TEACHING SPORT ETHICS: ONE PERSPECTIVE

Authors: **Pete Van Mullem**, Ph.D., Lewis Clark State College, **Sharon Stoll**, Ph.D., University of Idaho, and **Heather Van Mullem**, Ph.D., Lewis Clark State College

Abstract

Over 300 universities across the United States offer a degree in sport management and the number of schools developing new sport management curriculum continues to grow (NASSM, 2013). As new curriculum is being developed and programs are starting to be implemented, a discussion on the best methodological approach to teach each class is becoming more frequent. Often courses in a sport management curriculum include: sport finance, sport marketing, sociology of sport, sport ethics, sport facilities, event management, and sport law. Of the courses listed, the one course that tends to be the most challenging because of its theoretical basis, abstract, and subjective nature is teaching about ethics. This article examines an effective methodological approach to teaching sport ethics based on established research and provides an example of an effective pedagogical method for teaching sport ethics in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

In 1966, Ohio University started the first graduate-level curriculum aimed at preparing students for jobs in the sport industry (Parks & Quarterman, 2003). Since that time, the number of sport management programs in the United States has grown to over 300 undergraduate and graduate programs offering degrees in the area of sport management (NASSM, 2013). Within a typical sport management program, various courses are offered including: sport finance, sport marketing, sociology of sport, sport ethics, sport facilities, event management, and sport law. Of the courses listed, the one course that tends to be the most challenging because of its theoretical basis, abstract and subjective nature, and multiplicity of pedagogical methods is teaching sport ethics (Piper, Gentile, & Daloz Parks, 1993). What does it mean to teach a class in sport ethics? What approaches to instruction are currently being utilized and what methods or combination of methods for teaching ethical decision-making in sport are the most effective (Van Mullem, Stoll, & Beller, 2010)? Therefore this paper will: 1) discuss common methods for teaching sport ethics in the classroom, 2) examine an effective methodological approach to teaching sport ethics, and 3) provide an example of an effective pedagogical method for teaching sport ethics in the classroom.

Common Methods for Teaching Sport Ethics

For the sport ethics instructor, the common misconception is that if one is ethical then "one can teach sport ethics." This could lead to placing an instructor in the classroom, who is ill prepared for the difficult abstract theoretical basis and ability to lead knowledgeable and effective discussion sessions (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2011). Possibly lacking adequate study and training in both the complexities of content and application (e.g., teaching sport ethics in the formal educational setting), instructors, are left to search for an effective pedagogical approach (Piper, Gentile, & Daloz Parks, 1993). Furthermore, the instructor is faced with a multiplicity of methods when considering their approach to teaching sport ethics. The variety and number of textbooks on applied sport ethics focus on everything from philosophy and theory to sportsmanship and case studies (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010; Lumpkin, Stoll & Beller, 2011; Malloy, Ross, & Zakus, 2003). Influenced by their own training or non-training in the study of morality and personal experience in the sporting realm, the sport ethics instructor may be challenged to create a learning environment conducive for open discussion and reflection.

Two basic methods prevail in the teaching of sport ethics within the sport management curriculum, the theoretical – model based method and the less theoretical learning through case studies approach (Malloy et al, 2003). A theory-based approach reaches the learner through the reading of great works, classical pieces, or combinations found in anthologies (Boxhill, 2003; Morgan, 2007; NcNamee & Parry, 1998; French, 2004). The student learns to act as a philosopher, asking questions such as: are moral standards universal, is an ethical decision based on individual subjectivity, and why do people behave morally (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010)? Supposedly, a background in theory develops a student's confidence for more in-depth discussion of ethical dilemmas. Nevertheless, theory must be taught with a focus of practical application to the world of sport (Klein, 1998). If left to study theory for too long a period the student will cease to engage in the material and lose interest in the course (Malloy et al, 2003).

In contrast, the case study method challenges students to become active participants in the learning process, working together in small groups (Malloy et all, 2003). However, it is important to consider the training of the student and his/her readiness to discuss ethical issues. "Otherwise, case discussion can quickly turn into a rambling debate or favor those who most vociferously advocate a personal point of view (Murphy, 2004, p.16).

The case study method offers the students a cursory description of theories, but the strength lies in various scenarios in which the students are to ferret out the solution and to give their reason why. Additionally, teaching research currently argues against these techniques because the result usually is a relativistic point of view. As Murphy so pointedly states, "...the discussion is hardly philosophical but rather busy and noisy with little moral reasoning development" (Murphy, 2004, p. 17).

An Effective Methodological Approach

In the classroom setting the topic of sport ethics does not easily lend itself to the lecture format unless the instructor is highly trained and educated in theory, application, and practice (Gill, 1993). Rather, active participation by the student is not only beneficial but a necessity to a successful learning environment (Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh, 1990). The instructor must first recognize, discuss, and reflect on the scenarios in establishing a learning environment conducive to the growth and development of the students. However, it must be noted that increasing interaction and discussion in the classroom should not solely rest on the actions of the instructor. Students must read assigned materials and be prepared to contribute to the classes they attend. The relationship must be a reciprocal one. Teachers must be prepared to provide discussion and students must be prepared to engage in the learning process through adequate preparation and participation (Young, 2009; Gill, 1993). A discussion of ethical issues in sport requires preparedness from the student and instructor on current issues in sport, development of a clear vision and personal mission about what it means to be ethical (Stoll, Beller, Van Mullem, Brunner, & Barnes, 2009), what it means to be ethical in the greater world (in this case sport management)(Lumpkin et al, 2011), the actual skills and tools to do moral reasoning (Fox & DeMarco, 1990), plus a time of personal reflection to increase cognitive skills for personal growth (Piper, Gentile, & Daloz Parks, 1993; Gill, 1993). To accomplish the above, the instructor must facilitate an environment conducive for the student to develop the ability to reason about moral issues (moral reasoning). Moral reasoning is a skill requiring the process of reading, writing, and reflection to develop a personal mission with ethical principles (Lumpkin et al, 2011). Subsequently, the student can then reflect and discuss ethical dilemmas that occur in sport.

The written personal mission statement should act as the overarching guide for each student's journey through the study of sport ethics. What do they believe? What do they value? Who are they? A thoughtful mission statement might read as follows: As a professional sport

manager, I believe that I should be responsible, honest, fair, and respectful toward my clients, my duties, and the mission of the organization.

Writing the personal mission statement is not something done quickly or spuriously. Rather, the writing should be a diligent process in which the student learns the differences between moral and social values. The writing should also focus on the importance of an organization's honorable mission, and why personal missions should support the honorable mission of the organization. Once written, the student then has a personal mission statement as a guide in reflecting and solving ethical dilemmas.

An ethical dilemma involves making choices based on the conflict between two good: a non-moral good and a moral good (Lumpkin, et al., 2011). Typical conflicts in sport are the seeking of external goods (success, winning, and fame) which often conflict with the internal goods of following an ethical mission that supports moral values such as integrity, fair play, respect, and human dignity (McIntyre, 1984). When faced with a true ethical dilemma, a person experiences cognitive dissonance, a situation where one must choose between two competing goods (external and internal). If the instructor focuses on getting students to develop a clear principled personal mission statement and then uses the moral reasoning process to make ethical decisions, the instructor, will have taken a significant step in conducting a successful class discussion and helping students come to grips with the tensions that exist between the external and internal goods of sport (Lumpkin, 2008; McIntyre, 1984).

For example, a discussion of ethical issues in intercollegiate sport may include, but is not limited to: paying student athletes, deciphering gender equity issues, and recruiting violations (Hums, Barr, & Gullion, 1999; Lumpkin, et al., 2011). The challenging part of teaching sport ethics is that the instructor must overcome the misconception that there are no good answers and that ethical decisions are based purely on personal opinion (Kretchmar, 2005). The approach to teaching sport ethics should involve an intended purposeful cognitive dissonance approach. The dissonance occurs when what one actually believes is truth, in relation to the greater world (in this case sport management), is stressed by, alternative information that doubts or challenges the believed truth (Fox & DeMarco, 1990).

A sport scenario provide excellent opportunities for further cognitive dissonance and moral development, but only after each individual has ferreted out their own personal ethical mission and how that mission works in the greater world of sport management. The process occurs when the

instructor recognizes, discusses, and reflects with their students the moral implications of the sport scenario (Piper, Gentile, & Daloz Parks, 1993; Gill, 1993).

...discussion will ask us to make and evaluate moral judgments about cases...The challenge will   be to develop positions that we can impartially affirm, that are consistent with our views in related areas, and that rely on principles whose consequences for action are acceptable (Simon, 2010, p.16).

How does this then play out in the sport ethics classroom? What might be an effective method to assist students in learning how to make ethical decisions?

An Effective Approach

Developing the classroom environment. Sport is considered a microcosm of society (Eitzen & Sage, 2009) and there are many scenarios in sport and society that can be discussed in the classroom (McMillan & Gentile, 1988).

Given the great impact of sports on society, it is critical that they exemplify this broader moral agreement. Sports both reflect and actively affect society. This is one reason for their moral significance. Sports teach us what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what is condoned and what is shunned (Boxill, 2013, p. 16).

Implementing a successful pedagogical approach involves identifying ethical dilemmas in sport and being able to develop interactive discussion sessions on sport that represent or dramatize elements of our personal and social life (Clifford & Feezell, 2010). Classroom discussion is greatly enhanced when the instructor and student have a common knowledge base of the current and significant historical, philosophical and sociological events involving ethical dilemmas in sport. In order to have a common starting point, time must be invested in reading and discussing these events and why they have moral significance. Having a common starting point provides the student relevance, a sense of reality (Schaupp & Lane, 1992), level of confidence, openness, and readiness to learn.

If the instructor connects with the learner that there is an optimal ethical mission this will help overcome common rationalizations regarding ethical dilemmas in sport; "it's part of the game," "it's good strategy," and "if you don't get caught, it isn't wrong," there will be less of a roadblock in the learning process (Kretchmar, 2005). The connection to the student is imperative and without the teacher student interaction, the process of actually doing "ethics" is highly limited. Therefore the classroom environment and teacher personality are imperative to the successful

implementation of teaching sport ethics (Gill, 1993). The instructor returns to the personal mission statement that each student has written to argue for why honorable action is important. The initial learning of moral reasoning and the writing of the mission statement will influence the student's ability to solve ethical dilemmas.

Selecting sport scenarios. The culture of sport provides numerous examples and opportunities for discussion on ethical issues as well as acting as a base to develop a moral point of view. For example, let's consider the role of the athletic administrator when hiring a coaching staff. One of the most difficult processes is selecting an individual who will be both successful in obtaining the external goods (winning) and the internal goods (developing players to be good human beings). In the hyper-competitive environment of college sports, this dual role often challenges coaches to make decision based on the conflicting external and internal goods.

One highly successful coach was caught in just such a dilemma. Basically, he violated recruiting rules and then lied about it. The coach questioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in regards to potential recruiting violations involving prospective student-athletes and improper benefits stated,

I provided incorrect and misleading information to the NCAA. I've learned some invaluable lessons. After I provided the false and misleading information, subsequently I went back and corrected the record…I learned that it's not OK to tell the truth most of the time, but you've got to tell the truth all of the time (O'Neil, 2010).

This ethical scenario is an excellent choice to help students understand the tensions between external and internal goods. It is a multi-faceted dilemma. The first question here is why did the coach violate the rules? Usually the ethical dilemma occurs in the tension of gaining an advantage (external goods), winning, and success against following a rule (the internal goods of integrity). The second question occurs when the coach, faced with possible sanctions for recruiting violations, chose to lie (internal goods, integrity) when he was caught. Why? Perhaps he lied to maintain loyalty to their team and/or institution or to cover for his own or their misdeeds (external goods).

Application into the Classroom

The following steps provide one perspective in developing an effective pedagogical approach in teaching sport ethics in the classroom.

Step One: Application of Personal Mission to the Scenario. The goal of the instructor in step one is to provide opportunities for students to explore their values and beliefs when discussing a scenario. It is important to make linkages to the study of ethics in relation to the actual doing of ethics. To do so, students need to be refreshed on their study of internal and external goods linked to personal values. A value is something one gives worth to; it drives and motivates actions. A value may be non-moral (often the external goods) or moral (often the internal goods). A non-moral value is an extrinsic object or the "means to the good life." Whereas a moral value is an intrinsic behavior directed towards other human beings, based on motive, intention, and action. An example of a non-moral value might be a car, money, or a house. Examples of moral values include honesty, justice, responsibility, and beneficence (Lumpkin, et al., 2011; Stoll, 2007). In assisting students to examine values, the instructor may ask questions such as: what do you value and what do you give worth to?

To put this step into action have the students list a minimum of three values. Next to each value ask the students to provide an action statement. An action statement clarifies what the value means to them (Covey, 2012). For example if one values responsibility their action statement might read, "being accountable for my actions and holding others to the same standard." Following a reflection period by the student on their own personal values, the instructor can initiate questions about the scenario in relation to the general purpose of the activity within a sport management arena: what is the purpose of the activity, what is the purpose of college sport, and what is the purpose of youth sport? Each question stimulates the student to prioritize and examine the activity and its value not only to the student, but also to society.

Therefore, armed with a more clearly defined personal belief system the student is ready to examine the scenario about the coach violating NCAA guidelines. A typical discussion could begin, (Instructor) "Place yourself in the role the athletic director at an NCAA institution. In examining this scenario from your own personal mission, vision, and belief system about what it means to be ethical, how might you handle this scenario if your coach was caught lying to NCAA investigators?"

The student is now considering the scenario from a leadership position in sport by reflecting on their belief system, personal values and what it means to be ethical. By partaking in this process the student is creating a value-driven mission, providing a foundation for growth to occur (Van Mullem, Brunner, Stoll, 2008). Having established their belief system, the student is ready to match their beliefs to the sport organization they are working for.

Step Two: Matching Belief Systems. Having well-established values and a belief system about what it means to be ethical provides a platform to support the student in solving sport scenarios. However to apply what they have learned in their sport ethics course to the "real world, the student needs to be able to identify the mission of the organization. A sport organization is responsible to stakeholders; (e.g. employees, alumni, fans, shareholders, customers, suppliers, and the government) (Lussier & Kimball, 2009). Therefore, when developing a mission and vision for the organization all the stakeholders are taken into consideration and the purpose of the organization becomes driven by achieving end results deemed important to the stakeholders. However, the mission of the organization should have an honorable end. In most public or private educational athletic organizations, the honorable end is focused on responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty – all moral values.

Driven by a purpose to please the stakeholders and achieve a moral and ethical desirable end, the organization influences the belief system and values of each individual employee and stakeholder. Thus, an environment is created where a purposeful driven vision and mission is demonstrated by the action of the employees. Having prepared the student to understand the potential difference between one's own moral point of view (belief system) and the mission (belief system) of the organization, the class can revisit the sport scenario.

(Instructor) *What is the purpose of sport at the collegiate level? In an NCAA DI institution, what is the purpose of sport? Revisit your own beliefs about the purpose of sport and what you believe the purpose of sport is at the collegiate level. Does your belief system match the belief system of the institution, athletic department, or the coach?*

An important goal here is to assist the sport management student in understanding the challenges and importance of working for and with individuals and organizations that match the student's personal belief system. Being able to recognize the purpose of an individual or organization facilitates the student's growth and readiness for doing moral reasoning.

Step Three: Doing Moral Reasoning. The theoretical approach presents challenges for the instructor in delivery and maintaining the student's interest. However, the importance of having a background and understanding of ethical theory lays the foundation for successful discussion sessions. In our sport scenario, the coach is faced with an ethical dilemma when confronted by NCAA investigators. At that moment he is making an ethical decision based on his ability to reason about moral issues (moral reasoning). In addition, the athletic director faces a decision that may challenge his or her own belief system in upholding the vision and mission of the university.

Moral reasoning is the ability to think through a moral problem using a systematic approach that implements one's own values and beliefs while considering them against societal values and beliefs (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003). The reasoning process is a cognitive skill that can be learned through reading, discussion, writing, and personal reflection (Gill, 1993). Good reasoning can occur if the process is impartial, consistent, and employs reflective judgment (Lumpkin, et al., 2011; Stoll, 2007).

Furthermore, one's reasoning is driven by personal values and a moral point of view (belief system). At this point the student is ready to recognize which of the values and goods (external and internal) are conflicting in the sport scenario.

(Instructor) *Once again place yourself in the role as an athletic director and examine the scenario previously presented regarding the coach lying to NCAA investigators. Building on your own personal belief system, what are the values (non-moral and moral) and goods (internal and external) involved in this scenario? What are the conflicting values and goods for the coach? What are the conflicting values and goods for you, the athletic director?*

The process should help the student understand the importance of developing and reflecting on values and dealing with the conflicting external and internal goods in making ethical decisions. The student is now ready to proceed to the final step, learning how to develop new ideas and consider better alternatives when making decisions regarding ethical dilemmas.

Step Four: Personal Reflection. The student is now equipped with the skills and tools to make sound ethical decisions in sport. However, successful decision-making is greatly enhanced if the student learns to implement personal reflection. The classroom environment provides a framework for the instructor to encourage deliberate reflection by assigning reading material, written reflection papers, and in-class discussions. The process of deliberate reflection assists the sport management student in connecting their actual classroom knowledge with their intuitive knowledge or belief system. During reflection the student may consider the "best practices" and develop ideas for change (Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001).

The sport scenario presented in this paper can be revisited one more time using a personal reflection paper. For example, building on the steps already completed for this scenario a writing assignment could be: As an athletic director how would you help your coaching staff develop their personal mission, vision, and goals to match the ethical mission of the program? This paper would have assigned outside readings that would be referenced and discussed within the paper. The

writing process facilitates an avenue for the student to discuss a sport scenario while reflecting on their personal experiences and a newly developed belief system.

CONCLUSION

The ability to make ethical decisions is a critical skill for future sport leaders (DeSeni & Rosenberg, 2010), as decision-making encompasses a variety of the tasks a manager is responsible for (Chelladurai, 2006). Therefore through a comprehensive ethical pedagogical format of moral reflection, study, class preparation and environment, the posing of ethical dilemmas in a controlled setting of the classroom can occur. Through open discussion of alternatives, predictions can occur and the instructor can assist the class in developing the ability to think both critically and ethically (McMillan & Gentile, 1988). "Moral excellence should be the foundation upon which the sport manager's academic preparation rests (DeSeni & Rosenberg, 2010, p.15)."

The perspective presented in this paper is one example of an effective method in teaching sport ethics. More importantly, having a foundation and framework for making ethical decisions as a sport leader is a necessity for students completing a degree in sport management. Their success as a member of the sport profession depends on it.

REFERENCES

Boxill, J. (2013). The coach as moral exemplar, in Simon, R. L. ed., *The Ethics of Coaching Sports*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 2013, 9-21.

Boxill, J. (2003). *Sport ethics.* Berlin, Germany: Blackwell Publishing Company

Covey, S. (2012). *Personal mission statement builder.* Retrieved from http://www.franklincovey.com/msb

Chelladurai, P. (2006). *Human resource management in sport and recreation.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Clifford, C. & Feezell, R. M. (2010). *Sport and character: Reclaiming the principles of sportsmanship.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

DeSensi, J.T., & Rosenberg, D. (2003). *Ethics and morality in sport management* (3rd ed.) Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.

Etizen, S. D. & Sage, G. H. (2009). *Sociology of north merican sport* (8th ed.). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Fox, R. M. & DeMarco, J. P. (1990). *Moral reasoning: A philosophic approach to applied ethics.* Orlando, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

French, P. 2004. *Ethics and college sports: Ethics, sports, and the university.* Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gill, J. (1993). *Learning to learn: Towards a philosophy in education.* New Jersey: Humanities Press.

Hums, M. A., Barr, C. A., and Gullion, L. (1999). The ethical issues confronting managers in the sport industry. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *20*(1), 51-66.

Klein, E. R. (1998). The one necessary condition for a successful business ethics course: The teacher must be a philosopher*. Business Ethics Quarterly*, *8*(3), 561-574.

Knowles, Z., Gilbourne, D., Borrie, A., & Nevill, A. (2001). Developing the reflective sports coach: A study exploring the processes of reflective practice within a higher education coaching programme. *Reflective Practice, 2*(2), 185-207.

Kretchmar, S. R. (2005). *Practical philosophy of sport and physical activity* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics

Lumpkin, A. (2008), Teachers as role models; Teach character and moral irtues, *JOPHERD, 79*(2), 45-49.

Lumpkin, A., Stoll, S. K., & Beller, J. M. (2011*). Practical ethics in sport management.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Lussier, R. N. & Kimball, D. C. (2009). *Applied sport management skills.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Malloy, D. C., Ross, S., & Zakus, D. H. (2003). *Sport ethics: Concepts and cases in sport and recreation*. Canada: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.

McIntrye, A. (1984). *After virtue.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

McNamee, M. J. & Perry, S. J. (1998). *Ethics and sport.* New York, NY: Routledge.

McMillan, M. M. & Gentile, L. M. (1998). Children's literature: Teaching critical thinking and ethics. *The Reading Teacher*, *41*(9), 876-878.

Morgan, W. J. (2007). *Ethics in Sport (*2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics

Murphy, P. (2004). Observations on teaching marketing ethics. *Marketing Education Review*, *13*(3), 15-21.

NASSM (2013). Membership Institutions. Retrieved May 28, 2013 from www.nassm.com

O'Neil, D. (2010, September 10). When whistle blowers go bad: A sad tale. *ESPN*. Retrieved from http://espn.go.com/blog/collegebasketballnation/post/_/id/15159/when-whi…

Parks, J. B. & Quarterman, J. (2003). *Contemporary sport management*. Champaign, IL. Human Kinetics.

Piper T., Gentile, M. C., & Daloz Parks, S. D. (1993). *Can ethics be taught? Perspectives, challenges, and approaches at Harvard.* Harvard College: Harvard Business School Press.

Reimer, J., Paolitto, D.P., & Hersh, R.H. (1990). *Promoting moral growth: From Piaget to Kohlberg.* Long Grove, IL: Wayland Press.

Schaupp, D. L. & Lane, M. S. (1992). Teaching business ethics: Bringing reality to the classroom. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *11*(3), 211-219.

Simon, R. L. (2010). *Fair play: The ethics of sport* (3rd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Stoll, S. K. (2007). *Virtue driven lives: What it takes to be a servant leader.* Football Edition, 3. Moscow, ID: Center for ETHICS*, University of Idaho.

Stoll, S. K., Beller, J. M., Van Mullem, P**.**, Brunner, D., and Barnes, J. (2009). *Servant leadership in coaching*. Published proceedings: International Conference in honor of the 75-year anniversary

of the Sports Games Department of the Lesgaft State University of Physical Culture, St. Petersburg, Russia, pp. 169-175.

Van Mullem, P., Brunner, D., and Stoll, S. K. (2008). *Practical applications for teaching character through sport*, Pelinks4u (Online), October.

Van Mullem, P.W., Stoll, S.K., & Beller, J.M. (2010). Effects of an online moral reasoning intervention on coaches. *Research Quarterly Abstracts*, March, pp. 24.

Young, J. R. (2009, July 10). *When computers leave classrooms, so does boredom*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Retrieved July 27, 2010 from http://chronicle.com/article/Teach-Naked-Effort-Strips/47398/.