

ETHICAL DILEMMAS FOR COACHES IN YOUTH SPORTS

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Scenario 1 (SANCTIONS FOR OFF FIELD ACTIONS): Bill coaches a team of 11-year old boys in a tackle football league. Nearly all of his players attend the same elementary school. Just prior to the final game of the season, Coach Bill learns that Darren, his starting quarterback and best player has been suspended from school for bullying a 5th grade girl with a disability. If Darren does not play in this game, the team's chance of making it to the playoffs is slim.

- A. The coach should not allow Darren to play.
- B. The coach should ignore the situation at school and allow Darren to play.
- C. The coach should talk with Darren's parents and the school counselor to determine what to do.

Scenario 2 (INCLUSION AND DISABILITY): Coach Gibson is working with a group of 9-year old girls in a community-based recreational soccer league. One of the girls trying out for the team has a weak left leg, a disabled left arm, and no left side peripheral vision due to cerebral palsy caused by a stroke in utero. She wears a brace on her left foot and lower leg, runs slower than most other girls, and has a difficult time seeing and passing to her left.

- A. Coach Gibson should support the girl and explain her condition to referees and opposing coaches.
- B. Coach Gibson should refer the girl to a local recreation program for children with disabilities.
- C. A. Coach Gibson should let her play in team practices but not in games for her own safety.

Scenario 3 (RULE INFRACTION UNSEEN BY REFEREE): Coach Phillips has highest rated 12-year old football team in a Dallas, Texas competitive league. Down 5 points with seconds to play, his halfback returns a punt down the sidelines for a 50-yard touchdown. The teen-aged referees did not see the halfback step out of bounds in front of Coach Phillips and his team bench, but the coach and team members see it clearly.

- A. Coach Phillips should report the infraction to the young referee and have the game outcome reversed.
- B. Coach Phillips should let the play stand and tell his players that referee mistakes are a part of sport.
- C. Coach Phillips should ignore the call and allow his players and their parents enjoy the win.

Scenario 4 (REPORTING POSSIBLE ABUSE-A): In her first paid coaching job at a nationally known youth soccer club, Sara, a 22-year old coach, regularly sees serious bruises on her star player's body. The player says she got them while playing soccer with her older brothers and their friends. But Sara has seen the player's father grab her by the neck, yell at her, and shove her roughly into their car after a couple of games. The coach suspects that the girl is being abused at home.

- A. Sara should talk to the player regularly during practices and ask if she really gets the bruises as she says.
- B. Sara should confront the father in private and let him know about the bruises.
- C. Sara should call local law enforcement or human services to make a report.

Scenario 5 (REPORTING POSSIBLE ABUSE-B): Coach Dobbs is the volunteer head coach of a pre-teen track team (10-12-year old children) in a highly successful regional club. Her team practices in the same stadium and at the same time as Coach Smith's nationally successful under-18 track team. Over the course of the season, Coach Dobbs sees Coach Smith use obscene and abusive language with his athletes, kick their duffle bags, and throw fits of anger when they don't meet his expectations.

- A. Coach Dobbs should report what she has seen to the director of the track club.
- B. Coach Dobbs should ignore the situation because it's not her team.
- C. Coach Dobbs should meet with Coach Smith to tell him that his players are intimidated and fearful.

Scenario 6 (REPORTING POSSIBLE ABUSE-C): Coach Clark is new assistant gymnastics coach at a gym that has produced age group champions. Over the course of several months he has noticed several situations in which the head coach/gym owner has touched 10-12 year old female gymnasts in clearly inappropriate ways. He reports what he has seen to USA Gymnastics.

- A. USA Gymnastics should do a discreet investigation of this coach.
- B. USA Gymnastics should file a report with local law enforcement or human services.
- C. USA Gymnastics should wait until a gymnast or a gymnast's parents report a specific case of abuse.

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Scenario 7 (RUN UP THE SCORE): Coach Sims is a respected coach in a competitive soccer league. Her team is playing a team from another league. Midway through the first half, her team has a 10 to 0 lead despite her use of substitutes and telling them to practice passing rather than running their usual attacking strategy. The opposing coach is frustrated and yelling at his players; the opposing players look defeated.

- A. Coach Sims should tell her team to continue playing as they have been.
- B. Coach Sims should tell her team to focus on passing the ball and not try to score.
- C. Coach Sims should tell the referee to call the game as a 1-0 victory for her team so the players can be divided into two evenly matched teams for a scrimmage.

Scenario 8 (LEAGUE RULES): Coach Richards is an assistant coach of a junior high school basketball team. The team is especially talented this year and the head coach decides to hold practice sessions during the week between Christmas and January 2 even though league rules prohibit practices during this “dead period.” The players, including your son, want to practice, and other coaches and administrators are not around to see the team.

- A. Coach Richards should report this rule infraction to the school’s athletic director and principal.
- B. Coach Richards should ignore the infraction because the team wants to practice.
- C. Coach Richards should send an anonymous letter to team parents letting them know of the infraction.

Scenario 9 (BRAIN SAFETY ISSUE): You are the coach of a community-based junior rugby team. During a game, one of your players is tackled and his head hits the ground hard. He gets up slowly and wanders around for a few seconds before returning to his position. You are familiar with research on traumatic brain injuries among young people in contact sports, so you take him out of the game. Your league does not have a concussion protocol, and the player and the player’s parents object to your decision and want him back in the game.

- A. You stick to your decision and ask the parents to keep an eye on their son for the next week during which he cannot practice with the team.
- B. You return the player to the game because his parents are ultimately responsible for his safety.
- C. You keep the player out of the game but allow him to practice during the week so you can monitor him.

Scenario 10 (HEALTH AND WELL BEING OF ATHLETES): You are the owner of a new gymnastics club and you coach an 11-year old girl who has a chance of winning next week’s state title in her age group and provide great publicity for your gym. X-rays and an MRI show that she has stress fractures in the tibias of both of her (lower) legs. The orthopedist at a local clinic warns that her tibia could explode under extreme acute stress, such as landing a vault. The girl and her parents want you to tape her legs and allow her to compete because a win will help to qualify her for the Junior Olympic Team.

- A. The coach should tape the girl’s legs and allow her to compete.
- B. The coach should not allow her to compete in deference to her long term health and physical well-being.
- C. The coach and parents should seek a second opinion from another orthopedist.

Scenario 11 (SPECIALIZATION VERSUS OVERALL DEVELOPMENT): Eric Pike is the founder and manager of a well-known private, competitive volleyball club. To make a year-round living for himself and his highly-qualified coaches, he demands that the 11-15-year old players participate only in club soccer for the 50 weeks a year in which he runs competitions and camps. Parents pay at least \$4000 per year in club dues and camp fees. He knows that sport science research clearly shows that athletes in such a program have higher overuse injury and burnout rates than occur among multisport participants, and that specialized club players don’t have an advantage in being recruited for college scholarships when compared to multisport athletes.

- A. Eric should continue marketing his program as the best alternative for young volleyball players.
- B. Eric should reduce competition and camp schedules so that young people can play other sports each year.
- C. Eric should demand that his coaches spend 50% of practice time playing other sports and informal games.

Scenario 12 (INACCURATE RULE CALL BY A PLAYER): Coach White’s #1 tennis player is playing for the 12 and under state championship. The players make their own line calls during the match. On set point in the first set, Coach White’s player calls a ball out that you see was clearly in. Her opponent does not object because she was not in a position to see where the ball landed.

- A. Coach White should stop the match and tell his player to reverse the call and lose the set.
- B. Coach White should let the play stand because the opponent does not make it an issue.
- C. Coach White should wait until after the match and talk with the player about responsibility and honesty.