RESEARCH TOPIC

Superstition is used as an attempt to control for the uncontrollable. Naturally, it has a strong hold on sports, especially in competition. The idea is that the athlete has some attribute, other than skill, that he/she can grasp to ensure success.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

❖ Does the importance of the athlete’s superstition increase as the level of competition, i.e. playoffs, increases?
❖ Does the prevalence of the athlete’s superstition increase as the level of competition increases?

LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ All stories presented in Burger’s book include a superstition, an attempt to deviate from the superstition, and reinforcement for the superstition. The book fails to explain whether or not the behavior increases or becomes more intense, but rather just notes that the players rely more heavily on the superstitions.

In 2005, Burger and Lynn conducted a study on the superstitions of Japanese and American baseball players.
❖ The researchers hypothesized that the Americans would show a greater tendency towards superstition than the Japanese because American players focus more on personal gains while Japanese players focus more on the team.
❖ Both groups agreed that baseball is mostly a game of luck and proved how important and prevalent superstitions are in chance situations.
❖ Researchers found that while American players had more superstitions and practiced them more frequently, Japanese players believed the superstitions were more effective than American players.

Skill level and difficulty of task as related to sport superstition were called into question during a study by Wright and Erdal (2008).
❖ Researchers conducted a study of undergraduates, asking them to putt a golf ball from a 3.5-foot distance and a 9-foot distance. Participants were able to pick a color of golf ball to use for each putt. The researchers noted the color each person chose for each putt to determine whether or not they showed a superstition after a made putt.
❖ The results showed that the participants who showed a low skill level (as determined by practice putts) also showed more superstition at the shorter distance putt. They showed little superstition at the longer distance. Those with a greater skill level showed a greater superstition level at the longer putt than the shorter.
❖ The consensus among researchers is that the high skill level putters felt confident about the short putt and more uncertain about the longer putt. The lower skill level showed more superstition at the short putt because they found uncertainty even with the short distance.

METHODS

There are many ways to assess this question. There are experiments to view these superstitions in action by creating false competitions and noting repetitive behaviors. Another method could be a simple survey asking the prevalence or importance of superstitions to the athletes themselves. For the purpose of this study, a manipulated combination of the two methods would be best. A survey would be given to baseball teams, football teams, and various individual athletes. The survey would simply ask for the athlete’s choice sport, any behaviors or routines that they find to provide luck or increased skill, frequency of these events, and whether or not they believe them to be effective. The next step would be to select players that have routines that they truly believe to be effective. The final step of the study would be an observation of these players at practice, at a normal competition, and hopefully a competition of higher importance like the World Series, the Super Bowl or the Olympics. Each observation of the athletes demonstrating their personal behavior would be documented and compared in a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

REFERENCES


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