

Intercollegiate Athletics and Character Development: Rhetoric or Reality?

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February 5, 2010

Learning Outcomes

- What the higher education literature reveals about the impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics on the moral and ethical development of students.
- A successful method enacted for incorporating educational goals related to personal and social responsibility into an intercollegiate athletic program.

Views of Athletics in American Society



The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools states that *recreational, intercollegiate, and intramural athletic programs should be consistent with, and actively supportive of, the institution's mission and goals and consistent with the academic success, physical and emotional well-being, and social development of those who participate.*

...how empty the highly touted values (sport) supposedly teaches actually are: if you don't get caught, no penalty; if you get a chance to (do something) beyond the rules, take it...

Richard Bausch
Thanksgiving Night

“Sports do not build character. They reveal it.”



Haywood Hale Broun

**A Summary of the Research
Related to Student
Development through
Participation in Intercollegiate
Athletics**

Moral reasoning research on (sport) is rather clear.

All competitive athletes are negatively affected in their ability to reason about ethical questions in sport .

Lumpkin, et al

Although many coaches and administrators state that they stress ethical play, research finds that little or no concentrated moral education exists in sport.

Lumpkin, et al

A strong body of qualitative and quantitative research exists...supporting that the longer athletes participate in sport, the more their moral reasoning is adversely affected by the competitive experience.

Lumpkin, et al

It would appear from the research that sport does not model, challenge, support, or teach the critical reasoning skills paramount to making good moral decisions.

Lumpkin, et al

...few sports organizations, teams, or programs teach athletes sports ethics or moral reasoning...few coaching certification programs teach sports ethics or moral reasoning....

Lumpkin, et al

Contrary to widespread public opinion, intercollegiate sports appear to confer no advantage on athletes in terms of leadership skills.

Pascarella and Terenzini

- *Sports at any level have the potential to develop character.*
- *However, positive character building is not inherent to sport participation.*
- *The majority of the research reports that there is a negative relationship between participation in sports and character development.*
- *(A)s the level of competition goes up, the level of moral reasoning and moral behavior goes down.*

Doty

Contrary to what many believe, results from these studies have suggested that sport does not build character.

Rudd and Stoll

There is no causal influence between participation in intercollegiate athletics and:

- principled moral reasoning or moral behavior
- leadership skills
- self-understanding
- motivation for academic success
- cognitive development

or what we generally call character.

What Should Sport Teach?



Good character is defined as the formation of and action on universally desirable traits such as respect, responsibility, courage, moderation/balance, care and compassion, trustworthiness, generosity and humility....

Yeager et al

A categorical imperative is a universally accepted maxim that holds regardless of the situation because it is based on undeniable moral principles.

Lumpkin, et al

True sportspersons play to the best of their abilities within the letter and spirit of the rules (principles of justice, responsibility, and honesty).

Lumpkin, et al

*Seeking to win is acceptable only if the letter
and the spirit of the rules are followed
(principles of justice and responsibility).*

Lumpkin, et al

An opponent is not the enemy but a worthy athlete deserving to be treated exactly as everyone would wish (principle of responsibility).

Lumpkin, et al

Retribution is never acceptable regardless of the unfairness or violence of the initial action (principle of beneficence).

Lumpkin, et al

Games are not played to intimidate; the ideal purpose is a mutual quest for excellence through challenge (principles of justice and beneficence).

Lumpkin, et al

Sportsmanship requires modesty and humility in victory, praise for winners, and self-respect in defeat (principle of responsibility).

Lumpkin, et al

The Process of Character Development



The understanding of what is the right, fair or good thing to do in a given circumstance and the courage to act in accordance with one's understanding of what is right, fair, and good.

Whiteley

Character is demonstrated by moral reasoning that leads to moral action.

The Process of Character Development

- Values Acquisition
- Moral Reasoning and Internalization
- Self-Assertiveness
- Psychosocial Maturity
- Moral Behavior

Shea

How to Promote Character Development in Intercollegiate Athletics

- The program must function under a sound educational philosophy.
- The program must function under competent educational leadership.
- The program must be properly directed and controlled.
- A high level of expectancy related to character development should permeate all phases of a program.

Shea

**Is There More to
Character Development than
Moral Development?**

...there is evidence to suggest that sport may build social character, e.g., teamwork, loyalty, and self-sacrifice as a possible result of the emphasis that is placed on social character. In opposition, there is little evidence to suggest sport builds moral character when defining character from a moral idealistic standpoint.

Rudd and Stoll

What does all this mean for an intercollegiate athletics program?



- The athletic program's mission ought to be very explicit – clearly defined and specific. The mission statement conveys what a group believes to be of significant worth.

Yeager et al

- *A program's core virtues are synonymous with the character of a team or program. Have you defined the core values of your program? How often are the core virtues explained, practiced, valued? Do all stakeholders understand the same operational definitions?*

Yeager et al

- Coaches need to be held accountable for the fulfillment of a department's mission statement and the transmission of a department's values in their individual sports.

Yeager et al

- Programs should be designed that manifest the organization's mission statement and values in clear ways.

Yeager et al

Can positive character traits be developed through a sporting experience? Absolutely. But it will not happen by chance or hope. It can and will only happen when coaches, teachers, and administrators make a conscious decision to make character development an outcome (objective) of the sport experience.

Doty

Three initiatives to promote student development through participation in Intercollegiate Athletics



Staff Development

- Athletics needs to be an integral part of what ever reporting lines they are expected to follow
- It is very easy for an athletic department to become an island in itself. Inclusiveness of the entire coaching and support staff is very important.
- Professional development and student development programming are essential



Student Leadership Development

- Student Athletic Advisory Committee
- Special project participation
 - Hazing Workshops
 - Diversity workshops
 - Sportsmanship Summits
 - Career Development



Sportsmanship Summits

A person's character refers to dispositions, values and habits that determine the way that a person normally responds to desires, fears, challenges, opportunities, failures and successes. Ideally, sports can and should enhance the character of the student-athletes we play and work with on a daily basis. This can be accomplished if we embrace the opportunities we have with sport to instill in individual athletes knowledge of and a love for the qualities and virtues that comprise good character through participation in athletics.

--Michael Josephson

Sportsmanship Summits

- Created and supported in cooperation with SUNY Geneseo (Intercollegiate Athletics and Student and Campus Life) and a high school athletic association with funding from the NCAA grant program.
- A day long summit that addresses current issues in athletics and how athletes can have a part in breaking the cycle of stereotypical traditions and beliefs which are fostered through athletics participation.

Sportsmanship Summits

Format

- Cooperative games
- Workshops facilitated by college student-athletes
- Luncheon with keynote speaker



Sportsmanship Summits

Topics

- 2006 “Is it Gamesmanship or is it Sportsmanship?” defining the difference
- 2007 “The legal implications of hazing and the dangers of social interactive websites”
 - moral and legal implications of hazing
 - the dangers of interactive social networking, My-Space, Facebook, etc
- 2008 “Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion through Athletics”
- 2009 “Let’s Be Good Citizens-Civility in Athletics”
 - school leadership, civility and citizenship
- 2010 “Think Strong”
 - self-discipline and focus

Sportsmanship Summits

Benefits/Learning outcomes-facilitator assessment

- 100% have an increased understanding of the issues related to hazing, civility and making good choices.
- 97% indicated participation in this program has enhanced their understanding of their own personal values.
- 77% indicated participation in this program has enhanced their appreciation of individual difference.

Sportsmanship Summits

- 100% have enhanced their understanding of ethical behavior while engaged in athletic related activities.
- 97% indicated participation in the program contributed to the development of their leadership ability.
- 95% enhanced their ability to articulate the positive impact that participation in intercollegiate athletics has had on them
- 100 % fostered their consideration of the ethical ramifications of their actions as a student-athlete in the future.
- 97% indicated participation in the program has enhanced their ability to act responsibly toward others.
- 80% expect some change in their behavior as they engage in athletic related activities.

The right way is not always the popular and easy way. Standing for right when it is unpopular is a true test of moral character.

— Margaret Chase Smith

