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Chapter

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Book [Global Sport Management](#)

Edition	1st Edition
First Published	2016
Imprint	Routledge
Pages	29
eBook ISBN	9781315388663



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ABSTRACT

It has variously been argued out that sport is as old as the human race. Thus, within the African continent in general, games and sports have been in existence since time immemorial and they have all along occurred in a variety of forms and models. A distinction has therefore been made between African indigenous games/sports on the one hand and modern or contemporary games/sports in Africa on the other hand. Thus, it is vital that, right from the onset, operational definitions are offered for the words and terms used in this chapter. First and foremost, games are defined among many other ways, as a set of non-verbal signs of communication. They are also cultural actions that depict achievements of human groups and have socially approved functional inclinations. Whenever they are played, they enhance acquisition of skills and attributes that are required for all-round maintenance of life for everyone. This holds true for both indigenous games as well as modern games as explained in the abundantly available literature (Adams, 1991; Kenyatta, 1992; Wanderi, 1999, 2001; Wanderi, Kithuka and Mwenda, 2013). Two of the most commonly occurring words in this chapter are games and sport/ sports. To start with, most authors, including in this chapter, use the words games and sport or sports synonymously. The word game is also seen to synonymously refer to some sport and involves activities performed either formally or informally. Participation in a game or a sport may be directed by one or a combination of some interrelated factors, such as the need for physical fitness, fun, relaxation, leisure, prestige, recognition, status or other similar motives (Ituh, 1999; Wanderi, 2001; Wanderi et al., 2013). A game or a sport may be competitive or noncompetitive in performance. Participants may win or lose in such sportive activities due to one or a combination of several factors that include a high or low skill level, good or poor strategy or even luck factors (Ituh, 1999; Wanderi, 2001). However, on other instances, some authors use these two words differently and are said to refer to physical activities in a continuum. This continuum ranges from 'play' as the lowest form of activity, and

mostly unstructured, to 'games' at a middle level, while 'sports' are at the highest level on the continuum and are most structured activities with very definite rules. Another term, 'physical education or PE' is also used in this paper to refer to the didactic aspects of training students on the sportive physical activities in line with a specified curriculum. This form of training or teaching may take place at a basic school, a secondary school, a college or a university. Finally, to bridge the gap between all these definitions is the definition of 'sport' by UNICEF (2004, p. 1), which defines sports as 'all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental wellbeing and social interaction. These include play; recreation; casual, organized or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games'. UNICEF (2004, p. 1) further says that sport 'involves rules or customs and sometimes competition. Play – especially among children – is any physical activity that is fun and participatory. It is often unstructured and free from adult direction. Recreation is more organized than play, and generally entails physically active leisure activities. Play, recreation and sports are all freely chosen activities undertaken for pleasure' (UNICEF, 2004, p. 1).