



The Ethics of **COACHING SPORTS**

Moral, Social, and Legal Issues

Edited by
ROBERT L. SIMON

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HAMILTON COLLEGE



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*To my brother David—
A great companion in sports and in life*

Preface

The coach is a major figure in the sports world and even in the general culture, as shown by the success of such television series as *Coach* and *Friday Night Lights*. Legendary coaches such as Knute Rockne and Vince Lombardi are virtual icons, and giants of the coaching profession ranging from Dean Smith to Bill Belichick to Pat Summit seem better known than their star players. Moreover, thousands of coaches at different levels of sports, ranging from youth sports to high school and college to the professional level, have had a positive effect on their athletes and often are positive role models for their communities and beyond. However, there also is a less positive side to coaching represented by a win at all costs mentality, the use of bullying and intimidation, and even participation in academic fraud at some colleges and universities.

In light of the complexity of the decisions involved in coaching and the moral conundrums faced by coaches at all levels of sports, it is surprising that sports philosophers have not paid more attention to the ethical conundrums involved in coaching sports. To my knowledge, the only other volume by philosophers examining the role of the coach and the ethics of coaching (the similarly named *Ethics of Sports Coaching*) was published first in the UK and is cited in several chapters in this book. The present volume, *The Ethics of Coaching Sports*, which I believe to be the first book of its kind published in the United States, is broad in scope and examines the role and responsibility of the coach and ethical issues that arise in the practice of coaching, as well as some of the legal issues.

These chapters, which are designed to be accessible to nonspecialists, raise important questions about various aspects of the coaching role, offer a reasoned approach to arriving at answers, and attempt to add to the critical discussion of sports ethics in the existing scholarly literature. Each selection is followed by Questions for Review and Discussion, which should be useful to students using the book as a text, and a list of references for further reading (supplementing the sources cited in the notes). As editor, I hope the breadth of the topics covered and the accessibility of the discussion to nonspecialists, coaches, and students will allow the book to have a significant impact on coaching practice as well as the philosophy of sports.

retired as coach in 2001 to continue working with the team as a volunteer assistant.

I also am grateful to the coaches at Hamilton College for their goodwill and support and for their dedication to the athletic and overall educational development of our student athletes. Much of what is right in college sports goes on in Division III of the NCAA. The coaches at small liberal arts colleges such as Hamilton do at least as good a job as any coaches in practicing the ideals of ethical coaching as developed by the contributors to this book. Thanks as well to the players I coached on Hamilton's men's golf team from 1987 to 2001, when I served as head coach and since then while I have also served as a volunteer assistant coach for providing a laboratory for field research on coaching and always showing good humor while I was learning on the job. (The informal rule on one of our highly ranked teams was that I was not allowed to touch a player's clubs because if I did so, magic might take over and reverse his playing ability.)

As always, the editorial team at Westview was wonderful. My initial editor, Kelsey Mitchell, persuaded me to undertake this project after an informal discussion about it and steered me through a number of editorial decisions with tact, grace, and good judgment. When Kelsey left Westview to pursue a career in teaching, Priscilla McGeehon stepped in and, along with editorial assistant Brooke Smith, helped me complete the project without a hitch. Sandra Beris and her production team guided me through the production process with great care, good judgment, and understanding. Thanks and good wishes to everyone at Westview.

I also am indebted to the external reviewers who examined an earlier version of the manuscript. I appreciate their conscientious reading of the text. Their acute comments and suggestions helped me and the other contributors to make improvements that are far too numerous to list.

Finally, I wouldn't have embarked on this project if I did not believe in the importance of ethical coaching at all levels of sport. Of course, significant ethical issues arise in coaching, as in every other significant human endeavor. But in my view, the vast majority of coaches from youth sports to elite levels of athletic competition fulfill their duties with dignity and honor. I hope the chapters in this collection not only shed light on moral and related legal issues in coaching but also help coaches to analyze, understand, and react appropriately to the many ethical issues that arise in their coaching endeavors.

There are a number of ways readers may approach this book. Let me suggest two that may be useful, especially to instructors of college and university courses but also to coaches and readers.

What I think of as the default approach is represented by the table of contents. The chapters proceed from general and perhaps abstract analysis of the role of the coach at various levels of sports to the ethical considerations that apply to specific ethical and legal issues that arise in coaching. The order presented in the table of contents encourages development of a broad conception of the role of the coach and the rights, duties, and virtues associated with coaching that can provide a foundation for assessing the chapters in Parts 2–3, which focus on specific ethical and legal issues that arise in coaching. This approach also has the virtue of introducing general issues in the ethics of coaching before confronting controversies about hot-button issues, thereby allowing for reflection on broader principles and values in a cool moment.

Alternately, readers might begin with a chapter that focuses on a problem of special interest to them, for example, John Russell's provocative chapter claiming that coaches have strong moral reasons to help correct officiating errors that significantly benefit their teams, Scott Kretchmar's discussion of coaches' obligations to benchwarmers, or Matthew Mitten's discussion of the legal responsibilities of coaches to protect the health and safety of their athletes. These chapters, like the others in this volume, lead to broader questions about the role of the coach and the ethics of coaching covered in the chapters in Part 1. Some instructors may be able to involve their classes in discussion more quickly by proceeding along this route. However, both paths will lead readers into philosophical analysis of coaching and judicious discussion of the ethical and legal ramifications of issues that arise in coaching practice.

AS THIS BOOK GOES TO PRESS, I owe a great debt to many people. My wife, Joy, remains a proofreader extraordinaire as well as my greatest (and perhaps only) golf fan. She has been a constant source of encouragement and good cheer even in the face of medical difficulties over the past few years.

I am also grateful to my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Hamilton College for providing a friendly, supportive, and intellectually challenging atmosphere; I couldn't ask for a better teaching and writing environment. I am also grateful to Hamilton College for supporting my research over the years and for granting me a faculty research fellowship that freed me up in the spring of 2012 to complete this project.

I would be remiss if I did not thank a trio of athletic directors at Hamilton College—Tom Murphy, David Thompson, and Jon Hind. Tom Murphy encouraged me to become head coach of men's golf in 1987 and then after I

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PART 1

Introduction

One

The Ethics of Coaching

ROBERT L. SIMON

The television program *Friday Night Lights* was an especially thoughtful, well-acted series that explored the role of high school football in a small Texas town while following the lives of local young people and adults over several football seasons.¹ The central character, Coach Eric Taylor (played by actor Kyle Chandler), while not without faults, was not only a good father and husband, a leading educator in the area, but a great coach and, most importantly, a role model for his players. Although he sometimes made bad decisions, both in his family life and on the field, he could be counted on by his family members and his players, who came from a variety of backgrounds and economic circumstances and often confronted major personal and social crises.

In the real world, many issues facing the coaching profession, particularly in high profile sports, raise significant ethical questions about the behavior of coaches. Joe Paterno's fall from grace at Penn State, due to the allegations of sexual abuse leveled against former assistant Jerry Sandusky, is a case in point. Some have argued that Paterno fulfilled his moral obligations by informing the university athletic director about the problem and that the scandal was external to football. However, the devastating report by former FBI director Louis Freeh alleges that Paterno contributed to the cover-up of sexual abuse of children and that fear of going up against the renowned Penn

State football program deterred some university employees from reporting the abuse. The Paterno case did not directly involve his coaching practices; by all accounts Coach Paterno ran a clean program, made sure his players graduated, and used funds raised by Penn State football to support the academic mission of the university. However, Paterno's legacy has been significantly tarnished as the Freeh report, released in July 2012, charged that Penn State officials, including Paterno, showed "total and consistent disregard by the most senior leaders at Penn State for the safety and welfare of Sandusky's child victims."² On July 23, 2012, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) announced unprecedented penalties against Penn State, imposing a \$60 million fine (to be used to help victims of child abuse), vacating Penn State football victories from 1998 to 2011, and reducing the number of football scholarships the program can offer.

Moreover, a significant number of NCAA Division I intercollegiate programs were involved in serious rule violations, apparently with the knowledge and even support of the coaching staff. These range from NCAA violations committed in the Ohio State football program under Coach Jim Tressel (which led to his firing) to cases of academic fraud, such as the University of Minnesota case where an NCAA investigation found that tutors did academic work for some basketball players with the knowledge of their coaches. Recently NFL investigators have charged that players on the New Orleans Saints football team were awarded bonuses for hard hits against rival players that resulted in the targets being removed from the game, all with the knowledge and possible support of some members of the coaching staff.³

While coaches in youth sports are mostly volunteers and high school coaches who put in enormous amounts of time for little financial reward, men's basketball and football coaches at elite high profile intercollegiate programs make huge incomes, some earning more than the presidents of their institutions. In 2011 Rick Pitino, the basketball coach at Louisville, had a total pay of well over \$7 million. Mike Krzyzewski, the basketball coach at Duke, had a reported total payout of over \$4 million, and John Calipari, whose teams at different institutions have been cited for violating NCAA rules, made nearly \$4 million at Kentucky. Salaries for top collegiate football coaches are comparable.⁴ While some argue that huge compensation packages are justifiable as the result of free market bargaining, others have raised questions about whether this reward structure is economically sustainable and whether it is appropriate to pay coaches so much more than top faculty members.

On the other hand, many coaches (perhaps most coaches) at both the collegiate and the interscholastic level not only play by the rules but, like Coach Taylor, play a positive role in the athletic development of their athletes as well as in their educational and personal growth. It is important to look

past the negative publicity surrounding some high profile coaches and understand that coaching is a practice that takes place in a wide variety of contexts ranging from professional to youth sports. These good coaches often don't get the attention the media bestow on bad behavior in high profile sports.

Nonetheless, many ethical dilemmas arise among coaches who labor in youth, high school, and college sports and in various low profile clubs and leagues, perhaps *especially* in such cases. For example, is winning the coach's primary goal? Which value takes precedence when winning clashes with other goals, such as showing loyalty to experienced players who are less skilled than newcomers, allowing all the players on the roster to participate, protecting the athletes' health, and showing good sportsmanship when doing so hurts the team's chances at winning? Should coaches tolerate gamesmanship by their players and should they set rules or codes of conduct that apply to the behavior of their players off the field or during the off-season? Is it permissible for coaches to "work" officials, even to the point of intimidation, or bully players in an attempt to improve their performance? To what degree, if any, should coaches stress competition, as opposed to developing skills or just having fun, in youth sports?

The chapters in this book deal with some of the most significant ethical issues facing coaches. They also explore the role of the coach and the duties, responsibilities, and even ideals that apply to coaching behavior, in both ethics and law. In particular, they explore the reasoning that may be used to support different positions on the issues being examined and so provide an analytical as well as a moral perspective on the role of the coach and the practice of coaching.

Sports, Coaching, and Philosophical Analysis

Sports attract attention around the world. The World Cup and the Olympic Games enjoy the greatest visibility, but many sports such as basketball and golf are becoming increasingly international in scope, with Asian as well as American and European players making a major impact. Soccer (elsewhere called football) is arguably the most popular sport worldwide. Children are becoming increasingly involved in youth sports and developmental programs. In the United States, college and high school athletic competitions attract huge audiences throughout the country. Sports are the subject of major films such as the award-winning *Chariots of Fire*, *Hoosiers*, and *Million Dollar Baby*.

Increasingly, sports are receiving attention from various academic disciplines. Psychologists, economists, and sociologists study empirical questions, for example, investigating what mental qualities tend to contribute to success

in athletic competition (sports psychology), or whether highly visible Division I college sports actually bring in revenue for their institutions rather than operate deep in the red (economics).

However, many questions about sports go beyond the ordinary parameters of the natural and social sciences. Social scientists can describe the effects of competitive sports on participants, but can they tell us whether competition is good or bad, ethically permissible, desirable, or morally reprehensible? Whether a high school coach should give significant playing time to the less skilled players on the team, what responsibilities coaches should be expected to meet in protecting the safety of their players, or how much they should involve their players in making strategic decisions (a democratic vs. authoritarian style of coaching) raises ethical issues that are beyond the scope of the natural and social sciences.

Philosophy can help us approach such evaluative issues in part by helping to clarify key concepts and assessing arguments that attempt to justify answers to questions such as, What counts as fair play in sports?

Before turning directly to coaching, however, we need to view the practice of coaching in the broader context of sports and athletic competition. Ethical issues involving such concerns as athletes' use of performance enhancing drugs, questions of gender equity in university athletic programs, and misbehavior by elite athletes are widely discussed in the media, by fans, and even by casual observers. Some behaviors, such as doping to achieve a competitive advantage, are alleged to be violations of the ethics that should govern sports. But even if that claim is true, it presupposes that we have some idea of what that ethic should be. Criticizing a practice as unethical suggests that we have some notion of what is ethical.⁵ But while we all have intuitive ideas about, for example, what counts as fair play, it is not easy to articulate the principles that justify our intuitions, defend them, or apply them to hard cases where our principles may appear to conflict.

This suggests a deeper set of questions that go beyond current headlines. Is athletic competition a good thing? Are competitive sports valuable activities? If so, why? Does their value depend on circumstances or context? What circumstances are important or relevant to moral evaluation? Are sports purely recreational or do they also have an educational function, especially in youth sports but perhaps also at the interscholastic, intercollegiate, and professional levels?

In developing responses to such questions, we may ask about the role coaches do play and should play at the different levels of sports. Are coaches purely technical advisers who help their athletes develop better techniques, like a swing coach in golf? Or are they more like generals or CEOs who

develop and maintain a “program” as at elite Division I colleges and in professional sports? Or are coaches more like teachers or professors, educating their players about the sport and even about the kind of character needed to play well? Should they aim at developing personal virtues among their charges? Or does that take them beyond their proper role? Does the coach’s role depend on context? For example, perhaps different ethical guidelines apply to coaches in youth sports than to coaches in intercollegiate athletics. But even if that is true, are there some universal principles that apply to coaching in all contexts?

Indeed, the role and moral duties of the coach not only change significantly from one context to another (e.g., professional vs. youth sports) but arguably from one cultural context to another. At times in ancient Greece, as well as in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century England, athletes were expected to succeed on their own; working with a coach was considered unsporting. Part of the charm and interest of the movie *Chariots of Fire*, which tells the story of two contenders for the 1924 Olympics, is that it illustrates the British aristocratic ethics of the time, which frowned on the use of a coach by one of the characters, Harold Abrahams, thereby showing how people’s beliefs about sports ethics can be influenced by existing social practices and cultural norms. (Of course, whether the views are defensible depends on the soundness of justifying arguments, not merely on what people at a given time believe is ethical.)⁶

The prevailing attitude throughout most of the world today is very different, but to what extent can the attitude prevalent at a given time and place be justified? What ethical rules, principles, and ideals apply to coaching? Should coaching as we now know it be regarded as purely instrumental, designed only to promote winning, or is it a multifaceted activity subject to moral standards? If the latter, which moral standards apply? How can we *justify* the moral considerations we believe apply?

The contributors to this book attempt to clarify, explore, and in some cases resolve ethical and related legal questions about coaching, including some of those raised above. They look beyond the daily sports headlines and analyze in depth the ethical issues that arise in coaching as most of us experience it; in such contexts as youth sports, high schools, colleges and universities, clubs and other informal organizations, as well as professional and elite teams and institutions. All the contributors hope to advance our theoretical and philosophical understanding of coaching. However, just as important, they also present well-reasoned examinations of issues that coaches face in carrying out their duties and suggest recommendations for coaching practices that can be explored and debated by students, coaches, sports administrators, and fans.

8 Part 1: Introduction

Each chapter, other than the two introduction chapters, is followed by a series of review questions designed to bring the main theses and potential lines of criticism of them into focus. A short list of suggested readings also follows, which may include works cited in the footnotes if the author regards them as especially deserving of attention. Those interested in exploring the issues raised even further should consult the sources cited in the endnotes.