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CHAPTER 2

Ethics and Sportsmanship

Braithwaite (2005) claims, "the first and foremost guardian of the sacred flame of sportsmanship is the coach." Unfortunately, egregious behavior of coaches and student-athletes has been reported in increasing numbers. Recent studies have challenged the claim that sports teach positive values, build character, and promote sportsmanship. The results concur with Braithwaite's statement and have also identified the coach as an integral person in the formation of athletes' sportsmanship and character. Athletic directors, parents, school boards, and community leaders should become increasingly interested in a coach's ethics.

This chapter defines the terms "morals," "ethics," and "moral reasoning" and provides a brief synopsis of the literature on ethics and sportsmanship. The findings from the renowned Josephson Institute of Ethics and the Missouri State High School Activities Association's categories of sportsmanship are also introduced.

The discussion questions ask what coaches should demand from their student-athletes and from themselves concerning sportsmanship. The issue of appropriate punishments for coaches and players who display poor sportsmanship and the ethics surrounding trick plays and strategies are raised. This chapter's discussion questions also provide nine examples of sporting behavior and ask coaches whether they would allow, implement, or encourage the tactic.

Ten scenarios are provided for coaches to consider whether certain accepted strategies in sport are ethical or represent sportsmanlike behavior. Coaches are asked to review these scenarios and determine the most ethical course of action. Examples include an opponent who inadvertently leaves their plays on a board and a clock operator who admits to you he helped your team at the end of the game. The chapter concludes with a practice exercise where prospective coaches can begin to formulate their expectations in the area of sportsmanship.

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Warm-Up

Key definitions of ethics and morals and a small review of ethical theory are explained in this section. The section also defines sportsmanship, identifies what a coach must demand from their student-athletes concerning sportsmanship, and provides data questioning whether coaches and student-athletes are currently appropriately modeling the proper ethical, moral, and sportsmanlike behaviors.

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1. Definitions of morality, ethics, and moral reasoning:
   a. Ethics is concerned with issues of right and wrong in human conduct. It is also concerned with duty, obligation, and responsibility.
   b. Morality is a central concept of ethics. It refers more to the principles that guide actions and behaviors.
   c. Moral reasoning is a systematic approach enabling us to probe deeply to see things with greater clarity.
2. Three ethical bases (Malloy, Ross, & Zakus, 2003):
   a. Deontology
      i. Based on rules
      ii. Behavior based on what is right
      iii. Attention focused on the act and not the consequence
   b. Teleology
      i. Based on the consequences of an action
      ii. Behavior based on what is good
      iii. Attention focused on assessment of the consequences and not the act
   c. Existentialism
      i. Based on the individual
      ii. Behavior based on what is authentic
      iii. Attention focused on how true the person is to oneself
3. Two types of ethical judgments:
   a. Judgments of moral obligation—judgments related to human actions; relate to what a person should or should not do
   b. Judgments of moral value—decisions concerned with intentions, motives, and the character of individuals
4. Four distinguishing marks of morality:
   a. Concern with moral ideals that are accepted as guides for behavior
   b. A prescriptive character
   c. Universalization—the same for all people in similar situations
   d. A central concern must be the well-being of others
5. Areas of character incorporated in decision making (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 1996):
   a. Trustworthiness
   b. Respect
   c. Responsibility
   d. Justice/fairness
   e. Caring
   f. Civic virtue
6. The moral basics of coaching (Lopiano, 2003):
   a. Treat student-athletes and officials with respect and dignity.
   b. Do not instruct student-athletes to intentionally hurt opponents.
   c. Show remorse for words or actions that are hurtful.
   d. Accept responsibility.
7. Definitions of sportsmanship (Blasé, 2002):
   a. Demonstrate genuine concern for others and commitment to fair play, ethical behavior, and integrity.
   b. Observe the letter and spirit of the rules.
   c. Observe the Golden Rule, treating others as you wish to be treated.
   d. Respect others and yourself.
8. Categories of sportsmanship (Hoch, 2003):
   a. Comments on officiating
   b. Critical comments about other schools
   c. Player behavior during contest
   d. Bench decorum

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e. Running up the score
f. Playing starters after the outcome has been determined

9. What a coach should expect from student-athletes in regard to sportsmanship (Braithwaite, 2005):
a. Shake hands with the opponent after games.
b. Respect calls of officials.
c. Follow the rules of the game.
d. Follow the spirit of the rules of the game.

10. Key findings of the Josephson Institute for Ethic's 2004 Sportsmanship Survey (Sharma, 2004a,b):
a. A high percentage of coaches engage in questionable actions.
b. Several high school athletes break rules and engage in unsporting conduct.
c. Girls are more sportsmanlike than boys.
d. A high percentage of athletes believe "it is more important to win than be considered a good sport."
e. The majority of boys have cynical attitudes about the necessity and legitimacy of cheating.
f. High school students have unrealistically high self-images when it comes to ethics and the overwhelming majority are satisfied with their ethics and character.

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Discussion Questions

1. Are the following representative of good sportsmanship and/or ethical for a coach to allow, implement, or encourage?
a. Stealing signs?

b. A "rabbit" in track and field or cross-country?

c. Juggling a tennis line-up to ensure victories?

d. Encouraging tactics against the rules until the referees call it?

e. Arguing with officials in the hope of intimidating them to receive future calls?

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f. Deliberately baiting the opponent's star player into a yellow or red card, technical foul, etc.?

g. Encouraging your players to retaliate to physical or mental provocation?

h. Altering the field of play (soaking a field, allowing the infield grass to grow long) to gain a perceived advantage?

i. Altering equipment (hockey sticks, baseball bats) to gain a perceived advantage?

j. Yelling at an official after the game because you believe you received unfair treatment?

k. Celebrating crazily after a goal/basket is made when the score is close?

l. Celebrating crazily after a goal/basket is made when you are winning by a significant amount?

m. Calling an opponent names or distracting them during competition/play?

n. Purposefully fouling an opponent hard?

o. Pitching a ball intentionally at a batter because the other pitcher hit one of your players?

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p. Rolling the ball under the net fast at your volleyball opponent's "all-star" to get him or her worked up?

q. Purposefully not adhering to the etiquette of a particular sport (golf, tennis, bowling, etc.)?

r. Creating a diversion so you can execute a trick play?

s. Allowing a starter to untie his or her shoes or take off his or her jersey when taken out of the game with a big lead?

2. Does a line exist where a trick play becomes unethical, unsportsmanlike, or in poor taste? If so, provide examples.

3. Does a line exist where accepted good strategy becomes unethical? If so, provide examples.

4. What should a coach demand from his or her players in regard to sportsmanship? Their coaching staff and other support personnel? Should the demands be different between games and practice? Why or why not?

5. What should players expect from their coach in regard to sportsmanship?

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6. Should a coach additionally punish a player penalized by the officials (technical foul, yellow card, personal foul, etc.)? Why or why not?

7. Should athletic directors reprimand coaches for receiving technical fouls and red cards or demonstrating poor sportsmanship? Why or why not?

8. Is swearing tolerable in the heat of competition? Why or why not?

9. What constitutes trash talking and why does it occur? Should a coach allow the student-athletes who can "back it up" some leniency? Does the score matter?

10. How should a coach expect his or her team to behave during the post-game handshake, after a win and after a loss? How should a coach behave?

11. What constitutes "running up the score"? Is it always poor sportsmanship? Is turnabout fair play?

12. a. Are there instances where being a good sport and sticking up for your student-athletes conflict? If so, provide examples.

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b. What is the appropriate behavior when a coach believes the officials are doing an injustice to the team?

13. Do student-athletes have an ethical or moral obligation to attempt to correct an official's call in their team's favor they know is incorrect? Why or why not?

14. Do coaches have an ethical or moral obligation to attempt to correct an official's rules interpretation in your team's favor they know is incorrect? Why or why not?

15. Lumpkin and Cuneen (2001) cited research suggesting that a student-athlete's moral and ethical values decline the longer he or she participates in competitive sport. Thus they refute the myth that sport teaches positive values. Critique this claim in lieu of your experiences.

Scenarios

1. You are cleaning up after a home game when you discover your opponent left several of their plays and strategies written on the chalkboard. You play this team again this season and the information would be helpful. Is it ethical to copy down the information? Why or why not?

2. One of your baseball players hits a home run in the first inning. He is drilled in the back the next time he bats. Your pitcher asks if he should retaliate. How do you instruct this student-athlete?

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3. You have a team rule prohibiting swearing. The first offense calls for a player to be removed from the game. In a tight game one of your best soccer players mutters "That f**king sucks" in reference to a call. You heard it, but it was not loud enough for others to hear. Your team is not as strong without this athlete on the field. What do you do and why?

4. You are a faculty member at the school you coach. Student-athletes need to be passing four classes every week to remain eligible. One of your best players is barely passing your class. You gave an exam on Wednesday and are preparing to grade them. Glancing through the tests, you notice the player in question has left so many answers blank there is no way his final score will keep his weekly grade above passing. He would thus become ineligible for the weekend's big game. If you wait until the weekend to grade the exams, the student-athlete will miss next week's game against a weaker opponent. What do you do and why?

5. You are winning your last football game of the season by a lopsided score against a weaker opponent. Your third-string quarterback is entering the game with less than 2 minutes remaining. He is a senior who has always worked hard and accepted his role but has never had the opportunity to attempt a pass at the varsity level. He asks you if he can run the offense as opposed to running out the clock. What do you do and why? What are the considerations?

6. a. Your basketball team scored a basket to take the lead with 7 seconds left and your opponent immediately called time out. The clock operator did not stop the clock on the referee's whistle and the clock ran down to :03. The opposing coach is furious, but the referees and clock operator cannot agree on the circumstances. You know definitively the clock should read :07. Do you have an ethical obligation to volunteer this information? Why or why not?

b. The clock operator approaches you after the game and indicates he was happy to help. You ascertain he purposefully allowed the clock to run down those extra seconds. What is your ethical responsibility now that you know this information?

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7. Half way into your 2-hour road trip your best player informs you she forgot her uniform at the school. There is no time to retrieve it and no way to contact her parents or another third party. A third-stringer is approximately the same size as your star. Is it ethical to force this player to sacrifice her uniform for the good of the team? Why or why not? What are the considerations?

8. You are a coach in charge of a car wash as a team fundraiser. You have partnered with a local grocer where their customers receive a coupon entitling them to a free car wash. Patrons without the coupon pay $5. Your sign says "Free Car Wash" in large letters with the words "with a coupon" in small print. You are hoping to attract extra customers this way, though some will be surprised at the expectation they pay $5. Is this ethical?

9. Your baseball team is winning 17–0, and your team is batting in the top of the fifth. Jason singles to lead off the inning. With 8 steals earlier, he has already tied the state record for most stolen bases in a single game. Should you give Jason the green light to break the record? The red light? What should you do if Jason ignores a red light and breaks the stolen base record?

10. Your team is hosting a professional wrestling event as a fundraiser. The promoter of this independent operation told you it would be a "family friendly" show and specifically indicated there would be no swearing, blood, or scantily clad women. You subsequently promoted the show as such. The actual show is not as "clean" as you had thought and would have preferred; several attendees are upset. What are your ethical responsibilities to them? What ethical responsibility does the promoter owe you?

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Practice Exercise

1. Prepare a list of what you would expect from your players, staff, and self in regard to sportsmanship. This list should include pre-game, the game itself, and the post-game. It should also include practice and all team functions. Identify what would occur if student-athletes' or other's behavior does not correlate with your expectations? How would you reward those who do? Share your articulations with a colleague and critique each other's efforts.

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