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Analyzing Ethics in the Administration of Interscholastic Sports

Three Key Gender-related Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Educational Leaders

Warren A. Whisenant, Paul M. Pedersen and Galen Clavio

ABSTRACT

Athletic administrators and decision makers within interscholastic athletics are expected to embrace a code of ethics that serves as a set of rules to guide their professional behavior. Included within this code are areas of controversy that present gender-related ethical dilemmas for administrators. Three specific ethical dilemmas involve (1) providing equitable participation opportunities for students, (2) instituting ethical hiring practices for coaches, athletic administrators and educational leaders and (3) creating an environment and organizational culture that embraces fairness. This article examines these three critical dilemmas.

KEYWORDS *fairness, hegemony, homologous reproduction, title VII, title IX*

Introduction

Young people who wish to participate in competitive athletics generally have two options available to them. First, they can become active in school-sponsored athletics, where they join a team that is directly affiliated with and sponsored by the educational institution. Second, they can participate in non-school sporting activities such as athletic clubs, federations and associations. While most countries have both options available for their young people, there is often a greater emphasis (i.e. organizational input, financial resources) placed on one of the options. As Laios (1995: 6) noted, 'In Europe, and in the rest of the world, there is school athletics but the main means for the promotion of sport are the non-school sports'. Because of their emphasis on junior teams and club level activities, 'European countries give school sport a lower priority than does the USA' (Laios, 1995: 4). In countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia, 'sport is an inseparable part of the academic experience'

(Laios, 1995: 4). For young people in the USA, the secondary school system is their primary means to participate in competitive sports. In the latest figures from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), there were over four million boys and slightly fewer than three million girls participating in high school sports in the USA (NFHS, 2005). Such high participation numbers for school-sponsored sports support the statement by Laios (1995: 5) that, 'Nowhere in the world, is so great an emphasis given to school sports as in the USA.'

Leading each of these school-sponsored sports programs is an athletic director (AD). As noted by Schneider and Stier (2001: 212):

the responsibilities and expectations associated with high school athletic directors have increased tremendously, primarily because of the rapid growth in the number of sports made available at the secondary level and also because of the increase in the number of young people who desired to be a part in competitive sports at this level. With the expansion of the number of sports coupled with a greater number of athletes came a corresponding expansion in the workload and complexity of the challenges being faced by the typical athletic director:

As of both the emphasis on school-sponsored sports in the USA and the increased importance of athletic directors in the management of these enterprises, it is important to examine the key ethical dilemmas that face educational leaders and athletic department administrators.

Administrators and interscholastic ADs face a myriad of decisions throughout each day. Although some of these decisions are rather perfunctory in nature (i.e. scheduling, media requests, correspondence, fund-raising), others involve major ethical issues. To assist athletic directors in their pursuit of ethical decision making, a code of ethics is offered by the national professional association that oversees the development and promotion of interscholastic athletics. This sport governing body—the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA)—is a member association within the NFHS, the coordinator of extracurricular activities among state high school associations. The primary mission of the NIAAA is to promote the growth and image of interscholastic athletic administrators and preserve the educational nature of interscholastic athletics (NIAAA, 2005).

As with most organizations, the NIAAA's established code of ethics (see Figure 1) is a document for which its members are expected to embrace. The purpose of an effective code of ethics is to serve as a set of rules that an organization's members can use to guide their behavior (DeSensi and Rosenberg, 2003). While the NIAAA's code primarily focuses on student athletes, some aspects are applicable to coaches, officials, administrators, and other adult leaders who serve the students.

Athletic administrators and other educational leaders involved with school-sponsored athletics are expected to embrace the tenants of this code. Several tenants within this code (i.e. protection of civil rights of all individuals involved

Figure 1 NIAAA Code of Ethics

- The Interscholastic Athletic Administrator:
- 1.) Develops and maintains a comprehensive athletic program which seeks the highest development of all participants, and which respects the individual dignity of every athlete.
 - 2.) Considers the well-being of the entire student body as fundamental in all decisions and actions.
 - 3.) Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.
 - 4.) Organizes, directs and promotes an interscholastic athletic program that is an integral part of the total educational program.
 - 5.) Cooperates with the staff and school administration in establishing, implementing and supporting school policies.
 - 6.) Acts impartially in the execution of basic policies and in the enforcement of the conference, league, and state high school association rules and regulations.
 - 7.) Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity.
 - 8.) Upholds the honor of the profession in all relations with students, colleagues, coaches, administrators and the general public.
 - 9.) Improves the professional status and effectiveness of the interscholastic athletic administrator through participation in local, state and national in-service programs.
 - 10.) Promotes high standards of ethics, sportsmanship and personal conduct by encouraging administration, coaches, staff, student-athletes and community to commit to these high standards.

Source: NIAAA Code of Ethics (2005).

with interscholastic athletics, support of all school policies [including those pertaining to equal employment opportunities] and promotion of high standards of ethics) point to three key ethical dilemmas for the leaders of high school athletic programs. These dilemmas are directly related to gender issues in high school athletics. Specifically, the issues involve females and their ability to participate not only as student athletes, but their ability to continue their affiliation with high school sports as professionals in leadership roles.

Sport is a male dominated institution (McGinnis et al., 2005) and the sport industry segment of interscholastic athletics in the USA is no different (Schell and Rodriguez, 2000). How leaders in education handle the three key dilemmas they are facing with regard to female students will to a large extent determine how much female students will be involved in and benefit from interscholastic athletics. This analysis will detail those areas of controversy that face decision makers who control interscholastic athletics. These three ethical dilemmas involve: (1) providing equitable participation opportunities; (2) instituting ethical hiring practices; and (3) creating an environment and organizational culture that embraces fairness.

Three Ethical Dilemmas

Ethical Dilemma 1—Participation

Supporters of extracurricular activities, in particular interscholastic athletics, promote the virtues of sports participation. Those virtues include character building, self-confidence, self-respect, teamwork, respect for authority, honor

in winning and losing, and other social skills necessary for students to become effective, contributing adults in their communities ('The Case for High School Activities', 2005; DeSensi and Rosenberg, 2003). Some of the direct benefits accrued for those who participate in extracurricular activities include lower dropout rates, greater academic successes, and higher school attendance.

While these virtues have been tied to the institution of interscholastic athletics for decades, equal opportunity for attaining the benefits of these virtues has been elusive for females until very recently. For instance, since 1971, the number of girls participating in interscholastic athletics has risen dramatically, from fewer than 300,000 to over 2.9 million (Hase, 2005). During the same period of time, the number of boys participating in interscholastic athletics has risen from 3.6 million, or 13 percent of all high school boys, to approximately 4.1 million, representing just under 15 percent of all high school boys (Hase, 2005). While nearly 53 percent of all high school students have some association with interscholastic athletics, only 10 percent of the high school girls go on to participate at the college level.

Girls have increasingly benefited from the more ethical decision making and compliance actions of athletic administrators. The primary explanations for these actions, and the dramatic increase in girls' participation numbers, are the demands of Title IX, combined with the schools' compliance with the NIAAA's code of ethics, thereby ensuring that all student athletes will benefit from participating in interscholastic athletics.

Title IX, a federal statute of the USA that is often associated with sports, is actually not specific in its application to sports or athletics. Title IX specifically states, 'No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance' (Clement, 2004: 119). Title IX makes no direct mention of sports. Over time, however, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), supported by numerous judicial judgments, has applied Title IX to sports at both the collegiate and interscholastic levels.

When assessing compliance, the OCR looks to see if the school or school district meets at least one of three tests. The first test looks for participation opportunities for girls and boys to be substantially proportionate to the rates of enrollment for students. Second, the school district must demonstrate a history of expansion and continuing practice of program expansion for the under-represented sex. The third test explores the degree to which the school accommodates the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex. If at least one of the three tests has been met, then the school is found to be, at that point in time, compliant with Title IX.

Efforts to achieve Title IX compliance have given rise to the first ethical dilemma faced by interscholastic athletic administrators and decision makers. Although a good faith effort towards compliance does take into consideration the extent the programs meet the interests and abilities of each gender, there

are no requirements for identical athletic programs to be offered to boys and girls. In addition, Title IX does not require reductions in or the elimination of any boys' sports. The choices made by school administrators, however, have often resulted in the reduction of participation opportunities by boys. Rather than making tough funding choices, administrators have tended to take the easiest approach (e.g. cutting boys' sports and replacing them with girls' sports). As noted by the Secretary of Education's Commission on Opportunity in Athletics, 'Although, in a strict sense, the proportionality part of the three-part test does not require opportunities for boys and men be limited, it has been a factor, along with other factors, in the decision to cut or cap teams' (US Department of Education, 2005: 24).

The choices made by school administrators to achieve Title IX compliance by cutting boys' sports teams has fostered a hostile environment for both girls' sports and Title IX as a whole. The popular perception is that girls are to blame for a supposed reduction in sporting opportunities for boys. However, the anecdotal argument that Title IX has a negative impact on the opportunity for boys to participate in sports is false. While girls have benefited from the passage of this legislation through increased participation rates, boys have not experienced reductions in their participation rates. A recent study by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) noted that the 2005/6 academic year saw the highest number of boys participating in interscholastic athletics since 1978, as well as the highest ever participation numbers for girls in interscholastic athletics (Howard and Gillis, 2006). Not only are more boys participating since the passage of Title IX, a larger percentage of the student population are experiencing the positive effects of participation.

In many cases, the main culprit in the cutting of boys' sports teams is in fact 11-player American football, another boys' sport. Football, despite being ranked fourth as the sport most often fielded by schools, remains largely immune to any budgetary cuts made to accommodate the equitable inclusion of girls into interscholastic athletics, and in fact has seen its participation numbers increase in recent years. With nearly 1.1 million participants, football comprises nearly all the participation differential between boys' and girls' sports. Furthermore, the number of football participants is nearly double that of the next most popular boys' sport, basketball (Howard and Gillis, 2006). Taken together, participants in football comprise 25 percent of all boys who participate in interscholastic sports.

The paradox of fighting for participation equity for girls is stark. In support of high school athletics, school administrators tout specific attributes such as character building, enhancement of social skills, and improved self-efficacy and self-esteem as being essential educational attributes for students who participate in sports. By denying girls the equal opportunity to participate, decision makers are in affect, suggesting that girls have no less a need to build their character, improve their social skills, or improve their levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. A similar supposition may be applied to less talented student

athletes. Often the less talented students are denied the opportunity to participate by either holding tryouts for limited roster positions or by later during the competitive season, cutting students from a team. Justifications for roster limits include the need to maintain budgetary expenditures within manageable funding levels, or to improve a team's level of competitiveness. In addition, while boys often have teams for underclassmen (i.e., students of freshman or sophomore standing), such as sophomore and junior varsity football teams, girls often only have one varsity team.

The question to ask administrators is, 'Are these key educational attributes of sport participation only valuable to those students who are more talented?' If so, then what should stop school administrators from resolving classroom academic funding issues in the same manner? If individual character is not important for an individual's ability to contribute to society, then reading skills may be placed into the same category as athletic talent. When funding or over crowding in the classroom becomes an issue, teachers should drop poor readers from their classes in the same manner coaches cut students from their teams. There would be no need to spend resources on poor readers because they may reduce the school's test scores for reading, affecting the perceived academic performance of the school as well as the school's funding.

Obviously, the public would hope teachers and instructional administrators would not deny students who were poor readers the opportunity to improve their reading skills. However, if character, self-esteem, and self-confidence are deemed essential attributes that the school will allocate as much as 3 percent of its budget to athletics, they face an ethical dilemma when they decide to deny students, girls in particular, the opportunity to participate. Title IX compliance essentially hinges on the choices educational leaders make regarding the importance of school sponsored athletics in the school's academic mission. If the need arises for students to have more foreign language classes or math classes, teachers are hired and capital investments are allocated to meet the school's need. The same decision criteria used for basic educational expenditures should guide decisions regarding funding of girls' athletics.

Ethical Dilemma 2—Hiring Practices

Although there is still much work that needs to be done to increase the participation opportunities for high school girls, increased ethical decision making and Title IX compliance have resulted in some major steps forward for girls. Unfortunately, however, similar successes have yet to be witnessed by women who desire a career in high school athletics. As noted above, the number of girls participating in high school sports has grown nearly 10-fold. The jobs in coaching and athletic administration created by this significant growth, however, have typically gone to men. The magnitude of the disparate growth is substantiated by the demographic data collected from a variety of studies. Whisenant (2003) found that nationally, women only held 14 percent of the AD

positions in high school sports. A later study found that men not only controlled 84 percent of the high school AD positions in the USA, men also held 78 percent of the high school principal positions (Whisenant and Pedersen, 2006). Within the state (Texas) with the largest number of student athletes (10 percent of all student athletes in the USA), men not only control the AD and principal positions, they outnumber women as school district superintendents (Whisenant et al., 2005). Men also hold more head coaching positions than women in two out of the three most popular girls' sports (see Table 1).

What clearly stands out from those studies is that women have not been granted the opportunity to fully capitalize on the growth of interscholastic sports. Similar findings have been evident in earlier studies involving coaches and administrators. While women may initially get a position coaching girls' sports, men fill most of those positions when women leave coaching for one reason or another (Chesebro, 1985; Heishman et al., 1990). The number of girls' teams coached by women has declined from nearly 98 percent in 1972, to less than 50 percent (Hart and Mathes, 1982; True, 1983 cited in Hart et al., 1986).

One of the primary causes for the inequity women experience in sport has been identified by Stangl and Kane (1991) and Lovett and Lowry (1994) as being Kanter's (cited in Stangl and Kane, 1991) model of homologous reproduction. Homologous reproduction suggests that the group in power systematically reproduces itself in its own image. Stangl and Kane (1991) as well as Lovett and Lowry (1994) found that a direct relationship ($p < 0.05$) existed between the sex of the AD and the sex of the coach hired. Essentially, men tended to hire men and women hired women. In that men so dominate the power positions in high school administrative structures, hiring based upon the sex of the applicant is akin to overt job discrimination towards women in employment opportunities within interscholastic athletics, which is the second dilemma.

In the USA, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act 1964 expressly prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. While no specific studies have been published regarding hiring practices in interscholastic athletics, other than those attributed to homogenous reproduction, a review of job announcements for AD positions provided insight into how women are denied the opportunity to apply for athletic director positions

Table 1 Texas school demographics

Position	Male (%)	Female (%)
Superintendent	82	18
Principal	75	25
Athletic director	95	5
Girls' basketball	54	46
Girls' softball	56	44
Girls' volleyball	16	84

Source: NIAAA Code of Ethics (2005).

(Whisenant, 2005). A review of all advertised AD job vacancies for a one-year period was conducted. The review found that nearly 75 percent of the announced vacancies required the applicant to also serve as the head football coach. Because women are not known to serve as head football coaches in the USA (Gregory, 2004), the coaching requirement effectively discriminates against women. The disparate treatment of women who may be interested in an AD position was validated upon review of job descriptions for AD positions by Whisenant et al. (2005). In most AD job descriptions, concurrently serving as the head football coach was not listed as a qualification required for the position. Their study included a review of the AD job description template issued by the state's school board association. The template did not list the head football coaching position as an AD qualification (TASB, 2003).

The dilemma, then, rests on the fairness of requiring the candidate to serve as the head football coach. If so, then all women are denied the opportunity to apply for nearly 75 percent of the AD positions within the state. A second consideration rests on the importance for the AD to also be the head football coach. A review of the major responsibilities and duties of athletic directors provides support for the notion that serving as the head football coach is not a bone fide occupational requirement—to do so leads to disparate-treatment discrimination against women.

Ethical Dilemma 3—Climate of Fairness

The third dilemma centers on what may be the hidden costs to all boys and girls who are in contact with high school sports. There are potential lasting effects on boys and girls exposed to the male domination of sports. As high school children become adults and enter the workforce, they may carry the hegemonic effects of sport into the workplace. As men and women, their perceived roles in society and its institutions may be defined by their experiences in sports. If men are seen dominating the power positions in sport, then perhaps it is appropriate for them to dominate other institutional settings including business, government, the family and the media.

As so few women have had the opportunity to serve as role models in leadership positions in interscholastic athletics, girls may have been negatively impacted in their social development (Greendorfer, 1977). The outcome, rather than enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy through their participation, may be that girls see careers in interscholastic athletics as being limited (Heishman et al., 1990) or inappropriate. Bandura (1997) has documented an abundance of research suggesting that cultural sex-typing influences career choice. Girls may self-select themselves out of these careers, more as a result of obstacles to gender-related efficacy rather than an actual lack of skills when considering occupations that are stereotypically male. The result of fewer girls choosing a career in sports leads to the continuation of an environment that may perpetuate gender bias in interscholastic sports.

Therefore, the third ethical dilemma facing male decision makers is to remove entry barriers to women. As more women fill leadership roles in sports, newcomers to the industry will have available mentors and girls will have more role models. The cycle of male hegemony may then begin to erode.

Ethical Choices Require Decisive Leadership

Leaders in youth sports—whether the activities are sponsored by schools or clubs—will be required to demonstrate decisive decision making as they face the three crucial gender-related ethical dilemmas noted above. These decisions center on increasing equitable participation rates, establishing ethical hiring practices and creating cultures of fairness. Applying ethical values within the context of addressing the issues administrators are facing regarding gender equality may be accomplished with the same focused discipline athletic administrators expect of their student athletes.

Many ADs have limited awareness of or interest in their shortfalls regarding ethics. It is hard to make consistent ethical decisions if there is no training in ethical decision making. In a study of athletic directors by Schneider and Stier (2001: 217), the researchers pointed out what they considered a 'significant' finding when they noted that only 42 percent of the respondents felt it was advisable for those in athletic administration to have course work in the area of ethics of sport management. Therefore, providing seminars and courses in ethical decision making for ADs would be a positive initial step.

In the schools, ADs and other school administrators should make decisions based upon moral values that guide the ethical choices they make. DeSensi and Rosenberg (2003) outline four moral values that can be applied to decision making in high school sports: justice, honesty, responsibility and beneficence. As noted earlier, justice centers on the fairness of decision makers. When allocating the resources necessary to support sport programs, fairness dictates that girls and boys each have similar opportunities to participate. Honesty deals with the level of truthfulness and trustworthiness leaders are able to maintain in the process. While sport administrators in the USA have the legal guidelines set forth by Title IX and Title VII, ADs and their cohorts in club sports must ensure their decisions can be trusted by those impacted by the decisions. Perhaps more important than just following the 'letter of the law' they build the trust and respect by demonstrating their activities meet the 'intent of the law'. Responsibility and beneficence address issues of accountability and fair play, respectively. Leaders must be held accountable for their decisions and ensure those decisions do not negatively impact those outside of sports' mainstream. With reference to the example noted above whereby most AD positions were coupled with the head football coach position (HFC), that activity may have been an acceptable practice in the past, knowing that such a requirement overtly discriminates against women, decision makers must remove the HFC requirement. Severing the linkage creates a fair opportunity for women to

apply for those positions. A failure to act subjects educational leaders and their schools to tort recourse by potential candidates who may perceive that they were subjected to the disparate-treatment discrimination.

Decisive leadership requires not only hard decision making but disciplined decision making. Institutional change may be slow, but will occur if those in charge focus on making incremental changes that demonstrate their commitment to a goal of equity in sports. Sport administrators can draw upon the 'game plan' noted by Harvey and Lucia (1993) in *Walk the Talk*. The actions of sports' leaders should follow the values espoused as outcomes that guide the sports they lead, recognizing that there are no gray areas in their decisions. As leaders, they should determine what is right and take the initiative to do the right thing, not in response to affirmative action efforts or employment laws, but because equity is ethical. Do the little things necessary to set the foundation for equity. Their actions should move all those involved in sports towards success. Finally, resolving these ethical dilemmas requires a team approach, involving all who are touched by sports.

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