

True Competition:

Mental Maps for Improved Performance, Ethics, and Enjoyment

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Brenda Light Bredemeier, Ph.D.

University of Missouri-St. Louis

2011 AAHPERD National Convention

March 30, 2011

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The
Ethics to Excellence
Approach



Building Champions through “True Competition”

In This Workshop

We will learn about “Contesting Theory”
and how to use it to:

- 1: Maximize performance excellence
-manage goals, focus, stress, and distractions
- 2: Increase enjoyment and satisfaction
-tap sustainable motivation and positive emotion
- 3: Strengthen character and ethics
-deepen commitment to moral norms of fairness and respect



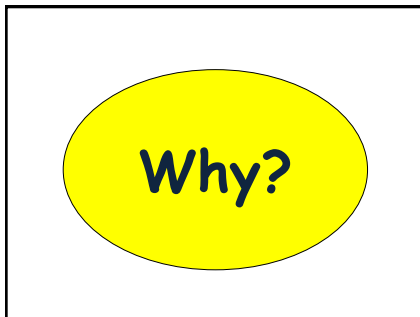
Sport can
be a dynamic
and powerful
vehicle to
promote a commit-
ment to excellence,
positive values, and a
dedication to ethics



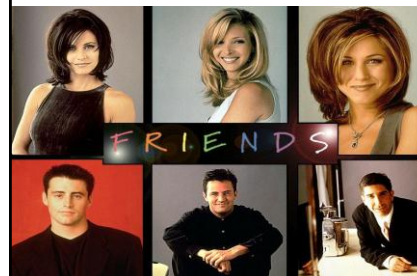
Competition can lead to a host of
negative outcomes and, in fact, . . .



Ethical Problems are Prevalent in Sports at All Levels

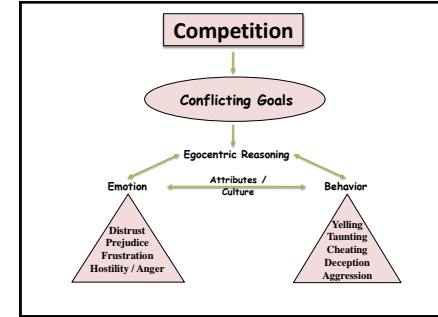
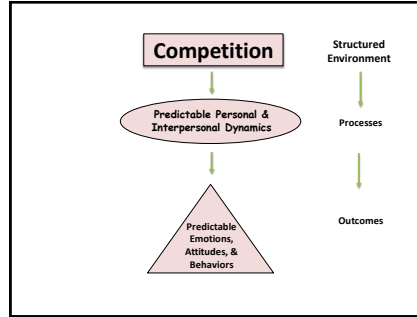
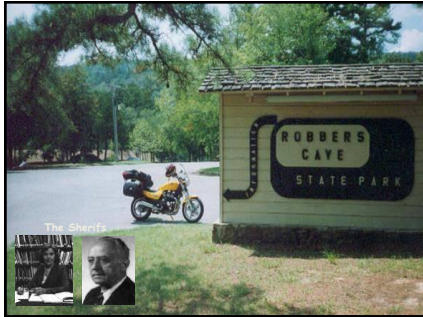


A Bit of Wisdom from Comedy ...



Traditional Approaches to Explaining the Dynamics & Consequences of Competition:

- ❖ Realistic Conflict Theory
- ❖ Social Interdependence Theory



“Competition, by its very nature, damages relationship. Competitors’ interests are inherently opposed. I succeed if you fail, and vice versa. ...so the failure of others is devoutly to be wished.”
-Alfie Kohn

The Good News

- In a study of 803 youth (age 9-15), 189 parents, and 61 coaches from West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast:

98% of coaches agreed or strongly agreed that:
 “Teaching sportsmanship is a major part of a coach’s job.”

97% agreed or strongly agreed that:
 “I can have a tremendous impact on the sportsmanship of my athletes.”

Shields, D., Bredemeier, B., LaVoi, N., & Power, F.C. (2005). The sport behavior of youth, parents, and coaches: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 3, 43-59.

And Yet ...

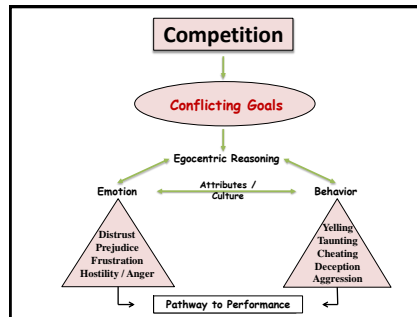
Youth:
 9% cheated
 13% tried to hurt an opponent
 31% argued with official

Parents:
 13% angrily criticized own child
 14% yelled at an official

Coaches:
 7% taught how to break a rule
 42% angrily yelled at an official
 36% angrily yelled at a player
 8% made fun of someone on team

Shields, D., Bredemeier, B., LaVoi, N., & Power, F.C. (2005). The sport behavior of youth, parents, and coaches: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 3, 43-59.

Why do sportsmanship programs so often fail to achieve their stated goals?






Before I enter the ring, I have to change. I have to let the goodness out and bring all the bad in, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Larry Holmes on 60 Minutes

Interview with Ron Rivera:

Q: Can you describe your personality?
Ron: Most of the time, I'm pretty soft-spoken, considerate and friendly. ...

Q: Do you have a different personality on the field?
Ron: I'm mean and nasty then. ...I'm so rotten. I have a total disrespect for the guy I'm going to hit.

A 34% cut in sportsmanship should return us to winning.

A "Radical" Alternative to Sportsmanship Programs

Radical = Addressing the "root" of the problem

KEY IDEA!

Ethical problems originate from a deep misunderstanding of what "competition" is.



Contesting Theory



What can Cognitive Science Tell Us?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?



NOW WHAT DO YOU SEE?




CONTEST

There are two distinct ways to "see" a contest.

DETOUR AHEAD

A Quick Detour into Cognitive Science:


Have you ever:

- Invested time in a worthy project?
- Wasted your time?
- Found ways to save time?
- Spent time on something important?
- Made time for someone?
- Budgeted time for a leisure activity?

We often make sense of abstract concepts through use of preconscious “deep” metaphors.

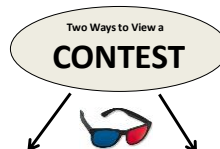
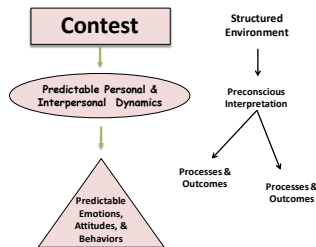
These “deep” metaphors (or what cognitive scientists call “conceptual metaphors”) arise from our physical, embodied experience.

For example

- Abstract concept: “Love” 
- Is often interpreted through a concrete metaphor: “Journey”
 - “I think we’re at a crossroads.”
 - “We aren’t going anywhere.”
 - “Look how far we’ve come.”
 - “It’s been a long, bumpy road.”
- The “journey” metaphor provides a conceptual scaffolding for the experience of love.
- Everyday cognition is structured by dozens of such preconscious deep metaphors.

The Central Premise of Contesting Theory

People’s preconscious metaphors for *contesting* influence their interpretations and behaviors.



Both “deep metaphors” are “true” but we can only think through one lens at a time.

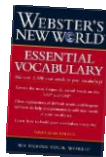
What We “SEE” Profoundly Impacts Our Motivations and Behaviors



Here’s a shocker!
To tap the potential of competition . . .



We need to begin by refining our vocabulary!



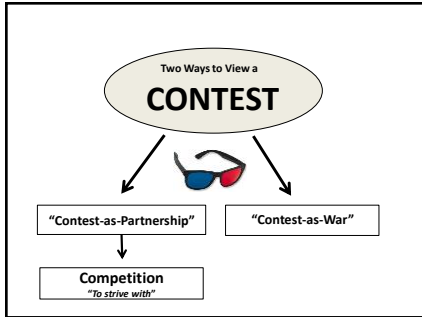
What Does “Competition” Mean?

From the Latin	<i>Com-petere</i>
<i>-petere</i>	“to strive” or “to seek”
<i>com-</i>	“with”
Competition = to strive or seek with	

Competition

- To strive or seek *with* opponents
- What is being “sought” is an enjoyable quest for excellence.
- The contest is interpreted as a form of partnership.





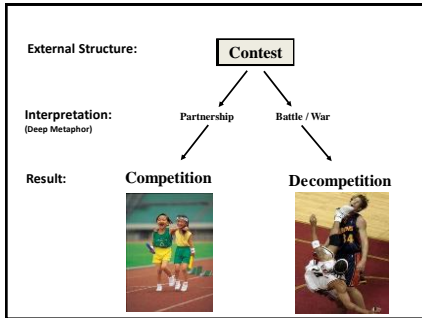
Holding a Contest (a win/lose event)
May or May NOT Lead to Competition (striving with)

Why am I contesting? What am I trying to achieve? What does success mean?

It depends on how the contest is interpreted

To call things by their right names is the beginning of wisdom.

-Chinese Proverb



Decompetition

De = reverse of

- To strive **against**
- What is being sought is the thrill of conquest, dominance, and/or the extrinsic rewards of victory.
- The contest is interpreted through a metaphor of battle or war

Decompetition is not just “bad” competition, nor is it equivalent to poor sportsmanship.

Decompetition is a separate and distinct process from competition.

Contesting Theory

CONTEST

“Contest-as-Partnership” “Contest-as-War”

Competition: “To strive with” **Decompetition:** “To strive against”

- There are two distinct modes of contesting rooted in two different conceptual metaphors.
- Everyone “sees” the contest through one or the other metaphor.
- Most often, the choice of metaphor is “preconscious” and does not depend on specific language use.
- There are profound consequences (for performance, enjoyment/satisfaction, ethical behavior) associated with each metaphor.

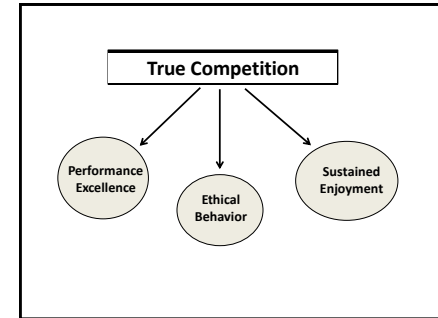
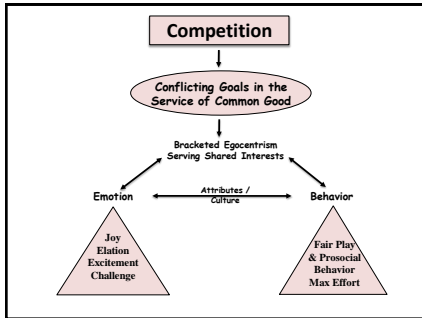
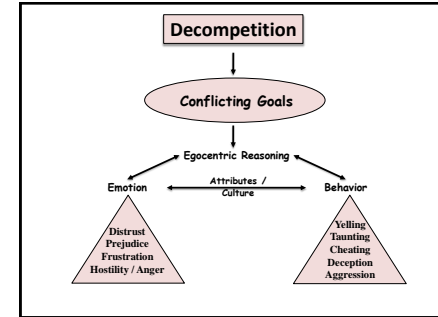
“Good news. The test results show it’s a metaphor.”

Two “Mental Maps” for Contesting

	True Competition (Striving With)	Decompetition (Striving Against)
Goals		
Motivation		
Opponents		
Rules		
Officials		
Process / Outcome		
Emotional Tone		
Whose Interests		
Ideal Contest		

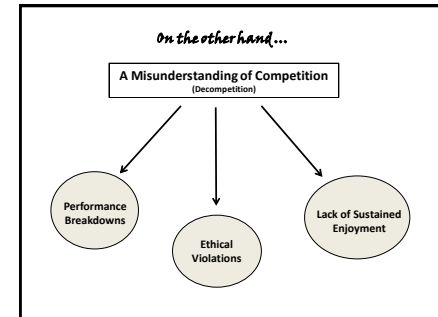
The Mental Map of Decompetition	
	Decompetition (Sitting Against)
Deep Metaphor	-Battle or War
Goals	-Domination / Conquest -Pursuit of Superiority
Motivation	-Use of the Game -Thrill (at opponents' expense)
Opponents	-Enemy / Obstacle
Rules	-Rules = Partially Tolerated Restraints
Officials	-Officials are Opponents
Process / Outcome	-Focus is on Outcome (winning)
Emotional Tone	-Negative Emotions Predominate -Seriousness Displaces Play
Whose Interests	-The Victor's Interest -Individual Good
Ideal Context	-Dominated Contest -Certainty of Outcome

Each Element Triggers Every Other Element	
Deep Metaphor	-Battle / War
Goals	-Conquest / Domination -Demonstrate Superiority
Motivation	-Use of the Game (Extrinsic Rewards) -Thrill (at opponents' expense)
Opponents	-Enemy / Obstacle
Rules	-Rules = Partially Tolerated Restraints
Officials	-Officials are Opponents
Process / Outcome	-Focus is on Outcome (winning)
Emotional Tone	-Negative Emotions Predominate -Seriousness Displaces Play
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Mental Map of Competition	Ethical Advantages (Partial List)
Deep Metaphor = Partnership	The partnership metaphor enables the athlete to grow in personal character and integrity.
Goal Orientation = Task / Mastery	Defining success as learning and mastery leads to higher self-discipline, an embrace of challenge, and a commitment to personal excellence.
Motivation = Intrinsic	Deriving motivation from the activity itself reduces temptation to pursue extrinsic benefits at the expense of others.
Opponents = Partner / Enabler	Viewing opponents as partners increases respect for others, as well as improved perspective-taking and empathy.
Rules = Respected "Minimum"	Respecting the moral foundations of rules promotes a heightened awareness of justice and fairness, and a concern for the welfare of others.
Officials = Facilitators	Respecting the dignity of officials promotes an appreciation and respect for legitimate authority, as well as recognition of its fallibility.
Process / Outcome = Focus is on Process	Focusing on the "values of the game" can promote such character dimensions as perseverance, diligence, optimism, and leadership.
Emotional Tone = Positive Emotions Dominant	Emotional control and positive attitude contribute to affective maturity, friendliness, and personal integrity.
Whose Interest = Mutual Interest	Focusing on the "common good" and "mutual interest" develops civic character.
Ideal Context = Close (strop, olo)	Dealing close, exciting contests promotes an interest in everyone's growth and development.

Mental Map of Competition	Performance Advantages (Partial List)
Deep Metaphor = Partnership	The partnership metaphor enables the athlete to take advantage of numerous psychological benefits.
Goal Orientation = Learning / Mastery	Defining success as learning and mastery leads to sustained effort even when loss is likely (reduces "fear of failure").
Motivation = Intrinsic	Intrinsic motivation sustains interest, and leads to higher levels of effort even when external supports are lacking.
Opponents = Partner / Enabler	Viewing opponents as partners reduces sense of "threat" that can lead to performance anxiety and stress.
Rules = Respected "Minimum"	When players are not seeking loopholes in rules, they are better able to stay focused on the immediate, game-relevant demands (what is within their control).
Officials = Facilitators	When athletes allow officials to do their job without frequent challenge, they reduce occasions for frustration and are better able to stay mentally focused.
Process / Outcome = Focus is on Process	Focusing on process enables a balance of playfulness and seriousness, facilitating appropriate risk-taking and spontaneity; high focus on outcome can result in rigidity in performance.
Emotional Tone = Positive Emotions Dominant	Negative emotions can be more difficult to control and often result in narrowed perception that can filter out important performance information. Negative emotions can lead to costly penalties.
Interest Served = Mutual Interest	Recognizing that he or she will gain regardless of whether the ultimate outcome is a win or loss, reduces anxiety and distracting thoughts.
Ideal Context = Close (strop, olo)	With the ideal context equated with a close, tense contest, the stress of close contests is less likely to become disabling.






Mental Map of Decompetition	What Knocks Competition Off Balance? <i>Recognizing the Threats</i>
Deep Metaphor = War / Battle	-The Contest Structure
Goal Orientation = Dominance / Superiority	
Motivation = Extrinsic	
Opponents = Enemy	
Rules = Maximum Requirement	
Officials = Part of Opposition	
Process / Outcome = Focus is on Outcome	
Emotional Tone = Negative Emotions Dominant	
Interest Served = Individual (Team) Interest	
Ideal Contest =	
Blame/Retaliation =	

Building Champions

The
Ethics to Excellence
Approach




**From Theory to Practice:
A Few Quick Ideas**

Chariots of Fire (1981)

A Look at Motivation Within Decompetition

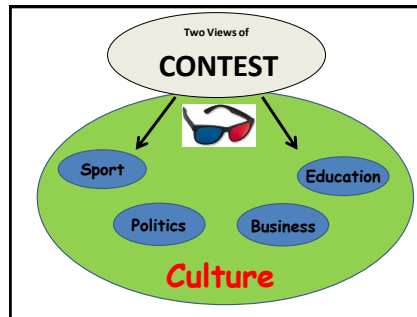
Setting

Cambridge track star, Harold Abrams, competed against his rival, Eric Liddell, in the Olympic trials. After losing the race, Harold replays the defeat in his mind as his girlfriend tries to help him gain perspective.



- ### Ten ⁽⁺⁾ Commandments for Coaches & Athletes
- (Or ... A Quick & Dirty Guide to Avoiding Decompetition)
1. Thou shalt not speak of sport as war.
 2. Thou shalt not think ill of opponents.
 3. Thou shalt not question the integrity of officials.
 4. Thou shalt not equate success with winning.
 5. Thou shalt not define losing as failure.
 6. Thou shalt not tap anger for motivation.
 7. Thou shalt not seek unfair advantage.
 8. Thou shalt not promote self-esteem at the expense of others.
 9. Thou shalt not hope opponents screw up.
 10. Thou shalt not encourage or seek retaliation.
 11. Thou shalt not sacrifice *play* on the altar of seriousness.

Three Goals / Nine Strategies	
COACHING GOAL	STRATEGIES
DEVELOP CHARACTER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote a Values-Based Team Culture 2. Talk about What Matters 3. "Practice" Good Character
ENHANCE ENJOYMENT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Support Intrinsic Motivation 5. Minimize Fear of Failure 6. Encourage Enthusiastic Effort
PROMOTE EXCELLENCE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Focus Attention 8. Set Appropriate Goals 9. Support Foundations of Excellence





For More Information

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The “Mental Maps” of Contesting

	True Competition (Striving <i>With</i>)	Decompetition (Striving <i>Against</i>)
Deep Metaphor	-Partnership	-Battle or War
Goals		-Domination / Conquest -Pursuit of Superiority
Motivation		-Use of the Game -Thrill (at opponents' expense)
Opponents		-Enemy / Obstacle
Rules		-Rules = Partially Tolerated Restraints
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Mental Map of Decompetition

What Knocks Competition Off Balance? *Recognizing the Threats*

Deep Metaphor =
War / Battle

-The Contest Structure

Goal Orientation =
Dominance / Superiority

Motivation =
Extrinsic

Opponents =
Enemy

Rules =
Maximum Requirement

Officials =
Part of Opposition

Process / Outcome =
Focus is on Outcome

Emotional Tone =
Negative Emotions Dominant

Interest Served =
Individual (Team) Interest

Ideal Contest =
Blowout (little suspense)



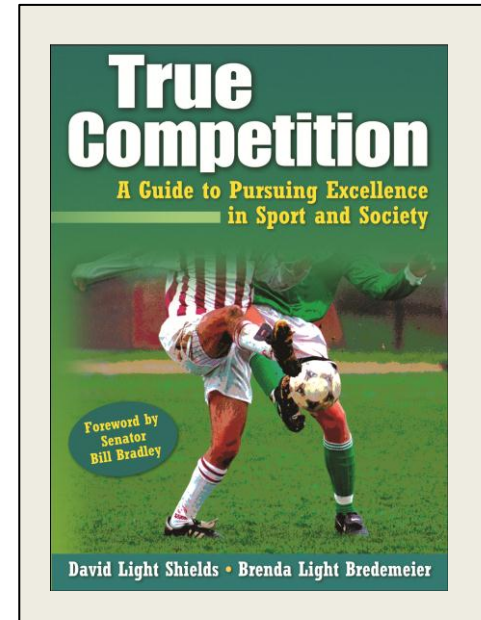
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CONTESTING THEORY IN ACTION

Where do you see evidence of “decompetition” in your program? What does it look like? How is it expressed?

How do you see decompetition interfering with: (a) optimal performance? (b) enjoyment/satisfaction? (c) ethical behavior?

What are some of the triggers for decompetition in your setting? ...Are they different for different individuals or groups?

How can the “mental map” of *true competition* guide your efforts to enhance your students’ or athletes’ competitive experience?

How can the “mental map” of *true competition* guide you in building a positive and productive culture in your program?

What are three take-aways from today’s workshop that you can implement with your program?

Contesting theory addresses:

- how preconscious interpretations of contests are shaped by “deep” metaphors
- the “mental map” of competition (goals, motivations, view of opponents, rules, etc.)
- the “mental map” of decompetition (goals, motivations, view of opponents, rules, etc.)
- likely performance, enjoyment/satisfaction, and ethical outcomes associated with each of the two mental maps
- likely environmental and personal “triggers” for decompetition.