

The Ethical Reference of Sports Practices among Emirati Youth

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Abstract

This study addresses the ethical framework of sports practices among Emirati youth, through an analysis of the values and principles that guide sports behavior in light of religious teachings and the national culture of the United Arab Emirates. The study started from the premise that sports are not merely a physical activity, but rather an educational tool that contributes to building moral character and strengthening national belonging. The study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach in reviewing the theoretical concepts related to sports ethics, and examining the role of educational, sports, and media institutions in instilling these values in the youth. The research results showed that sports ethics in Emirati society are rooted in Islamic principles and authentic social values, and that they express an extension of the national and human identity that the state seeks to consolidate in rising generations. The study also revealed that sports practices effectively contribute to developing values of cooperation, discipline, and respect. However, they face contemporary challenges that require greater awareness and guidance. The study concluded that strengthening ethical standards in Emirati sports necessitates the cooperation of all relevant parties families, schools, clubs, and the media in instilling positive values and sportsmanship, in line with the nation's vision of building a conscious, creative, and ethical generation committed to the ethics of sports.

Keywords: Ethical Standards, Sports Ethics, Emirati Youth, Islamic Values, National Identity, Sportsmanship, Physical Education, Fair Play

Introduction

Sport is widely recognized as one of the most significant human activities contributing to the development of both individuals and societies. Beyond its role in enhancing physical fitness and athletic performance, sport constitutes a powerful social and educational arena for the cultivation of ethical and moral values. Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that sustained engagement in organized sports positively influences youth behavior by reinforcing

values such as respect, self-discipline, cooperation, and fair play, while also reducing tendencies toward antisocial conduct (Al-Houti & Youssef, 2023; Smith & Stewart, 2022). These findings highlight sport as a critical mechanism for value transmission in contemporary societies undergoing rapid social and cultural transformations.

Within the context of the United Arab Emirates, sport occupies a strategic position in the national vision for human development and youth empowerment. Empirical research conducted in Gulf societies indicates that sports programs aligned with cultural and religious values contribute significantly to strengthening national identity and ethical commitment among young people (Al-Mansouri, 2021; Hassan et al, 2022). In line with these findings, the UAE leadership has invested extensively in the sports sector, recognizing its role not only in physical development but also in nurturing a generation characterized by sportsmanship, ethical awareness, and adherence to moral standards rooted in Islamic teachings and authentic Emirati traditions. However, despite these efforts, recent studies have also pointed to emerging challenges such as excessive competitiveness, commercialization, and media influence that may negatively affect ethical conduct in sports contexts (Rahman & Ismail, 2023).

Building on and responding to this body of empirical literature, the present study aims to examine the ethical framework governing sports practices among Emirati youth. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the value-based dimensions of sports ethics as derived from Islamic culture and traditional Emirati social norms, while assessing the role of educational institutions, sports organizations, and media platforms in reinforcing these values. The scope of the study is limited to youth sports within the UAE, with a particular focus on ethical behavior, value formation, and contemporary challenges affecting sports ethics. By doing so, this research contributes to existing scholarship by contextualizing global empirical findings within the Emirati setting and by proposing practical approaches to strengthening sports ethics in alignment with the UAE's vision for sustainable social and moral development.

Concept of Sports Ethics

Sports ethics are considered one of the fundamental pillars in building sound sports practice, as they represent the standard that determines the behavior of individuals and groups during participation in sports activities, whether they are players, coaches, or spectators. Ethics in the sports field are not merely adherence to laws or regulations; rather, they constitute a system of noble values and principles that guide behavior and ensure that competition becomes a means of education and development rather than conflict or fanaticism (Al-Salawi, 2022).

From a linguistic perspective, the word "ethics" is derived from the verb "khalafa", meaning to improve oneself and adorn one's character with virtuous qualities. In terminology, ethics refer to a set of values and standards that regulate human behavior and guide it toward goodness and righteousness. When these concepts are applied in the sports domain, they focus on directing athletes toward fair conduct, respect for others, commitment to team spirit, and avoidance of negative behaviors such as cheating, violence, or mocking opponents (Murad & Al-Shaib, 2021).

Sports ethics express the educational dimension of sport, granting sports practice its human and noble meaning. Competition, in its essence, is not merely a battle for victory, but rather an opportunity to demonstrate values, appreciate effort, and accept defeat with high sportsmanship. Therefore, the true purpose of sport can only be achieved when it is practiced within a framework of discipline, mutual respect, and justice.

Key Ethical Principles in the Sports Field

1. **Respect:** Respect is considered the cornerstone of sports relationships. It includes respect for oneself, teammates, coaches, referees, spectators, and even sports equipment. An athlete who demonstrates respect understands that their opponent is not an enemy, but rather a partner in achieving the enjoyment of competition. Through this principle, values of tolerance and mutual appreciation are instilled in young people, reflecting an integral part of authentic Emirati culture (Abu Al-Khair, 2025).
2. **Justice (Fairness):** Justice means equality of opportunity and recognition of every participant's right to fair competition. The absence of justice leads to a loss of trust in sport as an educational system. Justice is manifested in referees' neutrality, coaches' fairness in selecting players, and athletes' avoidance of cheating or manipulation. This principle is considered one of the most important foundations for preserving the integrity and credibility of sport (Zyoud, 2015).
3. **Cooperation:** Sport, by its nature, is a collective activity aimed at achieving a common goal; therefore, cooperation represents a central value in any successful team. Cooperation is reflected through coordination of efforts, providing assistance to teammates, and prioritizing the collective interest over individualism. It also contributes to strengthening the spirit of belonging and citizenship among Emirati youth by promoting teamwork (Abdel Razek, 2021).
4. **Discipline:** Discipline is a form of behavior that reflects commitment to the rules, regulations, and standards governing sports activity. A disciplined athlete respects training schedules, responds to their coach's instructions, and maintains fitness and proper conduct both on and off the field. Discipline is among the values that intersect with Islamic and national principles, such as respect for time and obedience within the framework of responsibility (Al-Qaisi & Al-Houri, 2024).
5. **Fair Play:** Fair play is the principle that embodies the essence of sports ethics. It signifies honorable competition free from cheating, violence, and abuse. A true athlete does not seek victory at any cost, but rather strives to achieve it through effort, creativity, and respect. Fair play is closely linked to the sporting conscience, which guides behavior even in the absence of external supervision (Izyan & Qarmash, 2022).

In summary, sports ethics constitute the framework that makes sport a means of educating the individual before being a means of winning championships. They reflect the level of societal awareness, highlight the civilizational values upon which society is built, and serve as an indicator of human ethical and cultural development.

Ethical Reference in Emirati Culture

1. Religious Roots of the Ethical Reference

The ethical reference in Emirati society derives its foundation from the Islamic religion, which is considered the primary source of values and behaviors across all aspects of life, including the sports field. Islam encourages noble morals such as patience, justice, honesty, respect,

and cooperation—values that also form the essence of sports ethics. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “I was sent only to perfect good morals,” a statement that emphasizes that the goal of education, including physical education, is to build a person endowed with the finest qualities. Moreover, the principle of fair competition upon which sport is based aligns with the Almighty’s words: “And for that let the competitors compete” (Surat Al-Mutaffifin: 26), indicating that competition is commendable as long as it is for goodness and within an ethical framework (Abdel Razek, 2021).

Accordingly, the sports practices of Emirati youth stem from a religious value system that promotes upright behavior, respect for oneself and others, and the achievement of goals through legitimate effort rather than cheating or transgression.

Emirati Social and Cultural Values

Emirati society is distinguished by an authentic system of social values deeply rooted in its history and culture, such as generosity, chivalry, respect, commitment, and loyalty to the الوطن and leadership. These values are not confined to daily life but extend to sports practice as well (Abdel Fattah, 2022).

The Emirati athlete is therefore expected to reflect these values in their behavior, as they represent the identity of their country. Society also views sport as a means of embodying national unity and cohesion, rather than merely a competition for winning results.

It is also noteworthy that Emirati culture encourages moderation in behavior and discourages extremism or violence, which aligns perfectly with the concept of sportsmanship based on self-control and graceful acceptance of outcomes.

The Role of Institutions in Reinforcing the Ethical Framework

- a. The Family: The family is considered the first institution responsible for instilling moral values in children. Youth who receive upbringing from an early age based on respect, cooperation, and discipline tend to show greater commitment to proper sports behavior. The family also contributes to guiding children toward practicing sports for the purpose of personal development rather than merely seeking fame or financial gain (Al-Houti & Youssef, 2023).
- b. The School: The school plays an important role in moral education through curricula and sports activities. Physical education is not an end in itself, but rather a means of reinforcing values such as teamwork, justice, and discipline. Educational programs in the United Arab Emirates also emphasize national values and Emirati identity, making sport an integral part of comprehensive human development (Al-Salawi, 2022).
- c. Sports Clubs and Institutions: Sports clubs are considered an ideal environment for instilling ethics, as they combine physical training with behavioral discipline. Accordingly, official bodies such as the General Authority of Sports and the National Olympic Committee pay great attention to promoting positive sports behavior by organizing workshops and awareness programs for youth and coaches (Murad & Al-Shaib, 2021).
- d. Sports Media: Sports media plays a dual role: it can enhance ethical values through objective coverage, but it may also provoke negative behavior if it focuses on sensationalism and excessive rivalry. In the UAE, media outlets are keen to present sports role models that embody national and positive values (Abu Al-Khair, 2025).

National Identity and Sportsmanship

The United Arab Emirates links the practice of sport with national belonging. Every sporting achievement is regarded as a representation of the nation's name and flag, which places a great ethical responsibility on athletes in their conduct both on and off the field. Therefore, Emirati national identity itself constitutes an ethical reference, based on principles of loyalty, responsibility, teamwork, and respect for others—values deeply rooted in the philosophy of the state and its society (Zyoud, 2015).

The Impact of Sports Practices on Building the Moral Personality of Emirati Youth*Sport as an Educational Tool for Personality Development*

Sport is considered one of the most important educational means that contribute to developing youth personality and refining their social and moral behavior. It is not merely a physical activity, but a school of life in which individuals learn how to deal with success and failure, exercise self-control, respect rules, and assume responsibility. Through sports practice, Emirati youth acquire a set of positive traits such as patience, discipline, perseverance, and teamwork—values that strengthen their character and are reflected in their behavior within society (Al-Qaisi, 2024).

Participation in sports activities also helps youth build self-confidence and engage positively with others, while fostering leadership and cooperation skills. These qualities align with the UAE's vision of preparing a generation of leaders characterized by high moral standards and national responsibility.

Moral Values Generated Through Sports Practice

Sports practice contributes to instilling a range of core moral values among youth, most notably (Izyan & Qarmash, 2022):

- a. Mutual Respect: Sports activities train individuals to respect opponents, referees, coaches, and spectators. This enhances the spirit of tolerance and acceptance, which represents a fundamental pillar of the multicultural Emirati society.
- b. Emotional Control: Sport teaches youth how to control anger and impulsiveness, especially in challenging competitive situations. This reflects psychological and moral maturity that helps them cope with the pressures of daily life.
- c. Sense of Responsibility: Through commitment to training and participation in competitions, youth learn the importance of taking responsibility for their actions and performance outcomes, whether success or failure. Failure in sport is viewed as a learning experience rather than a source of frustration.
- d. Teamwork and Team Spirit: Team sports, in particular, develop communication and cooperation skills among youth and instill the value of sacrifice for the sake of the team—a trait directly linked to the principle of national unity and cohesion that characterizes the United Arab Emirates.
- e. Justice and Integrity: Fair sport rejects cheating and manipulation and emphasizes that true success is achieved through legitimate effort. Through regular practice, the concept of justice becomes firmly rooted in youth consciousness as a general life and moral value (Abdel Fattah, 2022).

3. The Role of Sports Institutions in Instilling Values: Sports institutions in the UAE—including clubs, training centers, and sports schools—play a pivotal role in guiding youth behavior and

enhancing their moral awareness. They do not limit their mission to developing physical skills, but also strive to nurture well-rounded personalities.

Official bodies such as the General Authority of Sports and the National Olympic Committee place great emphasis on ethical awareness programs that integrate physical training with values-based education. Workshops and educational courses are also organized with the aim of instilling principles of fair play, respect, and responsibility in young athletes (Al-Salawi, 2022).

4. Contemporary Challenges Facing Sports Ethics: Despite the significant development of the Emirati sports sector, ethical values face several challenges, most notably:

- The pressures of professionalism and financial gains, which may push some athletes toward unfair competition.
- The influence of media and social media, where excessive focus on fame and results can lead to a decline in the educational values of sport.
- Cultural globalization, which may transmit behavioral patterns alien to authentic Emirati values (Murad & Al-Shaib, 2021).

Therefore, it becomes essential to enhance awareness of the importance of sports ethics through integrated educational and media programs that maintain a balance between athletic ambition and moral commitment.

5. Sport and National Identity: In the UAE, sport is not merely a recreational activity, but a means of reinforcing national identity and strengthening a sense of belonging to the الوطن. Every sporting achievement is considered a representation of the state's values before the world, making youth commitment to sports ethics a practical embodiment of positive citizenship and social responsibility. Thus, ethical sports practice contributes to preparing an aware Emirati generation that is proud of its values and culture and capable of representing its country honorably both domestically and internationally (Al-Houti & Youssef, 2023).

Discussion of Results

Sports ethics represent a fundamental pillar in the formation and development of the personality of Emirati youth. Regular participation in sports activities plays a significant role in reinforcing essential moral values such as respect for others, self-discipline, cooperation, and justice. Through continuous engagement in sport, young people acquire behavioral patterns that extend beyond the playing field into their daily lives. In this sense, sport functions not only as a physical activity aimed at promoting health and fitness, but also as an effective educational and moral tool that contributes to the holistic development of individuals.

The ethical framework of Emirati sport is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and the national cultural heritage of the United Arab Emirates. Values derived from Islam, including honesty, fairness, tolerance, and respect, together with authentic Emirati traditions such as chivalry, solidarity, and team spirit, form a solid moral foundation that guides the behavior of young athletes. These religious and cultural references provide clear standards of conduct and serve as a moral compass that shapes attitudes, interactions, and decision-making within the sporting environment.

Educational, sports, and media institutions play a complementary and integrated role in the promotion and reinforcement of sports ethics among youth. The family lays the initial groundwork by instilling values and guiding behavior from an early age, while schools reinforce these values through educational programs and organized sports activities. Sports clubs further contribute by providing practical contexts in which ethical principles such as fair play, respect for rules, and teamwork are applied and practiced. In addition, the media has a powerful influence in shaping public awareness by highlighting positive role models, promoting ethical behavior, and discouraging negative practices, thereby strengthening young people's commitment to honorable competition.

Despite their importance, sports ethics face a number of contemporary challenges in the modern era. The pressures associated with professionalism, the intense influence of media, and the effects of cultural globalization may sometimes weaken adherence to ethical values, particularly when success and competition overshadow moral considerations. If these challenges are not addressed through well-designed educational initiatives, awareness campaigns, and value-based training programs, there is a risk that ethical principles may gradually lose their influence within the sporting context.

Sport also serves as an important means of reinforcing Emirati national identity. The ethical behavior of athletes reflects the image of the nation on regional and international platforms, making moral conduct a matter of collective and national responsibility. Adherence to sports ethics therefore becomes an expression of belonging, loyalty, and pride in the United Arab Emirates, as well as a reflection of commitment to its values, culture, and wise leadership.

It is recommended that moral education be systematically integrated into physical education curricula at both school and university levels. This integration should go beyond theoretical instruction to include practical activities and discussions that emphasize values such as respect, fairness, responsibility, and teamwork, thereby ensuring that ethical development accompanies physical and technical training.

There is also a need to organize comprehensive awareness and media campaigns that focus on promoting positive sports role models and highlighting examples of fair play and honorable competition. Through television, social media, and other communication platforms, these campaigns can shape public attitudes, inspire young athletes, and reinforce the importance of ethical behavior in sport.

In addition, coaches and sports administrators should receive specialized training in the principles and methods of moral education within the sporting environment. By equipping them with the necessary pedagogical and ethical skills, they can more effectively guide athletes, address unethical behavior, and create a sporting culture that prioritizes values alongside performance.

Furthermore, strengthening the role of the family and the wider community is essential in monitoring sports-related behavior and reinforcing national and moral values. Families and community institutions can provide continuous support and guidance, ensuring consistency between what young people learn at home, in educational settings, and within sports organizations.

Finally, it is recommended to organize annual sporting competitions and events that recognize and honor athletes who excel in conduct and ethical behavior, not solely in competitive results. Such initiatives would reinforce the message that moral excellence is as important as athletic achievement and would encourage athletes to embody ethical values both on and off the field.

Conclusion

Sports ethics represent the essence of sound sports practice, as they grant sporting activity its human and educational dimension and transform it from mere competition for victory into a means of personality development and value enhancement. Through the discussion presented in this research, it has become evident that the ethical reference of sports practices among Emirati youth stems from an integrated system of religious, social, and cultural values that form the foundation of the national identity of the United Arab Emirates.

Islam, as the primary moral reference, instills values of justice, respect, and honesty in individuals' values that also constitute the pillars of upright sports behavior. Likewise, Emirati society, with its rich heritage and authentic traditions, has contributed to reinforcing meanings of chivalry, cooperation, and discipline, making sports ethics a natural extension of Emirati culture. Educational, sports, and media institutions emerge as key environments for developing ethical awareness among youth by instilling team spirit, commitment to rules, and positive engagement with competition.

The study has demonstrated that sport is an effective tool for building a balanced moral personality, as it teaches youth self-control, responsibility, respect for others, and acceptance of results with sportsmanship. However, certain contemporary challenges such as the pressures of professionalism, media influence, and cultural globalization necessitate intensified efforts to protect authentic sports values.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that strengthening the ethical reference in Emirati sport requires integrated cooperation among the family, school, clubs, and media, with an emphasis on values-based education alongside physical training. Only through this approach can an Emirati sporting generation be developed one that upholds high moral standards and represents its nation in the best possible manner across all fields.

In light of the in-depth treatment this study provides regarding the ethical reference of sports practices among Emirati youth, its contribution to the research community can be identified in several fundamental directions. First, the study redirects academic attention toward the ethical dimension of sport as a structural component in shaping national identity and social behavior a dimension often overlooked in favor of technical or physical aspects. Second, the study offers an integrated theoretical framework that links Islamic values, Emirati social traditions, and the requirements of modern sport, thereby enriching the literature on sports ethics in Arab and Gulf contexts. It also helps bridge a research gap related to the scarcity of studies focusing specifically on Emirati youth and the role of educational, sports, and media institutions in shaping their moral awareness. Finally, the study provides a foundation upon which future research can build in areas such as sports policy, national identity reinforcement, and the development of educational programs that utilize sport as a tool for value formation, making it a qualitative addition to the academic community and to policymakers.

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