

# Coaching Ethics

An oxymoron, a lost art, a moot point?  
Creating a culture of principles and standards



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# Our Game Plan

- The world of coaching
- Coaching as a profession
- Ethics and coaching
- The disconnect between ethics and sport
- Teaching, reinforcing and modeling ethics in coaching

# Why Ethics in Coaching?



# The World of Coaching

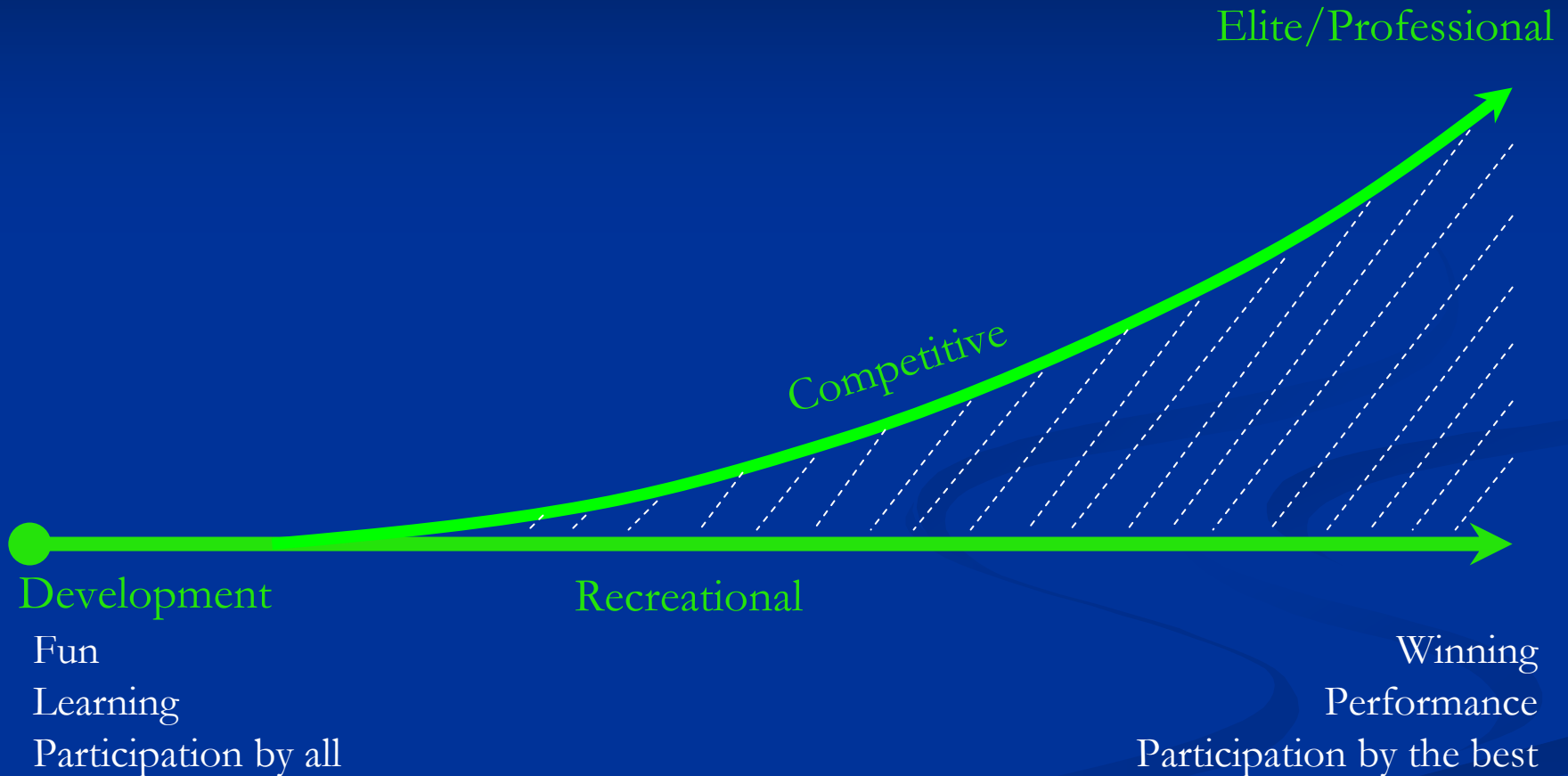
# What Sport/Coaches (can) Provide

- Technical skills
- Tactical skills
- Physical conditioning
- Psychological skills
- Social skills
- Sportsmanship



**None of this is automatic**

# Participation vs. Performance





# High Stress Job

- Long and often irregular hours – nights, weekends
- Competitive
- Part time vs. full time
- Scholastic coaches – 2<sup>nd</sup> job
- Multiple roles - “all things to all people”
- Intense personal involvement
- ‘Monday morning quarterback’ syndrome
- Disciplinary duties
- Competing and conflicting expectations
- Life balance concerns
- Parents
- Increased outcome expectations
- Fast developing science
- High burnout rate
- Lack of respect or sense of professionalism

# Of course, it isn't all bad...



- Pursuit of passion
- Creative
- Active
- Personal relationships
- Direct results visible
- Community



Photo: John Strohmacker ©2002



# Coaching as a Profession

The traditional model

The word "Coach" is rendered in a large, bold, 3D-style font. The letters are a vibrant orange color with a yellow-to-orange gradient and a subtle drop shadow. A bright green oval is drawn around the first letter, "C", highlighting it.

vs. The Trained Model

# Defining a Profession

- Academic or specialized training opportunities
- Specialized knowledge
- Formal qualifications (certification)
- Membership in a professional or regulatory body
- Regulation by professional organization
- Ethical code of practice

# Coaching - An Emerging Profession

- Increasing certification requirements
- Expanding collegiate programs
- Increasing standards and expectations
  - ◆ Organizational
  - ◆ Legal
  - ◆ Parental

# 8 Domains of Coaching Knowledge

National Standards for Athletic Coaching, NASPE (2006)

- **Philosophy and ethics**
- Safety and injury prevention
- Physical conditioning
- Growth and development
- Teaching and communication
- Sports skills and tactics
- Organization and administration
- Evaluation



# Ethics & Coaching



# Ethics?

The principle of conduct governing an individual or profession - a standard of behavior

- Behavior regarding....
  - ♦ right vs. wrong
  - ♦ good vs. bad
  - ♦ ought vs. ought not

# Common Ethical Concerns in Sport



- Respect for the game
- Steroids/ ergogenic aids
- Team relationships/favoritism
- Rule enforcement
- Win at all cost mentality
- Sportsmanship vs. Gamesmanship
- Eligibility concerns
- Dual role conflict
- Using athletes for personal gain
- Spirit of the sport
- Gender, race and cultural issues
- Athlete vs. student status

# Impact of Ethics on Athletes

- Sport participation does not automatically build character
- DI collegiate athletes moral reasoning has been found to be less mature than that of their peers
- Lack ability to see why it is ok in one area and not in another
- Entitlement mindset



# Why ethical decision problems occur

- “This is how we did it”
- Pressure to win
- Job security concerns
- Seeking peer recognition
- Fear of failure
- “The rules aren’t fair”
- “Everyone else is doing it, I’m just making the playing field level”
- Ego involvement
- Enemy mentality

# Where do coaches learn ethics?

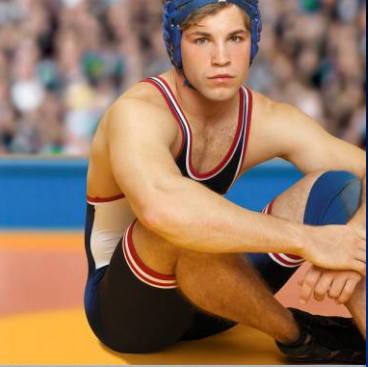
- 10,000 high school coaches surveyed
  - ◆ 94% had undergraduate degree or higher
  - ◆ 45% had a primary degree in education
  - ◆ 39% in physical education/ exercise science
  - ◆ 78% teacher

## Exposure to Ethics

- 13% reported never being exposed to coaching ethics
- 39% took a course in coaching ethics
- 39% had a course that discussed coaching ethics
- 49% received ethics training in a workshop
- 52% reported learning about coaching ethics on their own

# What did the coaches have to say about ethics?

- Only 32% were familiar with the NFHS's Coaches Code
- Majority reported they did a very good job being ethical, but not so sure of other coach's ethics





# Let's talk Ethical Dilemmas

The grey in the middle

# How do you handle ethical dilemmas?



Right vs. Wrong?  
Confusing shades of grey?  
How far are they willing to go to win?  
At what cost?

# It all starts with a clear philosophy



Beliefs, values, morals and ideas that support the goals or objectives as they relate to the particular setting and as they guide a person's practice or conduct

# The Common Goals of Youth Sport that should guide a coach's philosophy

- Participation has personal and social value
- To help schools reach and educate students
- To help students learn skills for life such as:
  - ◆ Character
  - ◆ Morals
  - ◆ Teamwork
  - ◆ Resiliency
  - ◆ Sportsmanship/ Fair play (ethics)
  - ◆ Value of hard work
  - ◆ Time management

# Creating a Meaningful Philosophy

- Written
- Situation specific
- Reflection of personal beliefs and values
- Identifies expectations of personal behaviors
- Reviewed at least yearly



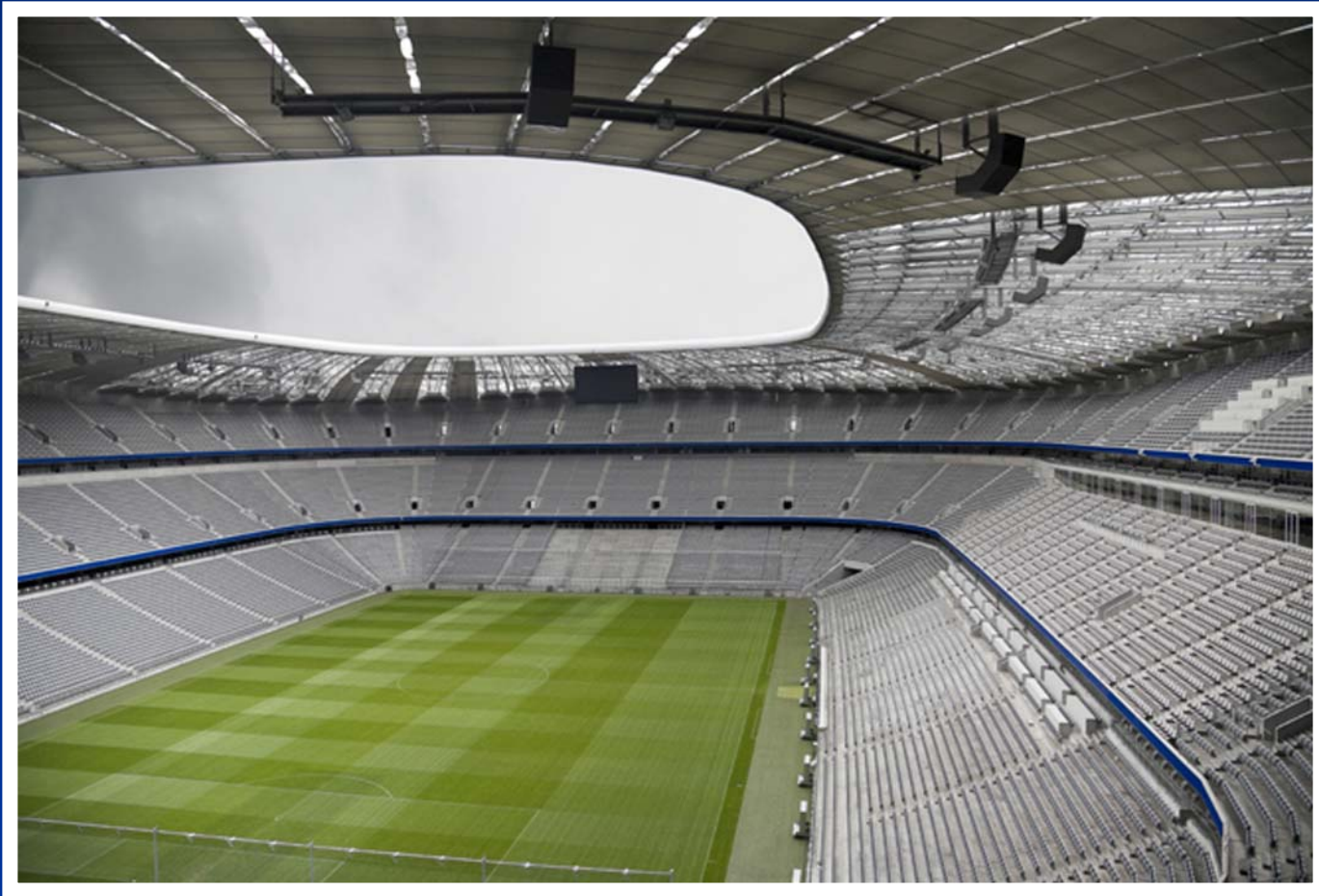


Beliefs → Thoughts → Actions

Philosophy will clarify culture



# Building a culture



The foundation for an ethical program

# What is culture all about?

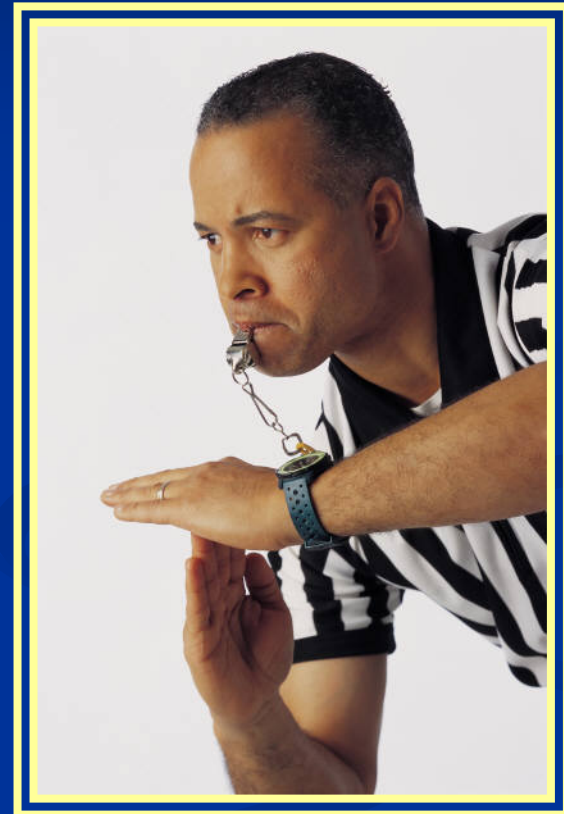
- Clearly define expectations
  - ◆ Sportsmanship
  - ◆ Gamesmanship
  - ◆ Not just what not to do
- Team rules
- Support rules and expectations
- Model and teach
- Look for examples



# Practicing Professional Ethics

## Towards

- ♦ Student athletes
- ♦ Fellow teachers
- ♦ Parents
- ♦ Administration
- ♦ Fellow coaches
- ♦ Officials



# Tips for an Effective Culture

- Emphasize from the start
- Be consistent
- Everyone on the same page
- Show how sportsmanship AND gamesmanship lead to success
- Consider everyday language and actions
- Expect it and help them live up to it
- Build pride in the history

# Ethics within your Culture

- Provide opportunities to practice
- Ask questions
- Public acknowledgement
- Are you a role model for ethics?
- Immediately positive feedback
- Expectations and treatment the same for all



What would you put in a professional code of ethics for coaches?

# Code of Conduct: Clear Ethical Expectations



- US Olympic Committee
- National Governing Bodies
- Australian Sports Commission
- Coaching Association of Canada
- National Federation of State High School Associations



# NFHS Coaching Code of Ethics

- The coach shall be aware that he/she has a tremendous influence, for either good or ill, on the education of the student and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest ideals of character.
- The coach shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession. In all personal contact with students, officials, athletic directors, school administrators, the state high school athletic association, the media, and the public, the coach shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct.
- The coach shall take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol and tobacco use.

- The coach shall avoid use of alcohol and tobacco products when in contact with players.
- The coach shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct his or her program in harmony with the total school program.
- The coach shall master the contest rules and shall teach them to his or her team members. The coach shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules.
- The coach shall exert his or her influence to enhance sportsmanship by spectators, both directly and by working closely with cheerleaders, pep club sponsors, booster clubs, and administrators.

- The coach shall respect and support contest officials. The coach shall not indulge in conduct which would incite players or spectators against the officials. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical.
- The coach should meet and exchange cordial greetings with the opposing coach to set the correct tone for the event before and after the contest.
- The coach shall not exert pressure on faculty members to give students special consideration.
- The coach shall not scout opponents by any means other than those adopted by the league and/or state high school athletic association.

# Coaching Resources: Books

- The Double Goal Coach by Jim Thompson
- Positive Coaching by Jim Thompson
- Coaching for Character by Craig Clifford & Randolph M. Feezell
- Creative Coaching by Jerry Lynch
- Coaching for the Inner Edge by Robin S. Vealey
- Catch Them Being Good: Everything You Need to Know to Successfully Coach Girls by Tony Diccico and Colleen Hacker

# Coaching Resources: Websites

- Institute for the Study of Youth Sport – [www.youthsports.msu.edu](http://www.youthsports.msu.edu)
- US Olympic Committee – [www.usoc.org](http://www.usoc.org)
- National Federation of High School - <http://www.nfhs.org/>
- Positive Coaching Alliance – [www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org)
- NCAA - [www.ncaa.org/wps/portal](http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal)
- Coaching Association of Canada - <http://www.coach.ca/eng/>

# More Coaching Resources

- Join a sport specific organization
- Attend coaching conferences – local and national
- Subscribe to sport specific publications
- Learn from colleagues across sports and beyond your region

What can you do to  
reinforce, practice and  
build better coaching and  
sport ethics?

# Thank you

Please contact us if you have questions or comments



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