Demystifying Sport Superstition

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Abstract

The available information from sociology, anthropology, psychology and physical education as well as popular sport literature was studied in an attempt to throw light on the topic of superstition in sport. The paper attempts to summarize the work done on the topic and, from the available facts, go on to suggest logical extensions of these ideas. It points out unanswered questions and raises doubts formerly unchallenged "facts".

All indications are that superstition, in a variety of forms, is very common in sport although not always as obvious as some of the incidents described in sports columns might suggest. There are problems in investigating the subject and very little scientific research has been conducted. It appears that superstitions are natural psychological mechanisms helping the athlete to cope with the stress of the competitive situation and to perform at his best under pressure.

There are theoretical answers as to where and how sports superstitions originate and under what conditions they persist. The level and extent of involvement of the athlete in his sport emerges a key determinant of the prevalence and seriousness with which superstition is endorsed. There are variations in superstition from one sport to another, and even with the roles assumed within a sport. There is some evidence of sex differences as well.

Some good work has been done, but to date the research and theorizing on the topic has raised as many questions as it has answered.

The sport pages of our newspapers and magazines abound with athletes' superstitions. They make for interesting reading and have for some time. They have been a bothersome concern of physical educators and coaches, but not such that they have done anything about them. And, although social scientists have been studying superstition for some time, it is only in the last decade that a minimum of attention has been given to those in sport.

This paper attempts to summarize the work done on the topic and from the available facts go on to suggest logical extensions of these ideas. It points out unanswered questions and raises doubts about formerly unchallenged "facts". At best, it attempts to clarify man's present knowledge and thinking on the subject and suggests where he might look next. It attempts to remove some of the mystery from a set of behaviours about which we have long been kept in the dark.

It does not involve an analysis of the religious or magical origins or dimensions of games and play, as suggested by Simri (1975). It does not
get into magic and sorcery as practiced in Zulu soccer (Scotch, 1961),
nor even its apparent extensive use by American Indians as noted by
Fox (1961). Rather, it is concerned with the superstitions that are prac-
ticed everyday by athletes at a variety of levels in a society such as
ours. What they are, and why they are there, where they come from-
how they vary and why they persist: these are the concerns to which this
paper is addressed.

THE PREVALENCE AND SECRECY OF SUPERSTITION IN SPORT

Although the media at times would lead us to believe that all athle-
tes and everyone else connected with sport is superstitious, there are
very few statistics to support this. The problem is that although some
superstitions are obvious, many more are shrouded in secrecy. This
is not surprising, when today the idea of science approaches the sacred,
and magical practices are smiled upon as being amusing or frowned
upon as being utterly ridiculous. Holding a superstition carries a pe-
jorative taint and as a result, athletes, like others, are often reluctant
to admit or even recognize as superstition, involvement in what others
regard as nonsense (Johoda, 1969, p. 139).

One might logically think that with man's ever increasing knowledge
and raising of the average person's education, superstition would be
disappearing. Gregory and Petrie (1972), however, suggest that, "Su-
perstitions, beliefs and practices are culturally relativistic: they are
changeable under the auspices of scientific knowledge. People don't
become less superstitious with the passage of time, but rather the
nature of their beliefs changes with the times" (p. 397).

Gregory (1975) argues that her research has demonstrated that
superstitions in general, particularly those in certain classes including
sports, are better known and quite possibly more widely endorsed
today than in the past. She suggests that this may be explained in
terms of changing cultural values and belief structures influenced by
the media. With improvements in media transmission over the past
50 or so years, one's greater awareness of superstitions may be a
product of increased and rapid dissemination of these beliefs through
television, radio, movies, books, magazines and other media. The me-
dia may also have had a divergent effect upon their origins, especially
in the context of sport. For example, the schools rather than the home
environment are increasingly reported as the source focal point of
many superstitions (Gregory, 1975).

At the same time, sport, because of its very nature, is one of the
places in society wherein one might logically expect to find a pre-
valence of superstitious behaviour. The inherent lack of predictability
in the outcome of sport constitutes one of its enduring appeals. Al-
though coaches and athletes attempt to convert all factors into causal variables, a residue of chance of luck always remains. The complexity of sport guarantees that all variables can never be brought completely under control, and it is this element of chance that offers hope to the participant as well as the spectator. Regardless of the degree of planning, scouting, research, and even spying on the other team's practices, the element of chance remains central to sport (Snyder and Spreitzer, 1978, p. 13). It is this strong element of chance that accounts for the abundance of magic and superstition surrounding athletics (Gregory and Petrie, 1975). When all the chance factors cannot be brought under human control, magic and superstition are commonly invoked as coping mechanisms.

A player believing that his ability is fairly constant attributes the inconsistencies in his performance to some possibly connected piece of behaviour, a charm, a piece of clothing or something else. Superstitions appear to be a natural outcome of involvement in activities of an unpredictable and often dangerous nature. For this reason one would expect to find superstition involved to some extent in all sport.

The evidence to suggest the presence of superstition in sport in articles and stories in journals, magazines and newspapers, although somewhat conjectural in many cases, is voluminous. In examining the superstitions among Yale athletes, Becker (1975) reported examples in lacrosse, soccer, track and field, football, tennis and rowing. Gregory and Petrie (1972) in their study and review of the literature found them also among jockeys, curlers, volleyball and basketball players, race car drivers, boxers and swimmers. There are numerous accounts of superstitions in baseball (Daniel, 1962; Gmelch, 1972; Seymour, 1971) and ice hockey (Becker, 1975; Miller, 1972; Neil, 1975; O'Brien, 1971) and a little searching would probably produce them in many, if not all, sports. Samuelsen (1957) provides dozens of examples in football, basketball, golf, boxing, harness racing, baseball, tennis, bowling and diving.

It is also apparent from examination of some of these descriptions of superstitions that athletes often exhibit irrational, unfounded beliefs without recognizing them as superstitions. They often preface their remarks, when asked about such behaviour, by saying that they are not superstitious, and then proceed to describe their actions and beliefs which have no rational basis. Today Esposito is typical. When asked about his continuing to wear old, worn-out ice hockey goalie equipment during a shutout streak in 1969, he replied, "It's not because I'm superstitious, it's just that things have been going so well lately, that I don't want to change it" (O'Brien, 1971).

Or, as Samuelson (1957) has said:

Take Ted Williams. He probably would be the last to confess to any
silly superstition. He won’t even bow to the tradition of doffing his cap after hitting a homer. But Ted goes through a certain ritual whenever he has two strikes on him. He tucks the bat under his arm and pulls his cap down tight with both hands exactly the same way every time. He’s not doing it for luck? Draw your own conclusions.

One reason for the reluctance of athletes to talk about their superstitions is that our society has cultural sanctions against it. "Science" has taken on an almost mystical value for us and we like to think of ourselves as "rational" (Womack, 1979). With superstition neither scientifically founded nor explainable by rational means up until now, athletes' psychological need for relief from their particular fears and problems comes into conflict with an environment opposed to superstition. In order to minimize this conflict and remain psychologically stable, most adopt superstitious practices which can be covert (Becker, 1975).

Also, one's superstitions are often hard to talk about because of their intensely personal nature. In fact, the very mention of superstition is taboo with some athletes. They subscribe to the belief that it is bad luck to even discuss their beliefs. They say, "If I told you about it, it wouldn’t work." (Samuelsen, 1957).

Coaches, managers and even spectators have also been found to have superstitions related to sport. Professional ice hockey coach Punch Imlack was well known for his fetish of refusing to change clothes while his team was on a winning streak. Jim Fanning, general manager of the Montreal Expos baseball team, while out examining the field one day found a penny and stuck it in his shoe for "good luck". That night the Expos beat the New York Mets and the penny stayed put. Two weeks later, near the dugout, Jim found a dime and quickly slipped it into his other shoe. The Expos beat the Phillies. The season ended with the Expos winning 73 games and Fanning on the limp (O'Brien, 1971). Although less fuss is usually made of it by the media, spectators have also been noted as having superstitions concerning the sports they follow. Gregory and Petrie (1972) recorded an instance where a little girl sent Jim Hurtuise, an automobile racer hurt in accident, her lucky $2.00 bill to help him get well.

Among the few statistics available on the subject, Gregory and Petrie (1972) reported 35% of their intercollegiate subjects openly admitting to holding superstitions. Fifty-one percent of the same group stated knowing of others involved in sports who held such beliefs, but indicated that they endorsed none themselves. Of their sample of athletes, only 9.48% percent indicated that they know of no superstitions associated with sports. Their athlete subjects also listed more than twice the number of superstitions associated with sport noted by their non-athletes. The athletes, however, listed fewer general superstitions (com-
monly known non-sport superstitions) than did the non-athletes, although they were more aware of such beliefs in sport.

All the available evidence suggests that superstitions are very common in sports. Further explanations as to why this may be so and as to variations from one sporting group to another, follow.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROBLEMS

As already noted, although much has been written about sports superstitions, there has been very little serious study of the topic. A perusal of the literature indicates that although numerous studies on the theme of superstition have been conducted (Caldwell and Lundeen, 1931), very few post-date the forties and not more than half a dozen relate directly to superstition in sport.

As should already be obvious, one of the greatest problems in studying sports superstitions is obtaining meaningful data when athletes are reluctant to admit their superstitions or do not even necessarily recognize them as such. Other difficulties arise when trying to arrive at an understandable and workable definition of superstition as distinct from habit or religion.

Data collecting on behavioural patterns of a phenomenon such as this must be obtained by observation or via an unobtrusive questionnaire or interview. Direct observation supplemented with interviewing of selected athletes and sports officials has been the most common approach used by those reporting sports superstitions in the popular literature. Although providing very interesting examples and sometimes useful indepth case studies, it is a very restricted approach to the scientific study of this phenomenon. This, however, appears to have been the approach taken by Becker (1975) in her study of superstition among Yale athletes. Womack's (1979) analysis of "Why Athletes Need Ritual" was based on several years of intensive interviews with, and observations of professional athletes in baseball, football, hockey, basketball and tennis.

Jane Gregory (1973) in her master's thesis followed the basic pattern set in earlier social science investigations of superstition using a questionnaire containing force-choice, Likert-type and open-ended questions. Her study, reported in parts in three publications (Gregory and Petrie, 1972; Gregory and Petrie, 1975; Gregory, 1975), and involving 137 intercollegiate athletes and 115 non-athletes is the most extensive study reported to date on superstition in sport. Although the athletes were expected, understandably, to be reticent to admit their own endorsement of superstitions, they appear to have been relatively prepared to report of having heard of sport superstitions or of know-
ing other athletes who believed in them (Gregory and Petrie, 1972).

The fact that superstitions are often very personal practices and beliefs does not lend them to easy observation or ready reporting to just anyone. It would seem best if the observer or interviewer is well known and has the confidence of the athletes if valid information is to be obtained. Gmelch (1972), a former professional baseball player himself, obtained his data on baseball superstitions through personal observations and some interviews.

In an effort to overcome some of the methodological problems inherent in earlier studies of sport superstitions, Neil and his colleagues (1981) used a somewhat different approach with ice hockey players. Working with a limited number ($n=58$) of male and female intercollegiate and intramural players, the researchers, aided by a 24-item open-ended questionnaire, interviewed each player. The two interviewers, members of the respective varsity hockey teams and known by the majority of the intramural players they interviewed, attempted to mask the intent of the study as far as the subjects were concerned. Beyond an inquiry as to the number of years of playing hockey, the research involved questions regarding a variety of facets of behaviour relating to ice hockey routines the night before, just prior to, at game time and afterwards; equipment and clothing preferences; dressing procedures and group practices of various kinds. The questions were stated and organized so that the subjects would perceive the interview as simply a study of hockey players' behaviour. For purposes of the study, an act or belief was considered superstitious if it would bother the subject once he discovered that the action or object of his belief was absent from his hockey environment. An effort was made to clearly distinguish both habits and religious beliefs and practices from superstition. The interviewer's objective was to determine whether or not each subject had a superstition related to each interview question and also to record the nature of any such superstitions.

This approach appears to have uncovered the superstitions surrounding the behaviour to which the questions were addressed, but was also restricted by their number and nature as well as the other limitations of the interview techniques. Behaviour inventory-taking is always a problem, especially when the subjects are not sure whether to disclose their beliefs or behaviours.

Definitions are a problem in studies of superstitions as well. It is commonly accepted that superstition is a "belief that one's fate is in the hands of unknown external powers governed by forces over which one has no control" (Johoda, 1969, p. 139). This definition includes both primitive and modern religion, which can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Gregory and Petrie (1972) included certain aspects of religion in their report of sports superstitions as did Gmelch (1972).
while Becker (1975), Womack (1979), and Neil et al. (1981) appear to have excluded them.

Religion may be defined as a "formal set of beliefs used to explain the unknown to man, used to comfort him in time of stress, used to keep his ethics in focus, held together by a mythology" (Coffin, 1971, p. 40). Superstition is a belief that is outside the framework of one's formal religion.

The specific form the behaviour takes should help to clarify whether it is of a religious or superstitious nature. An athlete who goes through certain rituals as he proceeds to the site of a competition, dresses one side of his body before the other and wears a lucky charm is practicing superstition, whereas the player who says a prayer before a game may be considered to be practicing religion. If the athlete exhibits religious behaviour only while under stress in the competitive situation, the distinction of religion from superstition is again in question.

The line between habit and superstition is also often not clear and easy to identify. This poses greater problems in studies employing the observational or an indirect approach than in those involving direct questioning. It can, however, be handled through the use of an appropriate operational definition. If the changing or omission of a certain routine or object would upset or emotionally disturb an athlete, and it does not involve his formal religion, then it may be defined as a superstition. For instance, an athlete upset about having to wear a different number than usual, or not being able to wear the exact same underwear or socks, or use precisely the same bat, stick or racket is being superstitious. When athletes unfailingly proceed through certain motions before going into action, they may think that they are doing it as a warm-up, but more often than not, it is at least in part to give them the feeling of confidence from knowing that they have done all they can to ensure the desired results in the competition ahead. They have dutifully practised and trained, and now they are vying for the one element that remains — luck. This too may be considered superstition.

As in other areas of sport behaviour inquiry, serious study of superstition poses certain difficulties. They are not insurmountable, however, and the topic is filled with interesting questions awaiting answers.

**SPORTS SUPERSTITION TYPOLLOGIES**

The lack of a clearly defined and widely accepted categorization of sports superstitions has led to difficulties in communicating ideas, and to problems in comparing the results of work done on the topic. Each author has, more or less, gone his own way according to his
interests or the apparent logical organization of this data, and the reader is left to interpret the best way he can. Some schemes appear to have broader application than do others.

CLASSIFICATION BY ORIGIN

Coffin (1971, p. 41) suggests that an athlete knows three types of sport superstitions: (1) those beliefs and practices he brings with him from his main culture, (2) the long-standing superstitions of his sport, and (3) his personal superstitions or eccentricities. As well as a very meaningful and useful, although not always easy to make distinction of various superstitions, this may also be seen as an identification of the basic sources of sport superstitions. A discussion of each follows.

Frequently, close examination of a collection of superstitions connected to a sport reveals that a significant portion of them have little to do with that sport as such. The fact that a player carries a four-leaf clover or a rabbit's foot in his pocket does not necessarily make these superstitions of his sport.

The fact that the number 13 is unlucky or that walking under a ladder is risky are beliefs that go well back before the Last Supper or the idea of the Trinity. Nevertheless, because there was said to be thirteen guests at the supper which Judas shared with Christ and because walking through the triangle formed by the ladder and the wall violates the Trinity, we never bother to think why the early indoeuropeans, Norse, Greeks, Romans found 13 unlucky or why similar head taboos exist all across the world (Coffin, 1971, pp. 40—41).

There are, however, a great many such beliefs and practices which athletes bring with them to their sport and these may become part of its folklore, Gregory and Petrie (1972) found that although athletes listed fewer such general superstitions than non-athletes, they were more aware of these beliefs in sport. Gregory (1975) also found, as had earlier studies, that most such general superstitions are learned at a young age. However, these beliefs affiliated with sport became known at later ages, with 9 to 13 years being the most important time-period in their acquisition. Family, friends, school, the mass media and personal experiences were the important sources in the transmission of these beliefs (Gregory, 1975).

Although many true sport superstitions depend to some degree on other more widely held beliefs, there are others that are developed and passed on as part of a particular sports sub-culture. Gregory and Petrie (1972), as a result of their extensive study, concluded "that the majority of superstitions associated with athletes are learned through the internal social structures operating within the various sports" (p. 391). "One learns the superstitions of the sport in which he is most directly
involved..." (p. 397). Neil and his colleagues' (1981) research with players at various levels of involvement in a sport seem to lend support for this conclusion.

Naturally a great many of the superstitions encountered in sport are highly personal. Some of these customs are bizarre. Trainer Andy Lotshaw of the old Cubs jad to rub Guy Bush's arm with a secret ointment, actually, Coca-Cola, before each pitching assignment. One high school baseball coach, eventually named the Twitch, had to remove himself from the lines because his habit of touching his cap and trousers in a superstitious routine confused the base runners trying to read his signs. Sometimes an idiosyncrasy appeals to others in the group, spreads and eventually becomes one of the general beliefs associated with the game. Perhaps the idea that it is disastrous to speak of a no-hitter or a shutout began with some individual's misfortune (Coffin, 1971, p. 44).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

Gmelch (1972) in his treatment of "magic in baseball" describes superstitions under the categories of (1) rituals, (2) taboos, and (3) fetishes. In describing rituals, Gmelch says:

After each pitch, ex-major leaguer Lou Skeirs used to reach into his back pocket to touch a crucifix, straighten his cap and clutch his genitals. Detroit Tiger infielder Tim Maning wore the same clothes and put them on exactly in the same order each day during a batting streak. Baseball rituals are almost infinitely various. After all the ball player can ritualize any activity he considers necessary for a successful performance, from the type of cereal he eats in the morning to the streets he drives home on (p 130).

An ex-major league player himself, Gemelch reports:

In hopes of maintaining a batting streak, I once ate fried chicken every day at 4:00 p.m., kept my eyes closed during the national anthem and changed sweat-shirts at the end of the fourth inning each night for seven consecutive nights until the streak ended (p. 131).

As can be seen, pre-game and day-of-game rituals usually consist of ordinary behaviours which are stylized and regimented or exaggerated until they take on ritualistic characteristics (Womack, 1979).

Under the category of taboos, Gmelch indicates that mentioning that a no-hitter is progress and crossing the baseball bats are the two most widely observed. It is believed that if the pitcher hears the words "no-hitter", his spell will be broken and the no-hitter lost. As for the crossing of the bats that is sure to bring bad luck. Taboos are of many kinds, both of the traditional nature just mentioned and more per-
sonal taboos which grow out of exceptionally poor performances (Gmelch, 1972).

Fetishes, Gmelch claims, are standard equipment for many baseball players. They include a wide assortment of objects: horsehide covers of old baseballs, coins, babby pins, protective cups, crucifixes and old bats. Ordinary objects are given this power in a fashion similar to the formation of taboos and rituals. The player during an exceptionally hot batting or pitching streak, especially one in which he has gotten all the breaks, credits some unusual object, often a new possession, for his good fortune. For example, a player in a slump might find a coin or an odd stone just before he begins a hitting streak. Attributing the improvement in his performance to the new object, it becomes a fetish, embodied with supernatural power. Fetishes are taken so seriously by some players that their teammates will not touch them out of fear of offending the owner (pp. 135-136).

**GROUPINGS BY NATURE OF SUPERSTITION**

Without explaining how they arrived at their categories, or of exactly what they consist, Gregory and Petries (1972) distinguished sport superstitions from general superstitions and then proceeded to discuss sport superstitions under the sub-categories of equipment, uniform, clothes, routing, spectators, religion, numbers, hair, hands, charms, coins and food. These appear to have been simply titles under which to group the beliefs and practices seemingly associated. In a subsequent table, they include an assortment of additional sport superstitions in addition to the foregoing sub-categories.

Neil (1975) in discussing ice hockey superstitions points out that while the majority of superstitions operate on an individual level, there are certain rituals acknowledged by entire teams.

There is the common clustering together of team members before the game where they pile their gloveclad hands one on top of the other and then send forth a death defying shout. Probably the most universal hockey ritual occurs just prior to the start of the game when the players skate in front of their goal and tap the goalie on the pads for "good luck" (Neil, 1975, p. 26).

Becker (1975) has perhaps made the most concerted attempt to categorize sport superstitions or at least place them in logical groupings. Her categories are (1) clothing, (2) manner of dressing, (3) numbers, (4) practices to prevent or cure injury, (5) equipment care and use, (6) practices before and during contests, and (7) omens, premonitions and beliefs about the result of a contest. She suggests that the most common superstition among athletes involves a particular article of "lucky" clothing be it a hat, a shirt or whatever. Athletes also avoid certain
articles which they associate with bad luck. Borrowed or new clothing is also often blamed for disrupting an athlete's performance. She found that lacrosse players would not wear the school colours of the opposing team since it was believed to cause bad luck through association.

Regarding the manner of dressing, she points out that after a win many athletes attempt to repeat the order in which they dressed before that contest whether it be one side of the body before the other or some other bizarre order.

Numbers have superstitious connotations for many athletes. Becker quotes an athlete as saying that after having the same number throughout an athletic career, it became part of his personality. Athletes often favour the numbers worn by admired professional athletes in their sport. Many athletes apply the number's significance to other aspects of their lives (Becker, 1975).

Among the practices to prevent or cure injury, Becker (1975) cites an athlete who having hurt his shoulder a year before, continued to wear an elbow pad on it, not because it offered protection to the shoulder, but because he felt that it protected his right side. She quotes a hockey player, however, as saying, "I've found that if you do tape up (an injury) you'll get hit there again" (p. 150). Another athlete never got taped preventatively except on his wrists. He was particular that the tape be placed exactly five inches up his wrists, indicating that if they were taped any differently, he believed that something bad would happen.

Equipment care and use involve a variety of superstitions. As with their uniforms, athletes believe that everything must be just right in order for them to be successful. Athletes feel that they must have their own bats, their lacrosse or hockey sticks or tennis rackets. When doing poorly they change implement, but swear by it when doing well. A broken stick bat or racket means a change of luck is imminent. Gordie Howe, the leading all-time scorer of the National Hockey League, would borrow a stick from a teammate who was enjoying a scoring streak. He has even known to borrow such sticks from opponents (Neil, 1980).

Among the practices before and during contests, Becker (1975) cites an athlete not shaving until the next game if he has done well, and repeating the method of going onto the field, court or ice if he played well last time he was on. She says that the omens, premonitions and beliefs about the result of a contest are mostly in the form of maxims or aphorisms about the conditions involved in success or failure. She quotes athletes as saying: "You don't cross two sticks". "You don't talk about getting hurt". "You just don't mention stuff like 'a shut-out'. Some athletes believe they can predict the outcome of contests. A Yale
hockey player is noted as saying that the result of the first play in which he is involved is an omen for the game and that the team that gets the first good hit will probably win. In rowing, if the team bangs the riggers on the boat house or makes other mistakes in bringing the shell to the water, it is a bad omen (Becker, 1975).

Womack (1979), writing from an anthropologist’s point of view, talks about all sports’ superstitions as rituals, but then goes on to include many of the foregoing categories.

Thus, although an interesting array of sports superstitions have been collected and grouped in various ways, no single, meaningful, comprehensive typology has yet emerged. There are similarities and overlap in the categories identified, but there are also real differences which must be reconciled before a more broadly accepted classification can be arrived at. The identification of the superstitions in a wider variety of sports through sound research would help. In the meantime, the available groupings should assist in the study and further understanding of superstitions in sport.

THE PLACE OF SUPERSTITIONS IN SPORT

The fascination of the general public with this behaviour of athletes lies in its seeming contradiction to the very things that athletes are supposed to represent. When inherent ability, disciplined practice and skill are supposedly at the basis of a high level of sports performance, why do athletes resort to such seemingly nonsensical behaviour? Athletes shrug their shoulders and say that they wear their charms or carry their fetishes to bring them luck. They repeat a piece of behaviour or wear the same clothing and equipment game after game when winning not because they are superstitious, they say, but because things are going so well it does not seem right to change anything. They say that they tap their goalie on the pads and gather to give their team yell or go through some other ritual to build or maintain team morale. Occasionally a player may go so far as to say that his pre-game ritual is performed to prepare him physically and psychologically for the game (Womack, 1979). These things may all be true, but they do not provide a very complete or satisfactory answer to anyone wishing to understand the causes of such behaviour.

Sociologists tell us that most superstitions can be traced to fears experienced individually or collectively and transmitted as part of experience. Since antiquity, most irrational beliefs have been associated with human helplessness in the face of mounting difficulties and impending dangers. Fear of the unexplainable, unpredictable and destructive forces of man’s environment give rise to superstitious beliefs and overt
practices to ward off impending danger and bring good luck (Maller and Lundeen, 1934). Superstitious behaviour, then, is most commonly invoked where a high level of uncertainty and anxiety exists concerning the accomplishing of the desired ends. That is, in times of great stress one comes to believe that his fate is in the hands of unknown external powers over which he has no control. In the case of the athlete, although he may have the knowledge and skill to win the contest, he knows that there are a host of factors which he cannot control. In his uncertainty and anxiety over the outcome, his rituals, charms, fetishes and taboos give him a sense of assurance or at least help him feel that he has done all that he can.

Athletes are always anxious about winning their contests or at least excelling in performance. They want to show well, but there can be no guarantee that this will be the outcome. Dedicated practice and outstanding ability are not the only determinants of victory. In contests where the competitors are viewed as being evenly matched, victory is often thought to be the result of simply "getting the breaks". In sport, "getting the breaks" consist of things such as "fluke" goals, "cheap penalties", injuries to key players, hitting goal posts on breakaways or shooting wide of an open net. Athletes practice magical rituals to bring them good fortune and to make sure that the "breaks" develop in their favour. A latent consequence of the rituals is that they help reduce tension and fear of failure and give the player confidence (Wrigley, 1970).

Athletes can only partially regulate their physical conditions, but they can have total control over their superstitious practices. Superstitions help athletes overcome both physical and mental obstacles through a "psychological placebo" effect. These practices give them a feeling of partial control over the outcome of events and cause them to experience less anxiety than they would if they did nothing (Becker, 1975).

Confidence as well as training and conditioning are important for top athletic performance. Athletes must feel that they are in as much control of themselves and the situation as possible. The higher the level of anxiety concerning the accomplishing of the desired ends, the greater the need. Superstitious practices provide this feeling of control of their destiny and hence help give meaning and order to their lives. Through their use, athletes are able to maintain emotional balance under extreme pressure and some serve by contributing to team morale.

Or, as Womack (1979) suggests:

Mental health plays an important role in athletic success... and psychological stability is a prerequisite for consistent success in the high level athlete... The professional athlete (in particular) is faced with the necessity of maintaining emotional stability for maximum performance.
on the one hand, and he must deal with conditions of prolonged uncertainty and stress on the other. Ritual (along with other superstitious practices) can be a behavioural means for resolution of this conflict (p. 30).

Womack (1979) goes further to say that ritual, as one aspect of superstition, is ideally suited to promote a state of controlled excitement, that it allays anxiety and inspires confidence. She even suggests that the exaggeration and routinization inherent in ritual focuses the attention of the participant on the task at hand and prevents energies from being diverted to non-productive distractions. In this sense, certain individual and group sport rituals would seem to have the potential for fulfilling the need for relaxing the athlete and directing his attention to the appropriate stimuli or what Nideffer (1976, p. 228) calls "developing a passive-reflective attentional focus". In this way, it may be that the acquiring of rituals in sport is like developing natural mechanisms serving some of the same purposes as the hypnotist's voice, the mediator's mantra or the standard formula of some self-induced relaxation procedure — drawing attention away from anxiety-inducing thoughts into neutral areas. It may thus help an individual to lower arousal, avoid "choking" and aid him in directing his full attention to the task at hand. It will not help him overcome physical or skill inadequacies, but a well disciplined, highly conditioned athlete may use rituals to screen out distractions and order his world so that he is free to concentrate on the game. In this sense, superstitious ritual may indeed play a very important role in preparation of the athlete for competition.

A latent function of magic is that it may, as some authors and athletes suggest, contribute, in some instances, to team morale. Like nickname calling, superstitions can become a source of light-hearted joking behaviour that contributes to team solidarity (Wrigley, 1970).

Magic may also be used a justifying mechanism for defeat. A loss or miscue can be attributed to a ritual that was ignored or incorrectly performed, or to just not getting the breaks. Failure can always be attributed to bad luck or the unknowing omission of some seemingly irrelevant act (Backer, 1975; Neil, 1980; Wrigley, 1970).

Wrigley (1970) has also pointed out that once a ritual has become standardized, it may become a secondary source of anxiety if not performed properly.

Author-football player, J. Kramer, has a superstition associated with the act of taping his ankles. Only the teams' trainer, Jorgensen, was allowed to do the job and he always had to use a new roll of tape and throw away what was left over. Describing what developed when the pattern was interrupted, he writes: "After he finished with Horn, Jorgy began taping me. Right after he got started, Jorgy put the roll of tape
down for a second, and Ben Wilson reached over, grabbed it and took a couple of inches off. I got shook up. I have that superstition about nobody else using my tape. So I made Jorgy throw the row away and start over with a fresh roll". Kramer's reaction to the interrupted ritual indicates that he was concerned about preparing for the game properly and was taking the situation seriously (Wrigley, 1970, p. 13).

The foregoing suggests that it is unlikely that any single explanation can account for the wide-spread existence and persistence of superstition in sport. There may be multiple explanations with emphasis shifting depending on the instance and the form of the superstition involved. It may be as Womack (1979) suggests, that superstition is efficient and can achieve several ends at the same time. Or, as Wrigley (1970) suggests: "The forms and functions of the rituals also vary as the examples of magic in sport indicate".

Whether personally superstitious or not, it would seem foolish for a coach to discourage such reassuring and possibly attention-directing behaviour. Although it can never replace hard work and practice, it does appear to serve at least one and possibly several useful purposes. When all the necessary preparation has been done, the more positively and confidently one thinks and feels about a competition, the more likely is the desired outcome to be achieved. At minimum, there appears to be this "power of positive thinking" or self-fulfilling prophecy aspect of superstition in sport (Neil, 1980).

ORIGIN AND PERSISTENCE OF SPORTS SUPERSTITIONS — A MATTER OF REINFORCEMENT

The answer to the question as to the origins or sources of sports superstitions seems relatively straight-forward, although not necessarily clear in each specific instance. As already discussed, superstitions associated with a sport appear (1) to be brought by the athletes with them from their main culture, (2) to be long-standing traditions of the sport, or (3) to be personally acquired eccentricities. As Coffin (1971, pp. 40—42) has pointed out, the origins of many general superstitions of our cultures, which have found their way into sports, are left-overs from discarded "pagan" religions. The significance of crossed sticks, the four-leaf clover, the rabbit's foot or a black cat crossing one's path are but a few of the most common. Coffin (1971, p. 42) goes so far as to imply that most true sports superstitions depend to some degree on more widely held beliefs. Gregory and Petrie (1972) suggest that female, as opposed to male, athletes' higher endorsement of superstitions related to uniform, hair, team cheers, hands and social pre-game-night activities stem from general superstitions endorsed among women. A
culture's superstitions are simply adapted to fit the sporting situation and then are passed on as part of sport's subculture. The media transmit these beliefs in sport, and the spectators watching the contest associate the player's actions with these reports (Gregory and Petrie, 1972).

The acquiring of other, non-general-culture-based superstitions appears to follow fundamental laws of reinforcement in learning. They are essentially responses to prior records of success or failure. If one is performing so poorly that he cannot find any way of winning, he will probably keep trying different things and superstition will be of little importance. Success, on the other hand, leads to repetition of behaviour because it is associated with the former achievement. In most simple terms, the athletes say they do what seems to have worked best for them in the past. In other words, they try to duplicate before and during the next contest everything they did leading up to and during the last successful attempt. Or, as Fred Caviglia, a Kansas City minor league pitcher once explained:

Everything you do is important to winning. I never forget what I eat the day of a game or what I wear. If I pitch well and win I'll do it all exactly the same the next day I pitch. You'd be crazy not to. You just can't ever tell what is going to make the difference between winning and losing (Gmelch, 1972, p. 131).

Being otherwise unable to ensure the outcome of his activities, the athlete assumes or hopes for a cause and effect relationship between his superstitious behaviour and the desired result.

If one takes into account the partial reinforcement conditions under which these things occur, it is easy to understand why these responses and beliefs are persistent and difficult to extinguish. That is, the athlete is exhibiting a particular piece of behaviour when he is reinforced by scoring a goal or winning a game, so when he desires the result repeated, he again displays that behaviour. Occasionally he may again be reinforced by scoring a goal or winning and he continues to demonstrate this behaviour even though reinforcement is only intermittent. In fact, research and practical experience both indicate that behaviour thus partially reinforced originally, persists longer when not reinforced than does behaviour one hundred percent reinforced originally. Thus the athlete may persist in his superstitious behaviour when he doesn't score, is scored against and is soundly beaten several times in a row. At that point he may discover a more powerful bit of magic or blame all his problems on the referee, the coach, someone or something else (Neil, 1975; Gmelch, 1978).

"Sometimes rituals fail. When the team has a losing streak, or when the athlete goes into a slump, ritual may be renegotiated" (Womack,
1979, p. 32). If an athlete is playing poorly he is likely to try a variety of behaviour in an attempt to find a new successful combination. For example, one of the most popular rituals associated with hitting in baseball concerns tagging a particular base when leaving and returning to the dugout each inning, so when hitters are playing poorly, they try different combinations of tagging and not tagging particular bases in hopes of finding the magic formula. Other components of a hitter’s ritual may include tapping the plate with his bat a precise number of times or taking a specific number of warm-up swings with a practice bat. These too can be easily changed when necessary in an attempt to mix the magic potion and obtain the desired results (Gmelch, 1972).

When going into a slump, some athletes report not changing their "main" rituals, but merely experimenting with their "other" rituals (Womack, 1979).

Taboos observed by entire teams appear to arise from modifications of either established general superstitions of the culture such as that against crossing bats or sticks, or time-honoured traditions of the sport such as not mentioning a "no-hitter" or "shut-out". Personal taboos grow out of exceptionally poor performances which a player attributes to some particular behaviour or object. For example, uniform numbers often become taboo. If a player has a poor training camp or a bad year, he may refuse to wear the same uniform number again. On occasions when athletes are playing poorly, they often request a change of uniform during the middle of the season. Gmelch (1972) reports that some baseball players consider this so important that they will wear the wrong size uniform just to avoid a certain number or to obtain a good number.

Sometimes a taboo or another successful superstition appeals to others in the group, spreads and may eventually become one of the general beliefs associated with the sport. Perhaps the idea that it is bad luck to change bats after the second strike was once a personal superstition (Coffin, 1971, p. 44).

SPORT SUPERSTITION VARIATIONS

There are undoubtedly a number of ways that superstitions in sport vary and a host of factors which control them. A few of these have been identified and are discussed next. There are variations from one sport to another, and with the roles players assume within a sport. There appear to be variations in the endorsement of different types of superstitions and there is evidence of sex differences.
SPORT TO SPORT VARIATIONS

The most obvious variations in sport superstitions expected is in their nature from sport to sport. The empirical data from the popular literature would seem to support this, as does the one reported study on the topic. In Gregory and Petrie's (1975) study of intercollegiate basketball, volleyball, ice hockey, track and field, swimming and tennis players, it appeared that many superstitions were related to the nature of the particular sport concerned. For example, the fact that ice hockey players used more and greater variety of equipment than the other athletes in the study was reflected in the increased number of superstitions related to it. Similarly, basketball players recorded a greater number of superstitions associated with the ball, such as sinking it on the last warm-up shot. Where there was no equipment actively used by the players in the sport, such as in swimming and gymnastics, the competitor indicated that he would touch a lucky charm or say a personal phrase just before taking a dive or performing a gymnastic routine. Although many more specific differences were cited, their significance in differentiating the superstitions of various sports was not clear.

On the other hand, Womack (1979) suggests that there is a great deal of consistency from sport to sport. In discussing day-of-the-game rituals she notes eating habits, and precise ordering of the route to the game being described by baseball, football, basketball and ice hockey players. One would logically expect further research on this subject to clarify such differences from one sport to another.

Besides differences in the nature of superstitions from one sport to another, theory at least would lead one to expect variations in the prevalence of endorsement among sports. It the existence of chance, uncertainty and anxiety among participants are the basic reason for the presence of superstition, as the evidence suggests (Maller and Lundeen, 1934), and if the amount of chance, uncertainty and anxiety vary from one sport to another, then the endorsement of superstition should be expected to be greater where the elements of chance, uncertainty and anxiety are higher. Samuelsen (1957) suggests that divers are the most superstitious among aquatic athletes, but provides only anecdotal evidence of diver superstitions to back up his claim. It is not clear which other water sports he is including in his comparison, but if he is thinking mainly of swimmers, then the rationale developed above would seem to be applicable. Divers not only are vying for the honours of victory, but they also are ever conscious of the possibility of injury if they miscalculate their distance from the spring board on the way by or miss their timing in opening out of a tuck, et cetera.

If the occurrence of descriptions of superstitions in the popular sports literature is any indication, there certainly are differences from
one sport to another. With sports like football, baseball, ice hockey, basketball, golf, boxing and horse racing at the top of the list, it is difficult to know if this is due to their media coverage or a real difference in the numbers of superstitions associated with each.

VARIATIONS WITH PLAYER ROLES

Although there has been no research verification of the above, Gmelch (1972) has gone on from there to develop a rationale to suggest that the frequency of superstition varies with different roles an athlete may play within a sport. The greater the element of chance, and hence the uncertainty and anxiety involved in the task, the more prevalent the superstitions. Gmelch provides anecdotal evidence in support of this hypothesis within baseball, wherein he suggests that superstitious behaviour is much more commonly associated with batting and pitching than it is with fielding. He says:

"The pitcher is the player least able to control the outcome of his own efforts. His best pitch may be hit for a bloop single while his worst pitch may be hit directly to one of his outfielders for an out. He may limit the opposition to a single hit and lose, or he may give up a dozen hits and win ...

Hitting, too, is a chancy affair. Obviously, skill is required in hitting the ball hard and on a line. Once the ball is hit, however, chance plays a large role in determining where it will go, into a waiting glove or whistling past a falling stab.

With respect to fielding, the player has almost complete control over the outcome. The average fielding percentage or success rate of .975, compared to a .245 success rate for hitters (the average batting average), reflects the degree of certainty in fielding. Next to the pitcher or hitter, the fielder has little to worry about when he knows that better than 9.7 times in ten, he will execute his task flawlessly (Gmelch, 1972, pp. 129—130)."

In summary he says:

"Magic appears in situations of chance and uncertainty. The large amount of uncertainty in pitching and hitting best explains the elaborate magical practices used for these activities. Conversely, the high success rate in fielding, .975, involving much less uncertainty, offers the best explanation for the absence of magic in this realm (Gmelch, 1972, p. 137)."

Further evidence in support of differences in the prevalence of superstitions surrounding the various roles played in sports come from data surrounding positions such as the goaltender in ice hockey. Gregory and Petrie (1975), Womack (1979) and Neil et al. (1981) all noticed an especially high number of superstitions associated with this playing
position as is suggested by a casual examination of the examples given by sports writers (O'Brien, 1971). As the last line of defence, his role is critical in determining the outcome of the contest and yet there are a host of factors influencing the effectiveness of his performance over which he has no control. Goal tending is often also considered to be literally the most dangerous position on the team as pucks come flying at him up to 120 miles an hour (Womack, 1979). Again, it would appear to be this high risk and chance element, and consequent uncertainty and anxiety surrounding his role, that leads to the high incidence of superstition associated with the position.

There are suggestions that there is also considerable variation from one position to another in football, but opinion is divided as to where it is most prevalent. Womack (1979) quotes various players, trainers and coaches saying that it is most frequently found among everyone from kickers and quarter backs to wide receivers.

Other variations connected with the roles played in sport have also been postulated. Gmelch (1872) suggests that because pitchers only play once every three or four days, the rituals they practice are often more complex than those of hitters, and most of them, such as tugging the cap between pitches, touching the resin bag after each bad pitch or smoothing the dirt on the mound before each new batter, take place on the field.

VARIATIONS IN ENDORSEMENT WITH TYPES OF SUPERSTITION

There have been suggestions that certain types or categories of sport superstitions are more prevalent than others. Among the inter-collegiate athlete subjects of Gregory and Petrie's study (1972), it was found that superstitions relating to uniform, equipment and clothes were cited most often. Becker (1975) also indicated that the most common superstition involves wearing a particular article of lucky clothing, and this has been further corroborated by Samuelsen (1957). Neil et al. (1981) found that, among ice hockey players at various levels of play, the most common superstitions were in connection with sweater numbers and the manner of commencing the game. This was followed immediately, however, by superstitions relating to uniform and other clothing.

A hierarchy of types of superstitions beyond this has yet to be established.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN SPORT SUPERSTITIONS

Early studies indicated that women held more general superstitions than men although sport superstitions among women were practically
unknown (Conkin, 1919). Gregory, in her 1972 study, found that women college students continued to endorse more superstitions than men, but also knew of a great many related to sport. She attributed this change over the years to changes in the sources of transmission of these beliefs. Improved communication through the mass media, the recent increased involvement in sports by women and their greater exposure to the social process operative to transmit such beliefs in athletics were suggested as responsible for this change. The male athletes and non-athletes, however, listed a greater number of superstitions associated with sport than did their female counterparts (Gregory and Petrie, 1972).

Gregory and Petrie (1972) also found women to differ from men in the nature of superstitions known and endorsed. The female athletes were found to endorse a greater number of superstitious beliefs related to matters of personal appearance such as uniforms and special hair accessories when playing a game, and to socially related functions such as team cheers and pre-game-night activities than were their male counterparts. The male athletes listed more superstitions related "indirectly to business practices", equipment, religious practices and repetitive actions than did the female athletes.

When comparing males and females in the various sports, Gregory (1973, p. 95) noted that the greatest similarity between the sexes in sports superstitions occurred for the inter-collegiate ice hockey players. "However despite their close similarity, male ice hockey players were more concerned with equipment than females, and this latter group endorsed a greater number of superstitions related to uniforms" (Gregory, 1973, p. 95). Neil and associates (1981) found more ice hockey related superstitions among the male players than among the female players at both the intercollegiate and intramural playing levels, but attributed this more to the length and level of involvement of the athletes than to real sex differences. Their study, with relatively small groups, did not identify sex superstitions in the nature of superstitions endorsed. It may be, with the ever increasing involvement of women in sport, that sex differences in such matters will be less and less apparent.

LEVEL OF SPORT INVOLVEMENT. A DETERMINANT SUPERSTITIOUS BEHAVIOUR

According to Gregory and Petrie's (1972) review of the literature, "the origin of most superstitions can be traced to fears experienced individually or collectively and transmitted as part of experience" (p. 385). They suggested that although the origins of superstition may
vary, the most prominent source is related to their transmission in primary relationships as within the family, close friends or associates. This was re-affirmed by their own research findings where it appeared that the majority of superstitions associated with athletes were gleaned through the internal social structure operating within the various sports.

With a logical extension of this idea, Neil and his colleagues (1981) went on to hypothesize that the longer and greater the involvement of an athlete with a sport the greater would be his superstitions associated with it. Casual, recreational play would be expected to elicit fewer superstitions than a more formal, organized form of sport. They obtained a confirmation of their hypothesis when they found varsity men with their higher level of play, greater number of practices and games per week, and longer experience in the game exhibiting more hockey superstitions than varsity women, intramural men or intramural women hockey players. The intramural women having the lowest average years of playing experience, and a minimum of involvement with the sport (one game a week at a relatively low level of play), demonstrated fewer superstitions connected with hockey than any of the other groups. They concluded that endorsements of superstitions associated with a sport increase with involvement in that sport; involvement meaning length of contact with the activity and level of perceived importance of that involvement.

Womack (1979) appears to have made this assumption about the importance of the level of involvement when she chose to study the superstitions of professional major league athletes because, as she said, the highly stressful environment and social complexity of professional sport interaction epitomizes conditions under which one would expect to find ritual. She suggests that it is the ideal laboratory for the study of ritual, because the conditions of social complexity, ambiguity and risk are accentuated.

In further support of the level of involvement theory, Womack (1979) observed among her subjects that although ritual is marked on the day of a competition, it is not associated with practice games. She notes athletes mentioning that there is something "special" about the game, as opposed to practice, even though the form of play may be similar. The level of perceived importance, and consequent anxiety associated with practice games presumably was not sufficient to elicit the coping behaviour of superstitions among the athletes she observed.

Perhaps simply another way of making the same point was Gregory and Petrie's (1972) suggestion that there are different degrees of seriousness of belief in superstition as it affects performance in sports. It may vary from the mild enjoyment of a student's minor superstition...
of wearing a particular article of clothing in order to play a good game
to the frantic searching around the dressing room floor of the entire
Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team hunting for a pitcher's "lucky safety
pin" (O'Brien, 1971). Gmelch (1972) even reports seeing a fight caused
by the desecration of a fetish.

Before the game, one player stole the fetish, a horsehide baseball
cover, out of a teammate's back pocket. The prankster did not return
the fetish until after the game in which the owner of the fetish went
hitless, breaking a batting streak. The owner, blaming his inability
to hit on the loss of the fetish, lashed out at the thief when the latter
tried to return it (Gmelch, 1972, p. 136).

There is thus evidence to suggest that there is considerable varia-
tion in the prevalence and seriousness with which superstition is en-
dorsed in sport and that as involvement in sport increases so does the
incidence and importance of superstition.

SUMMARY

All indications are that superstition is very common in sport, although
not always as obvious as some behaviour described in sports columns
might suggest. There are problems in studying the topic and very
little scientific research has been conducted, although methods for its
accurate assessment are beginning to appear. There are a tremendous
variety of superstitions in sport, some more common than others, which
have been grouped and categorized in several ways.

Superstition appears to be a natural psychological mechanism help-
ing the athlete to cope with the stress of the competitive situations
and perform at his best under pressure. There are tentative answers
as to where and how sports superstitions originate and under what
conditions they persist. The level and extent of involvement of the
athlete in his sport appear to be major determinants of the prevalence
and seriousness with which superstition is endorsed. Exposure to the
sub-culture of the sport concerned is thus an important variable.

There are variations in superstitions from one sport to another and
even with the roles assumed within a particular sport. There is some
evidence of sex differences as well.

Some good work has been done on superstition in sport, but to date
the research and theorizing has raised as many questions as it has
answered. All of the mystery is not yet out of sport superstitions. There
is a great deal more serious study of this topic to be undertaken.
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**DEMIESTIFIKATION PREDRASSUDKA V SPORTE**

**Резюме**

Предпринята попытка освещения темы предрасудка в спорте. С этой целью проведен анализ доступной информации из области социологии, антропологии, психологии и физического воспитания, равно как и популярной спортивной литературы. Автор стремится подытожить работы, проведенные над этой проблемой и, исходя из доступных фактов, высказывает мысль о логическом рас пространении этого рода идей. В статье указываются остающиеся без ответа вопросы и вдвигаются сомнения относительно ранее неоспоримых „фактов“.

Все говорит за то, что предрасудок, в различной форме, представляет собой обычное явление в спорте, хотя не столь очевидное, как это могут внушать некоторые события, описанные в спортивных рубриках. Существуют проблемы в изучении этого предмета, научных же исследований проведено очень мало. Предрасудки являются, кажется, естественными психологическими механизмами, помогающими спортсмену справиться со стрессом состязательной ситуации и выполнять спортивное задание самым лучшим образом, несмотря на давление.

Имеются теоретические ответы на вопросы, где и как рождаются спортивные предрасудки и в каких условиях они сохраняются. Уровень и объем вовлечения спортсмена в свою дисциплину представляется как главный дeterminant превалирования и серьезности, которые подтверждают предрасудок. Наблюдается вариирование в предрасудке в зависимости от спортивной дисциплины и даже в связи с ролами, предполагаемыми в данной дисциплине. Есть некоторые доказательства также различий в аспекте пола.

Проделана немалая работа, однако до сих пор исследование и теоретизация темы породила столько же много вопросов, сколько много было выяснено.

**DIE DEMYSTIFIKATION DES ABERGLAUBENS IM SPORT**

**Zusammenfassung**

Die zugänglichen Angaben aus dem Bereich der Soziologie, der Anthropologie, der Psychologie und der Körpererziehung sowie die populäre Sportliteratur sind Gegenstand der Untersuchungen gewesen, um das Thema des Aberglaubens im Sport zu ergründen. Der Artikel stellt einen Versuch dar, die im Bezug auf das Thema geleistete Arbeit zusammenfassend darzulegen und die festgestellten Er-
gebnisse auf logische Schlussfolgerungen auszudehnen. Der Artikel verweist auf unbeantwortete Fragen und läßt Zweifel entstehen bezüglich der früher als unangefochten geltenden „Fakten“.


Im Artikel werden ebenfalls theoretische Fragen beantwortet und zwar, wo und wie der Sportaberglaube entsteht und unter welchen Bedingungen er weiterhin bestehen bleibt. Der Grad und der Umfang des Engagements des Sportlers in seiner Sportdisziplin erscheinen als Schlüsselreakte der Verbreitung und der Ernsthaftigkeit, die den Abgerlauben bestätigen. Es bestehen Unterschiede im Aberglauben je nach der Sportart und sogar im Zusammenhang mit den Rollen, die von einer Sportdisziplin übernommen wurden. Es gibt auch Befunde, was die Unterschiede unter den Geschlechtern in dieser Hinsicht anbelangt.

Hiermit wurde eine gute Arbeit geleistet, doch bis jetzt haben die Untersuchungen sowie die theoretischen Erwägungen ebenso viele Fragen aufgeworfen wie viele sie beantwortet haben.

LA SUPERSTITION DANS LE SPORT

Sommaire

Les informations disponibles fournies part la sociologie, l'anthropologie, la psychologie et l'éducation physique ainsi que par les publications populaires sportives ont été so mises à l'étude pour mettre en lumière le sujet: la superstition dans le sport. Les tentatives des journaux à présenter en résumé le travail accompli en cette matière, à l'appui de certains faits, suggèrent l'expansion logique de ces idées. Ceci indique les questions restées sans réponse et suscite des doutes au sujet des „faits“ précédemment non contestés.

Toutes les indications prouvent que la superstition, dans toute la variété de ses formes, apparaît fréquemment dans le sport bien qu'elle ne soit pas toujours aussi visible comme pourraient le suggérer certains incidents décrits dans les colonnes réservées au sport dans les journaux. L'analyse du sujet implique des problèmes, et les recherches scientifiques sont rarement poursuivies dans ce domaine.

Il paraît que les superstitions sont un mécanisme psychologique permettant à l'athlète de surmonter le stress de la situation compétitive et de s'assurer les meilleures performances.

Il y a des réponses théoriques en ce qui concerne l'origine des superstitions sportives et les conditions dans lesquelles elles persistent. Néanmoins, c'est de l'engagement personnel de l'athlète dans son sport, qui émerge le principal déterminant de la fréquence et du sérieux par lesquels la superstition s'affirme. La superstition varie en fonction de la discipline sportive et même des rôles joués dans le sport. Certaines différences liées au sexe sont également évidentes.

Un bon travail a été fait, mais jusqu'à ce temps les recherches et le théories ont soulevé à ce sujet autant de questions que de réponses qu'il a données.