by ten goals deserves more points in the standings than a team that wins by one goal.

Running up the score may be permissible in certain situations where it is important to know the ability difference between teams. Goal difference is important when tiering, which is grouping teams by ability. Therefore, uneven contests are important in assessing at what level teams should be tiered particularly when tiering in leagues with many teams (Dixon 1992; Hardman et al., 1996; McNamee, 2002). Another example when running up the score may be acceptable is in tournament play when goal difference is used as a tiebreaker (Dixon, 1992). In that case, winning by a wider margin can help a team advance in the competition. In addition, it seems to be more acceptable to run up the score in a parallel sport, where competition is not face-to-face but teams may compete one-at-a-time or separately as is the case in cheerleading, compared to direct, face-to-face competition (Hardman et al., 1996; Sailors, 2010; Santana, 2017). As stated before, culture and context may be important and different sports may have different approaches to lopsided victories. For example, in the sport of rugby, the expectation is that teams will always play their best regardless of the score (Torres & Hager, 2005). In higher levels of rugby, teams are encouraged and even rewarded for winning by larger margins. However, this approach is not without its critics (Torres & Hager, 2005).

Mercy Rules

Many youth sports seem implicitly opposed to running up the score and have taken steps to avoid one-sided results. Mercy rules are used to end a game early or prevent teams from being rewarded for large goal differentials (Sailors, 2010). In some sports like baseball or softball, even at the college level, the game may be ended early if the score becomes too one-sided (Sailors, 2010). In youth lacrosse, the rules change to give the losing team the ball more often, and in youth football, the clock can run continuously to hasten the conclusion of a lopsided game (Sailors, 2010). In youth hockey, many leagues simply stop recording the score on the public score board when one team is a certain number of goals ahead of the other team. In ringette the mercy rule is in effect after the goal differential is seven. Two coaches, in informal interviews, explained that teams may

intentionally try not to score when the goal differential is seven, as winning by more goals is not rewarded or reflected in the official standings (coach interviews, coach #1; coach #2).¹

However, mercy rules are not without criticism. Zhang (2017) argued that stopping a game early, as suggested in some mercy rules, is a mistake as it punishes participants by depriving them the opportunity to play. In one hockey game for eight-year-olds where the final score was 41-0, the league rule stipulated that the goal differential on the scoreboard could never be greater than six, meaning the scoreboard read 6-0 for the majority of the game (CBC, 2018). The coach of the losing side did not want a mercy rule: “if we run the clock or if we have a mercy rule that’s showing them that we are giving up. We’re not going to give up” (CBC, 2018).

Methods

A weak ringette team made up of seventeen, fourteen- and fifteen-year-old females was followed for one season. Ringette is a hockey-like game using a ring instead of a puck. It was invented by Sam Jacks in 1963 in Canada as an alternative to hockey for females. Ringette Canada reports that 98 percent of ringette players are female and that players often choose ringette over hockey to be able to play with other females because hockey is often mixed-gender (Ringette Canada, 2019). This research followed the “Blues,” a team that lost 32 of 33 games played during a ringette season. During these games, the team’s average outcome was an 11-4 loss. More than half of the games were losses by more than 7 goals. Almost one-third of the Blues’ games were losses of 10 goals or more, and twice the team was beaten by 16 goals.

Qualitative data was obtained from informal, open-ended interviews of the players, coaches, and parents of the players. Early in the season permission was received from the coaching staff to observe the team from a participant observation perspective. The players were informed at a practice and the parents were informed via email. At the start of the ringette season, the researcher was known to a majority of the players and parents so there was a level of familiarity which helped elicit responses in the interviews.

Thematic analysis was used. The themes that were explored were obtained through a survey of the research available on running up the score. Having the themes generated from a review of the literature encourages trustworthiness of the results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The themes to explore included dropping out of sport due to one-sided losses (Dixon 1992; Sailors 2010; Zhang 2017) and humiliation (Dixon 1992, 2000, Hardman et al., 1996; Feezell, 1999). The theme of parental responses (BBC, 2014; Zhang, 2017) was not initially pursued but quickly emerged from the content analysis of players’ and parents’ responses and was pursued as the season went on. As the data emerged from the interviews it was then classified into these three categories. Examining only three categories simplified data collection by focusing on fewer topics, and increased reliability.

Participant observation allowed the researcher to collect data on the Blues. The majority of the games and practices during the season were observed, not from the ice or the bench, but from the penalty box, timekeeper’s bench or in the stands. Data was collected at every opportunity in practice and games. All players were given an opportunity to participate but some did not. Twelve of the seventeen players were interviewed informally throughout the season at practice, before or after games, and sometimes during games. Informal or unstructured interviews were used. Informal interviews do not follow a structured interview guide. They are not recorded, and notes are not taken during the interviews but are transcribed immediately after the conversation from memory. Responses from the interviews were categorized according to the three themes. This type of informal interviewing is commonly used with participant observation (Fontana and Fry, 2005). One disadvantage of this type of interviewing is accuracy due to the delay in transcription. To compensate for this, data collection was completed in a systematic, consistent way and transcribed as soon as possible after obtaining the data. Benefits of informal interviewing include being able to interview participants at any time and having the participants feel more comfortable and less intimidated by a formal structured process as respondents view these informal interviews as conversations (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005). These informal, open-ended interviews often elicit more engaged, personal data than formal interviews (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002).

Interviews were usually done one-on-one or in very small groups of girls. The one-on-one interviews were conducted without influence or peer-pressure from others, but the small group interviews were more common, and the players were more talkative. Questions were asked about the players’ experiences and to explore their reactions to consistently enduring one-sided losses. Questions included how the season was progressing, if they were having fun, if they were feeling frustrated or humiliated, how it felt if the other team was running up the score or not running up the score, and the reactions of their parents. These informal interviews helped provide insight into the experiences of the players losing one-sided games. They also laid the foundation for the structured online survey carried out at the end of the season.

One-on-one informal interviews were completed with parents from nine of the seventeen players seeking information about how their children were reacting to the losses, and to gain insight into how the parents were feeling about the ringette season. Parents were interviewed informally before or after practices or games. Questions were asked about how the player was feeling about the season, if she felt humiliated, if she would

¹ Interviews with players, coaches, and parents will be referenced in a way to identify the respondent but to maintain anonymity.

continue playing, and how the parent felt about the season. In addition, three coaches from other ringette organizations were interviewed at tournaments and games during the season to find out how coaches view running up the score. Brief, informal interviews were conducted about the coach's approach to running up the score and the culture of the ringette program's attitude towards running up the score. Every effort was made to have the findings reflect the participants' voice and not the researcher's biases, motivations, or perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Quotations have been used to show a connection between the data and results and to increase reliability.

At the conclusion of the season each player on the Blues received a seven-question, open-ended, anonymous, online survey. Questions explored the players' experiences during the season including asking what they enjoyed about playing ringette, whether they would play again, and their perceptions of having the score run up on them. Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained to explore the three major themes of dropping out, humiliation and parental reaction. Eleven of the seventeen players completed the survey for a response rate of 65 percent. The questions from the online survey are included in the Appendix.

Research Objectives

This research set out to explore several topics. One area of concern in youth sport is the increase in the number of participants dropping out of sport (Corrales & Olaya-Cuartero, 2022; Johnson, 2012; Witt & Dangi, 2018). Dixon (1992), Sailors (2010) and Zhang (2017) raise the issue of a potential increase in dropouts among players on a team that perpetually loses. Ringette is a sport that was invented for females and they make up the vast majority of players. Females participate in sport at lower rates than males (Hardie Murphy et al., 2017; Sabo & Veliz, 2008), enter sport later, and drop out earlier than males (Sabo & Veliz, 2008, 2017). These rates of dropout accelerate when females are experiencing puberty and are attending high school (de Lench, 2006; Sport England, 2019; Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2012). However, this is exactly when females need sport the most for reasons of self-esteem, body image, social bonding, and physical health. Research suggests that females are less tolerant of unsporting behavior (de Lench, 2006; Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2012) and therefore may be more likely to leave sport if they experience such behavior, for example having the score run up on them. Research has shown that having fun is particularly important for keeping female participants in sport (Stewart & Taylor, 2000). In their study of ringette players, Wankel and Sefton (1989) found that winning is a frequent response to what participants enjoy about playing and therefore, not winning may lead to players leaving ringette. An additional topic that is raised in the literature on running up the score is the issue of being humiliated when playing for a weaker team. Dixon (1992, 2000) raised the question whether it is more humiliating to have the opposition intentionally not try to score, than to be outclassed on the scoreboard? Kretchmar (1984) referred to the "psychically painful embarrassment" experienced by those who endure such losses (p. 28). Hardman and his collaborators (1996, p. 59) referred to the "shame" felt by the losers suggesting that losing causes disappointment but losing by a wide margin results in "anger and embarrassment" (1996, p. 63). Feezell (1999) concluded that running up the score inflicts embarrassment and psychological pain on the opposition, and it is wrong to make the opposition suffer. Humiliation is often assumed in uneven contests. In a nationwide radio interview after the previously referred to 41-0 hockey game, the interviewer stated "the assumption is that they're being humiliated and that this is very damaging for their self-esteem--that they are little kids, they can't take this, and that this shouldn't be allowed" (CBC, 2018).

However, Dixon (1992, p. 3) argued "there is no disgrace in suffering a heavy defeat by a far stronger team" as long as you play your best. The author (1998) suggested that blowouts are not humiliating because sport is about more than just winning (and the score). Taylor and Johnson (2014) concluded that, although blowouts may cause embarrassment, humiliation, and a loss of self-esteem, that does not make them wrong as these emotions are experienced in other areas of life. Still others questioned whether it is more humiliating to lose decisively or to have your opponents intentionally play poorly or try not to score (Dixon 1992, 2000; Hardman et al., 1996). Dixon (1998) raised the issue of being humiliated by an opponent not giving a best effort.

A final issue involves the responses of the parents of the players who experience these one-sided outcomes. Parents of youth sport participants have been well studied (Kovács et al., 2022, Szalánczi et al., 2020). Research has raised the issue of whether lopsided losses bothered the parents of the players more than it bothered the players (BBC, 2014; Zhang, 2017). Zhang (2017) suggested that coaches, administrators and parents are much more upset when the score is run up; even more than the players who endure the one-sided losses. Survey questions and informal interviews were used to explore the issue of whether losing bothered the parents more than the players.

Results

This next part of the paper will examine the experiences of the Blues ringette team focusing on specific issues that have been raised in the literature regarding running up the score including dropping out of sports, humiliation, and parental experience.

Dropout rates

In the survey results from the players on the Blues ringette team, 91 percent of the respondents said they would play again the following year. An examination of registrations found that 88 percent signed-up to play the

next year. At an age when so many children quit sports, in this specific case, continuously losing did not cause players to dropout. A survey question asked why the players would play again. Some responded saying that, regardless of losing they loved playing the game (player surveys, player #2; player #4). Another referred to constantly losing by answering “we will be able to do better. . . just because we had one bad season doesn’t mean all the seasons will be like this” (player surveys, player #8). Said another “one season can’t ruin it all [but] I don’t want to have a season like that again” (player surveys, player #9).

Humiliation

In informal post-game interviews, the players on the Blues indicated that they preferred when the opponent did not run up the score. Players often became frustrated, deflated and even humiliated after giving up so many goals (player interviews, player #1; player #2; player #4). However, contrary to what the academic literature suggests (Dixon, 1992, 2000; Feezell, 1999; Hardman et al., 1996) the players were not humiliated when the opposition intentionally tried to avoid running up the score. In one game where the opponent was obviously trying to avoid running up the score, the captain and best player on the Blues in a post-game interview exclaimed “they were the best team to play against.” She explained that the opposing team played hard but did not try and run up the score (player interviews, player #1). Referring to the same game, another player on the Blues said when the opposing team passed the ring around keeping it away from the Blues while not trying to score, it allowed the Blues to practice checking and covering (player interviews, player #4). The Blues felt more humiliated by the score than the opposing team trying not to score.

However, one aspect that emerged in informal post-game interviews that was humiliating, was when the winning team would mock, gloat or ‘trash-talk’ the weaker Blues team. One player in the survey identified the attitudes from some opposing players as “Oh yeah [you] suck. We don’t even have to try” (player surveys, player #1). This is consistent with the literature as this concern was raised by Dixon (1992, 2000), Sailors (2010), and Zhang (2017).

Parental attitudes

In interviews, many of the parents of the players on the Blues said that most players seemed to accept the losses and enjoyed playing and being with their teammates (parent interviews, player #2; player #4; player #7). Some players did not show signs of discouragement despite being blown out. For example, when one player in an informal pre-game interview was asked how to approach a game when the other team had previously beaten the Blues by nine goals, the player simply replied it would be a victory to lose by only eight goals this time (player interviews, player #7).

During interviews with players it was apparent that the constant one-sided losses did affect the parents more than the players. In several post-game interviews many parents confirmed that their child was disappointed but not upset about the losses (parent interviews, player #2; player #4; player #7). This was consistent with the post-season surveys when the majority of the players said that they enjoyed their ringette season. In post-game interviews the parents expressed disappointment with the team’s performance and several indicated that they were growing reluctant to drive their child to attend games where they would lose, or drive to practices because they were not improving (parent interviews, parent #3; parent #4; parent #9).

During the season, a group of the Blues players’ parents made the decision to intentionally miss an upcoming weeknight game against a team that had beaten the Blues earlier during the season by 16 goals. There were two concerns expressed by the parents after a game: they did not want to drive 90 minutes on a weeknight in the winter, and they did not want to be humiliated again (parent interviews, parent #1; parent #3; parent #4). The disagreement was solved when the time and date of the game was changed, and the team was threatened with a \$500 fine for missing a league game.²

Discussion

In the survey, players were asked if they had fun playing ringette and 100 percent replied yes. One player explained that “[I] don’t care if we win or lose” (player surveys, player #10) while another responded “[a]lthough we only won one game, I still had a lot of fun. This year . . . made me realize that you can lose every game and still have a great time” (player surveys, player #5). Despite the academic literature theorizing an increase in players dropping out of sport would be a consequence of consistently experiencing one-sided losses (Dixon, 1992; Sailors, 2010; Zhang, 2017), that did not occur on the Blues team. In addition, the players experienced more humiliation from the one-sided scores than when teams did not play their best. However, the Blues did experience humiliation when teams would taunt or ‘trash-talk’ and this is consistent with the literature (Dixon 1992, 2000; Sailors 2010; Zhang 2017). Celebrations, taunting, and ‘trash-talking’ when the outcome is no longer in doubt can increase the level of humiliation beyond the feelings associated with just the magnitude of the loss itself (Statman, 2000). Finally, the parents of the players on the Blues were more upset as a result of consistently experiencing one-sided losses than the players. This is consistent with other research that found the parents were more interested in winning and the competitive aspect of sport than their children. One survey

² This rule is outlined in Edmonton Ringette. (2016). Rules and regulations governing ringette in Zone 6, p. 16.

found that 86 percent of children and 97 percent of parents felt that winning was more important to the parents (BBC, 2014).

Having the opposition run up the score on the Blues resulted in the players feeling discouraged but did not seem to have the traumatic affects outlined in the academic literature (Dixon, 1992, 2000; Kretchmar, 1984; Hardman et al., 1996; Sailors, 2010). However, the players did express frustration in the post-season surveys. In answering the survey question asking what they least enjoyed about the season, 82 percent replied losing, and the same percentage agreed that the team's win-loss record affected their enjoyment. One player admitted that "one lousy season can ruin a lot" (player surveys, player #9).

Conclusion

Although consistently losing by wide margins did not have the expected traumatic effects, the team did grow frustrated and therefore running up the score should be minimized or avoided. The solution to running up the score is to "use nonpatronizing methods ... to respect the wishes of their opponents" (Hardman et al., 1996, p. 64). The challenge is to find nonpatronizing methods to handicap your team and employ them in a way that does not humiliate your opponent. Taylor and Johnson (2014) agreed that in the event of an uneven contest the superior competitor must handicap themselves. "When handicapping is done well, . . . the losing party is treated in such a way that their capacities are allowed to be demonstrated" (Taylor & Johnson, 2014, p. 260). Fraleigh (1984), Dixon (1992), and Hardman and colleagues (1996) offer potential solutions including strategic easing by playing less competent players, playing players in different positions, playing to an opponent's strengths, trying to end the game sooner by running out the clock, practicing new strategies and tactics, allowing the losing team to score, or playing poorly. However, simply allowing your opponent to score is potentially humiliating and may be disrespecting the game while playing poorly is also questionable from a fair play perspective (Zhang, 2017).

To prevent running up the score in tournaments when goal differential is used as a tie breaker, a maximum goal differential might be employed where teams will not benefit from winning by more than a set number of goals. Some tournaments avoid using goal differential and instead use goals against, which encourages teams to play stronger defense and reduces the emphasis on scoring goals or running up the score. Some hockey tournaments have used fewest penalty minutes as a tiebreaker to reward teams that play fairly instead of rewarding teams that run up the score.

During the season it was apparent that different teams had different approaches. The Blues' struggles became so widely known that some teams switched players' positions even before the game started. Forwards went on defense and defenders were moved to forward. Some teams passed a certain number of times, essentially playing keep-away, to run out the clock. In post-game interviews players on the Blues indicated they preferred it when teams intentionally attempted to avoid running up the score (player interviews, player #1; player #6). Two ringette coaches interviewed said the culture in their league when one team has a seven-goal lead (the maximum goal differential allowed by the ringette mercy rule) is to play differently to avoid humiliating the weaker opponent. Weaker players are played more, players switch positions, and players are told to pass and to run the clock down (coach interviews, coach #1; coach #2). Other teams had no such culture. One team beat the Blues 19-3 and it was obvious the team was pressing to reach 20 goals as the game neared completion. In the ideal situation, the losing team does not know that the winning team is not trying its best. During one game, after the opposition obtained the desired seven-goal lead, the opposing players switched positions and started to avoid shooting on goal. The seven-goal lead remained for the rest of game. After the game, in post-game interviews, the players on the Blues conveyed how much better they had played in the latter part of the game as the goal differential did not increase (player interviews, player #1, player #8). Players on the Blues had not noticed the other team's tactics to avoid running up the score.

Mercy rules have previously been discussed as potential solutions (Sailors, 2010). Administrators can also play a role. In the subsequent ringette season, organizers responsible for the Blues' league restructured the league to avoid weaker teams playing stronger teams. Reorganizing the teams in smaller, more evenly matched leagues after the season began resulted in fewer one-sided games.

In youth sport, attempts are being made to try and reduce the emphasis placed on the score, but it still matters to some players and maybe even more to their parents. The philosophy of sport literature suggests that running up the score is not sporting. However, this research suggests that one-sided losses do not compromise enjoyment as much as the literature might suggest. In addition, it did not lead to players dropping out. The findings from this research suggest that players can still enjoy the sport and more importantly each other. Observations also suggest, and this is consistent with other literature (BBC, 2014; Zhang, 2017), that the parents seem to be much more affected by not only the losses but also by the magnitude of the losses.

This research suggests that stronger teams should try, in a sporting way, to avoid running up the score, particularly at recreation levels, to avoid feelings of humiliation. In addition, avoiding excessive celebrations and taunting may help reduce humiliation. However, this research was carried out on a recreational team. Context may be important and therefore these results may not be applicable to other, for example, more competitive, situations or different sports. More research is needed to further explore running up the score including competition at different levels, age groups, and perhaps the differences in experiences between boys and girls in youth sport.

Disclosure Statement

The author did not report any potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Online Interview Questions

1. Why do you play ringette? (list as many reasons as you want. Please put them in order from most important to least important.)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

2. Did you have fun playing ringette this year? _____

3. Do you plan on playing ringette again next year? _____

4. Why or why not? _____

5. What did you enjoy the **most** about playing ringette this year? _____

6. What did you enjoy the **least** about playing ringette this year? _____

7. Did your team’s win-loss record affect your enjoyment this year? _____