A Matter of Coaching Ethics and Good Decision Making

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(c) look in the mirror and ask yourself how you would feel about yourself if you took action as you intended. In all three situations, if the answer to your question was that you would be proud of yourself and that people would respect you then your solution may indeed be the best course of action.

Summary

As a coach, you have the opportunity to influence the lives of the boys and girls, and the men and women who choose to play for you. These relationships are built on the athletes’ trust in you and your character as a person and coach. In many ways, your code of ethics underlies your character. If your code is well-established and based on solid principles and standards, your character as a coach will be solid as well.

References

As a coach, how would you handle the following situations?

- The cross-country runner who could lead your team to a state championship has an eating disorder and really should not be competing.
- You become aware that three of your star offensive players on the football team are using steroids and other performance enhancing drugs, a clear violation of school and team policies.
- You learn that the major booster of your team, whose athletic department, is upset with you.

By Trent A. Petrie, Ph.D. & Scott Martin, Ph.D.

Recognizing Ethical Dilemmas and Making Good Ethical Decisions

To handle ethical dilemmas you must be able to recognize them. So, your first steps are knowing your profession’s code of ethics and, with that as the foundation, establishing the principles and standards you are going to follow in your work and life. By having this structure in place you will be better able to evaluate the situations that arise in your work and, ultimately, determine an ethical course of action that protects and respects both you and your athletes. So, if you have not already, take the time to establish your ethical foundation. If this task seems daunting, involve trusted colleagues and mentors to help you think through and understand what you are developing for yourself.

Having an ethical foundation puts you in the best position to behave ethically and to recognize and handle the dilemmas that arise. Even with that, though, making ethical decisions can be challenging. To help you make decisions and behave in ways that are ethically and to recognize and handle the dilemmas that arise. Even with that, though, making ethical decisions can be challenging. To help you make decisions and behave in ways that are consistent with your ethical foundation, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Define your areas of competence, and then practice within them. Sometimes this will mean saying “no” or “I don’t know” to an athlete and/or seeking outside help (medical doctor, athletic trainer, sport psychologist, etc.) to help handle situations in which you really do not have expertise.

2. Annually participate in continuing education workshops. Coaches, in reality, are educators and great coaches know that to improve they must continue to learn themselves. So, take advantage of opportunities to learn from other coaches through workshops and professional meetings. Don’t limit yourself to X’s and O’s…also be willing to learn more about issues like coaching ethics, or improving communication, or being a positive coach.

3. Establish a trusted support network of other coaches with whom you can consult when facing challenging ethical decisions. In ethically challenging situations, there is often more than one acceptable course of action and coaches who work best for you, your athletes, your team, and your department is important. Talking with trusted colleagues and mentors can help you define the problem, generate possible solutions, talk through the consequences of each course of action, and implement your final solution.

4. After making a decision, but before taking action, it is sometimes important to do a final check, particularly if you have made your decision without consulting with colleagues or friends. Janssen and Dale (2002) suggest that this final check include considering how other people will feel about this decision. To help you consider this perspective, do the following: (a) ask yourself what your family or your coaching mentor would think of you if you implemented your solution, (b) ask yourself how you would feel if your solution became a headline in the sports section of your newspaper,