Athletes with choices, athletes with voices: The ethics of supporting athlete autonomy and athlete well-being in youth sport

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Today’s Discussion

The Daniels Fund Ethics Principles & youth sport

Why is athlete autonomy so important for athlete well-being

How ethics are a moving target in sport

What we did in HSCI 3310

How can these ethics principles help coaches and parents

Questions/Discussion
PRINCIPLES

Integrity
Act with honesty in all situations

Trust
Build trust in all stakeholder relationships

Accountability
Accept responsibility for all decisions

Transparency
Maintain open and truthful communications

Fairness
Engage in fair competition and create equitable and just relationships

Respect
Honor the rights, freedoms, views, and property of others

Rule of Law
Comply with the spirit and intent of laws and regulations

Viability
Create long-term value for all relevant stakeholders
What are some of our most salient sport experiences?
Why do kids say they play sports?
Professionalization of Youth Sport

Youth sports is becoming professionalized in the sense that a shift is occurring from a focus on physical, social, and psychological development to more extrinsic goals such as winning, rankings, fame, and earning college athletic scholarships.
Healthy youth sport environments that foster joy, competence, and self-worth have lifelong implications.
Do what’s right (?)
The moral compass in sport is often a moving target.
Youth Athletes: Especially Vulnerable
Vulnerable in our current sport culture of “it’s just a game”

Adult-led win at all costs mentality

Developmentally inappropriate training

Autocratic sport adults (Vealey & Chase, 2015)

Our love affair with sport (Coakley, 2017)

The ethical responsibility of all adults in youth sport to center athlete wellbeing
Have you ever experienced or observed an ethical dilemma in sport?
Ethical Decisions Case Study Discussion

- Do you bench your starting player who has been disciplined at school for bullying?
- You regularly observe a junior olympic coach berating and humiliating his players and using excessive physical training to “toughen them up” - do you say something or stay quiet for fear your athlete will lose playing time?
- A high school athlete collides with another player in the high school state championship and gets up looking off balance. Do you pull them from the game or have them checked by the team doctor after the game?
- A private soccer club requires athletes to travel 11 months out of the year and sells the $10k/year price tag by telling parents that this is the only way they’ll get a look from a college recruiter - is this an ethical business plan?
Youth Sport Panel

Youth Sport Parent-Volunteer-Coach

Coach - High School and College

High School Head Athletic Trainer

Former High School and College Athlete - Current Coach Educator
Ethical imperative of youth sport stakeholders:

Athletes first
Athletes before winning
Athletes with voices
Athletes with choices
Ethics-based best practices for parents and coaches

Parents
- Let kids choose their activities, and teach them accountability by following through on their commitments.
- Never hesitate to advocate for all children in sport when safety and wellbeing are not put first to ensure viability of lifelong physical activity.
- Teach kids to advocate for their physical and mental safety - trust and respect are mutual and earned.
- Teach integrity through sportspersonship, not gamespersonship.
- Be transparent by giving kids realistic expectations of success and unconditional love.

Coaches
- Be transparent about the whys of coaching choices.
- Respect every athlete's autonomy over their body and mind.
- Role model integrity.
- Create a team culture grounded in fairness and respect and be consistent with appropriate accountability for everyone.
- Give kids choices in the team structure and encourage peer leadership.
- Hold peer coaches accountable to centering athlete safety and wellbeing.
Questions/Discussion