

Participating in Paintball: Adventure or extreme sport?

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Abstract

According to Jessica (2012) paintball is recognised as one of the world's most exciting outdoor participation sports. Paintball is played in over 104 countries by millions of men and women of all ages and lifestyles. Whether homemakers or high-school students, professionals or retirees, all paintball players share in common a love for adventure and a strong competitive spirit. Some confusion exists in industry and amongst players on whether paintball is an adventure or extreme sport as well as terminologies used. The article serves to analyse and clarify the unique terminologies used in paintball and debate classification of paintball as either an adventure or extreme sport. A detailed description of equipment used, player categories as well as formats that are employed are discussed so as to elucidate for readers who are unfamiliar with paintball.

Keywords: Paintball; sport; adventure sport; extreme sport, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Paintballing was invented by North American lumberjacks to mark trees designated for felling. It wasn't long before one of them took aim at a colleague (Woods, 2011:50). Paintball is a sport in which players compete in teams or individually to

eliminate their opponents by marking them with breakable capsule (0.68 calibre) containing water soluble dye (called a paintball) which is propelled (300ft/sec) by a device called a paintball marker (gun). According to Muhlestein (2012) paintball is a sport.

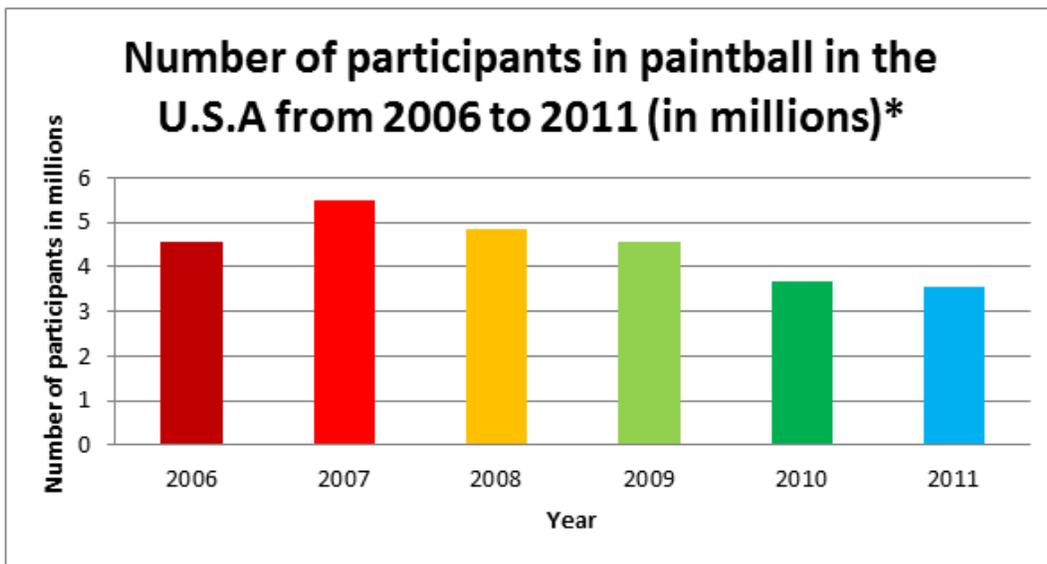


Figure 1: Number of participants in paintball in the United States of America from 2006 to 2011 (Source: Outdoor Foundation, 2010)

It is composed of opposing teams, fixed objectives and requires physical activity and fast-paced movement. Paintball is a world recognised sport played at various local, regional, national and international level tournaments by professional and semi-professional players. According to “Paintball Statistics”, paintball is played in over 104 countries by 2002. Paintball markers sold in the United States per month numbered 67 000 during 2004. Most recent statistics show that the sport has passed its peak in 2007 and has settled on roughly 3.5 million participants in the United States in 2011. Due to its global size, uniformed statistics are all but impossible to gather.

The application of paintball technology is widely used by law enforcement, military forces and security organisations for training and demonstration purposes. By replacing the paintballs with rubber or solid shot balls the markers can be used for non-lethal crowd control and subduing of dangerous suspects.

Paintball can be played in any indoor or outdoor environment. Games are normally played outside on specially prepared fields with natural or artificial terrain or obstacles which player use for cover and concealment. The objectives found at paintball events are as diverse as the scenarios that can be played. The most common are capture the flag, elimination, defending and attacking or capturing of objectives. Depending on the game played, field size and number of players a match can last from seconds to hours or even days in scenario play such as the D-Day invasions scenarios. An example of the biggest paintball event in the United States is the annual Oklahoma D-Day event which attracts over 4000 participants each year from across the globe (D-Day Adventure Park, 2013).

Literature searches revealed a lack of academic literature on paintball which makes comparisons with difficult (Google scholar, Emerald, EBSCO HOST). Industry related literature is diverse and terminologies (bushball, woodsball, scenario, MilSim) fragmented. The author has observed a conflict in the various terminologies used in paintball which often causes confusion amongst players and their expectation of the events they take part in. An example is scenario paintball, which leads to describe a situation or challenge that needs to be overcome but often only entails two teams shooting at each other till one side wins. By establishing standard definitions for the various forms of paintball industry can move towards a uniformed language which will improve the quality of events and participant satisfaction.

TERMINOLOGY/DEFINITIONS OF EQUIPMENT USED IN PAINTBALL

Marker\Gun

A paintball marker is the main piece of equipment in the sport of paintball. Markers come in all shapes and sizes depending on their costs and intended use. Realist players will use markers that are modelled on authentic military rifle and use an actual magazine to load paintballs. Other paintball markers such as the Tippmann Bravo One resemble an American M4 Carbine. The Bravo One is licensed and endorsed by the United States Army and is used by them for training purposes. Casual players will use whatever is available for rent at the paintball field. This normally consists of a basic paintball marker. Speedballers will use fast firing paintball markers that bare a resemblance to the ones used by casual players. Speedball markers have no peripherals (making them lighter) and shoot semi-automatic with a standard limit set on 12.5 balls per second (hence the name speedball). Markers work on the simple principle of using expanding gas such as CO₂ to propel paintballs down a barrel.

Mask

Masks serve to protect the wearer from facial injuries should a paintball hit them. The wearing of a paintball mask is mandatory at any paintball event.

Paintballs

Paintballs are industry standardised capsules measuring 0.68 calibres which contain a water based dye. The capsules are designed to break upon impact and leave the dye on the person hit. Being hit by such a projectile can be painful but becomes manageable over time.

Air\CO2 Tanks

Compressed air or CO₂ are stored in air tanks. These tanks vary in size from as small as 4oz to 24oz. The tanks are screwed onto a valve on the paintball marker which controls the flow of air released to shoot the paintball.

Hopper

Hoppers attach on the side of a marker. Paintballs are put into them which then rely on gravity to feed the paintballs into the marker for shooting.

Magazine

An increasingly popular form of paintball requires the use of a magazine instead of a hopper to improve realism and challenge.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Sport Tourism

Sport tourism has become an increasingly competitive market in the tourism industry and contributes directly to a countries national economy, especially when hosting major international sport events such as the Olympic Games, World Cup Soccer, Rugby or Cricket. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) global international tourist arrivals are expected to grow by four percent annually until 2020 (UNWTO, 2012). The Sports tourism is at the heart of tourism growth (show SA trends) and as the fastest growing sector in the global travel and tourism industry, accounted in 2008 for an astonishing US\$600 billion or ten percent of the international tourism market Worlds Sports Destination Expo (2010). Sport tourism is classified as the travel away from home to participate in a sporting activity for recreation or competition; travel to watch sport; travel to visit a sport attraction (George, 2013:565). The Sport and Tourism Division of Australia (2010:12), defines sport tourism is a niche market which can be broadly described as a tourism activity generated by participation in sporting activity. Sport tourism can involve attending a sporting event or competition, a tour of a sporting facility or a training camp. Participation might involve being a competitor/participant, official, or spectator. Furthermore sport tourism refers to travel which involves either viewing or participating in a sporting event staying apart from their usual environment.

Participatory sport tourists travel to destination to play sport. They make use of tourist transport, accommodation and visitor attractions. Family and friends usually accompany participants to such events. All of these people contribute significantly to the economy by taking part in tourism activities in the region, staying in local accommodation and support local retailing (Turco, Riley & Swart, 2012:9).

Paintball as a sport is played on a professional and semi-professional level which requires participants to travel and possibly stay over at a destination. Speedball is spectator friendly form of paintball as it takes place in a predetermined, standardized man made field were as scenario and MilSim takes place natural surroundings and rough terrain.

PAINTBALL AS A SPORT INTERNATIONALLY

Paintball leagues are responsible for organising, regulating and managing paintball as a competitive sport. Leagues vary in size from regional, national to international. Tournaments are organised into professional, semi-professional and amateur teams.

Some of these events offer cash prizes. As of 2010 the major international leagues include the National Professional Paintball League (NPPL), Paintball Sports Promotions (PSP) in the United States as well as the Millennium Series in Western Europe were more than 200 teams from varies European countries participated in 2008 (Davidson, 2008:1). The first ever paintball World Cup was held in Paris, France in September 2013 and the Naza World Cup Asia event which was held in November 2013 in Langkawi Malaysia (SANPA; 2013). Both events featured teams from across the globe and featured live coverage in their respective spheres.

PLAYER CATEGORIES

There is no clear definition for the different types of players or forms of paintball. The author proposes that paintball players be categorised based on purpose of participation, frequency of play and money spent. This will assist in differentiating the target market according to their needs wants and characteristics

(It should be noted that the following section will attempt to define the types of player's categories and not the form of paintball. Interviews were held with numerous paintball players during 2012\2013 with has

led the following proposed player categories and descriptions).

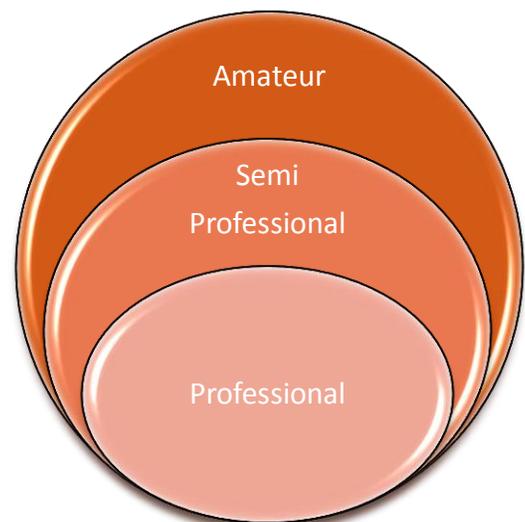


Figure 2: Player Categories and market volume comparison

Amateur

Amateurs play paintball on special occasions such as bachelor's parties, birthdays and corporate team building events. In other words they would not participate if it was not for some outside motivator to draw them there. They rent equipment from the venue and prefer quick matches for the sake of fun and enjoyment. They spend a small amount of money a

year on travel and paintball expenses. Amateurs represent the public at large and do not actively seek out paintball as an adventure activity.

Semi Professional

These players participate in local or regional events between 6 and 15 times a year. They are interested in well organised events (ranked or non-ranking) for adventure and are willing to travel long distances to participate therein. They spend an average of R4 000 – R12 000 a year on accommodation, travel and paintball expenses. Semi-professional players form the core of the paintball industry. They play in any environment and are motivated by the social opportunities with their peers and the challenge's associated with participating in organised events.

Professional

Professional players are members of a structured paintball league's and travel nationally and internationally to attend ranked sport matches with cash prizes and sporting titles. They spend on average R30 000 - R50 000 a year on accommodation, travel and paintball expenses. Prize money at tournaments are substantial.

PAINTBALL FORMATS

Paintball as mentioned earlier is a diversified sport activity, shaped by different player preferences. Based on the most popularity forms of paintball the author proposes to highlight three paintball formats (Figure 3), each of which has a loyal market following:

- Speedball
- Scenario (bushball, woodsball)
- MilSim

(It should be noted that the player categories mentioned earlier are found in each of the following paintball formats)

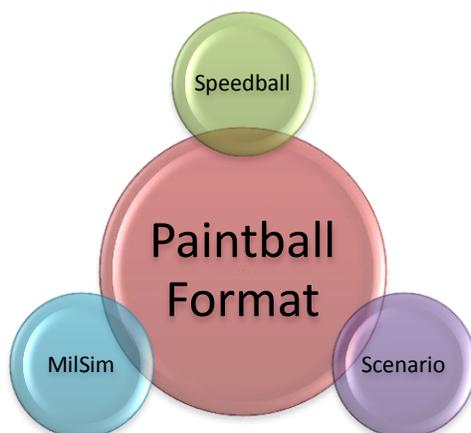


Figure 3: Paintball Categories

Speedball

Speedball is the spectator version of the sport and has dominated the professional leagues sport for the past 15 years (Woods, 2011:50). It is widely broadcast in Europe, North America and Asia on sport channels and has a large support base. Speedball use's flat, prepared fields and inflatable obstacles also known as Dorito's (Woods, 2011:50). Also known as "tournament paintball" which takes place on a small, flat field, with man-made obstacles throughout (Muhlestein, 2012). Speedballers must be willing to run, slide, hide, and expend large amounts of paintballs. It's the most well sponsored form of the sport. Professionals play in teams and participate in league matches in world wide. League matches in the Northern Hemisphere are well sponsored and have cash prizes and professional rankings.

Scenario

Also known as bushball or woodsball is believed to be the most popular form of paintball. Commentators from the online paintball show Behind the Bunker (2013) have stated that either name is not a sufficient description and can be misleading. Participants view each paintball match as a real test of their skills and proficiency making use of team play and tactics. They expend large sums of money on equipment which has been modified for their individual style of play. Players often train and participate in well organised teams. Scenario paintball takes place either in natural woodland settings or mock urban environments bedecked with bunkers and trenches (Woods, 2011:50). According to Muhlestein (2012) woodsball consists of a group of people who go into the woods and play paintball games reminiscent of military battles. Scenario games are larger woodsball games with dozens or even hundreds of players that often simulate famous historical battles or involve military-styled objectives such as those played at Oklahoma D-Day Park. Andre Rossouw spent his national service in the South African Defence Force as an infantryman and is of the opinion that woodsball is the closest a person can get to actual warfare (Woods, 2011:52).

MilSim

MilSim is an acronym for *military simulation* and is the most realistic form of paintball and measures up to military standards of realism and tactics. Combat engineering units of the United States have moved away from simunitions (which are extremely expensive) to magazine fed paintball guns (YouTube, 2012). There has been an increasing but still small number of paintball players migrating to this form of paintball which requires substantial investment in military clothing, apparel, realistic "magfed" (magazine fed) markers and formal tactical or military training. It is most often played by people who have said training and background. The increasing demand can be

attributed to paintball players seeking a greater challenge and more excitement (Houghton, 2013).

PAINTBALL, EXTREME OR ADVENTURE SPORT?

Adventure and extreme sports are ways for modern society to combat stress and as such have a positive effect on physical and psychological health condition most notably self-esteem, confidence and human biochemical mechanisms (Vujko & Plavša; 2011:95). It is scientifically proven that physical activity increases the production of endorphins which stimulate the feeling of being in a good mood and can also reduce the feeling of pain and stimulate a sense of euphoria (Vujko & Plavša; 2011:96). According to Saayman (2012:302) adventure and extreme sports do more than defy the limits of acceptable behaviour. They are perceived to be new, dangerous and go against societal norms of what is considered sport. Such sports cover an entire spectrum of outdoor activities in the air, land, water and ice. In an interview on SAfm on 10 August 2013, Paul Grobler, head of the South African National Paintball Association (SANPA) remarked that paintball is a fast passed extreme sport.

Key word frequently used to describe adventure products (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret; 2007:7):

- Thrill
- Adrenaline
- Excitement
- Fear
- Journey
- Roughing it
- Challenge
- Ultimate
- Elation
- Terror
- Expedition
- Awe inspiring
- Risk
- Conquer
- Success
- Daring

It could be argued that the words used to describe adventure sport are also applicable to extreme sport. Therefore descriptive wording does not distinguish between or sets apart adventure and extreme sport. Saayman (2012:307) is of the opinion that the terms “extreme” and “adventure” sport share similar elements of risk, danger and a natural setting and can overlap. The terms adventure and extreme sports are often used interchangeably (Top End Sport; 2013).

Extreme sport

The term extreme sports have become a way to describe a number of non-traditional independent and organised alternative sports (Brymer, 2009:1). Extreme sports are defined as activities where there is a high degree of risk to the participant who requires a certain set of skills (Caribbean Tourism Organisation, 2013). By definition extreme sports involve elements of increased risk and are usually performed in beautiful, exciting and often remote locations (Mei-Dan & Carmont, 2013:11). Extreme sports offer something different from traditional sports and are characterised by a strong perceived risk of physical injury. Saayman (2012:302) surmises that extremists are fearless, thrill seeking athletes that thrive on challenges who seek individuality, achieving higher levels of satisfaction, fun, excitement, ingenuity and technology. According to Saayman (2012:305) extreme sports are traditionally associated with adrenaline seekers which include skydiving, bungee jumping and rock climbing. Extreme sports are very demanding and somewhat risky as it requires professional knowledge and training (Boli & Li, 2005:3). Extreme sport is any sport that features speed, height, high levels of physical exertion, highly specialized gear and are often individual rather than team sports (Top End Sport; 2013). What sets extreme sports apart from adventure sport is that the most likely outcome of a mismanaged accident or mistake is death (Top End Sport; 2013). Extreme sports are outdoor activities where the most likely outcome of a mistake or accident is death (Brymer, 2005).

Table 1: Extreme sport individual’s categories (Adapted from Saayman, 2012:305)

Category	Description
Full-blooded experiencers	Chase risk, adrenaline “junkies”
Latent actualisers	Seek experience thrills to challenge themselves
Experience\ Achievers	Drawn to extreme sport to gain admiration of others

Adventure sport

The core components of adventure sport are: physical activity; risk taking; uncertain outcome and a natural setting (Ryan & Traur, 2005:143; Beedie, 2003:203; Krein, 2007:80). Adventure sports have developed significantly and become an attractive alternative to traditional travel worldwide. The term adventure sport is also used in a wider sense and includes sports that are labelled alternative, extreme, X, gravity, lifestyle and action sports (Breivik, 2010:1). Adventure sport although not free from risk is less likely to be fatal when accidents occur. Due to the nature of adventure sport, remote setting in which it typically takes place and external factors such as weather, it is impossible

to remove risk from the activity (Krein, 2007:80). Recently there has been a sharp growth in participation in all adventure sports (Saayman, 2012:306) such as paintball. Paintball events are ever increasingly moving away from traditional playing fields to a more rugged outdoor environment were participant wage simulated wars e.g. Losberg War game (MilSim Factory, 2013), Oklahoma D-Day (D-Day Adventure Park, 2013).

George (2013:205) is of the opinion that many tourists seek a more intensive or extreme leisure experience and differentiates between hard and soft adventure activities which are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of soft and hard adventure activities (Adapted from George, 2013:205)

Soft adventure activities	Hard adventure activities
High level of <i>perceived</i> risk	High level of risk
Low level of actual risk	Advance skills and previous experience
No need for prior experience of proficiency	Major physical challenge
Novelty	Adrenaline rush activities
Challenge	Participant in good physical condition
Danger	
Managed activity	

Table 3: Number of injuries per 100 000 participants per year in the United States (Adapted More, 2013)

Sport Type	Injuries per 100 000 participants per year
Tackle Football	3.8
Downhill Skiing	3.8
Ice Hockey	3.7
Soccer	2.8
Baseball	2.8
Paintball	0.2

With reference to Table 2 it can be argued that although paintball at a glance seems to carry a high level of risk the actual reality is that it is a very safe sport (see Table 3). This could be attributed to the mandatory facial mask worn by players and that most participants play in a controlled environment (paintball fields) where safety rules are enforced by trained marshals (referees). Advanced skills and prior experience as a requirement for hard adventure is

also debatable as it depends on the type of paintball event played. Any person can pick up a paintball gun and play scenario paintball which include woodsball and bushball but it could be argued that specialised skill is required for MilSim paintball due to its military format and required skills. Similarly a paintball player doesn't need to be very fit for casual paintball events but MilSim events require long durations of continuous play and presents a major physical challenge to participants which is a characteristic of hard adventure. The same argument can be made for speedball which is as previously mentioned the sporting format of paintball and requires hours of practice to master and a decent level of fitness. Paintball is described as an adrenaline sport (Vujko & Plavša; 2011:95) which leans itself to hard adventure but also contains elements of associated danger which is a characteristic of soft adventure. It can clearly be seen that paintball contains elements of both hard and soft adventure activities. Therefore an expansion of the current categories for adventure sport is required.

CONCLUSION

Based on the characteristics of extreme and adventure sport discussed, as well as the safety statistics shown (Table 3) it can clearly be seen that the risk of death when playing paintball is virtually non-existent. Therefore paintball falls into the category of adventure sport activity. The argument whether it is a hard or soft adventure activity is not clear as many characteristics are spread between hard and soft adventure. Furthermore, different forms of paintball offer different challenges to participants. It can therefore be argued that the classification of whether paintball is a hard or soft adventure activity solely depend on the discipline of paintball being played.

Further research and discussion is necessary to determine what type of adventure sport paintball is. It might be necessary to devise an entire new measuring scale to classify different forms/levels of adventure sport.

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