

Integrating Honor into Your Sports Program
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“Honorable behavior instills in the heart a belief in self and team. I submit to you that there is no greater competitive advantage than this belief.” Jim Spencer

Honor means standing up for what is right, decent, and fair.

Without honor, there is no trust. Where there is no trust there is no sense of team.

For many coaches and athletic directors, talking about honor with a team can be similar to the challenge of a parent talking about the facts of life with his/her child. It must be done, but in the end, they rely on the hope that everything will turn out for the best. Unfortunately, like that noise in your engine or the check-up that you didn't think you needed, insufficient attention may mean that disaster waits just down the road.

In athletic arenas throughout the country, honor can be seen taking a back seat to winning. Dishonorable acts by athletes ruin the core value of playing sports. In the March 5, 2007 issue of Sports Illustrated, Sharon Stolle reports on her 20- year study of nearly 80,000 college, professional, and high school athletes. She found that athletes score worse on tests of moral reasoning and that athletic competitive culture corrupts. “In America, we have a tendency when we do something nasty to say, ‘I’m just competitive.’ In Sports, gaining an advantage is what we do. But gaining that advantage has become an excuse to do what is morally wrong.”

Here are some examples of how gaining an advantage can be morally wrong.

- A basketball game when a player tries to deceive the official by trying to protect a star player from fouling out by personally claiming the foul
- Stealing an opposing team's signals, playbook, and sometimes equipment to put them at a disadvantage
- Steroids
- Allowing athletes eligibility without them having the completed requirements
- Paying elite college athletes under the table

To ignore or neglect dishonorable behavior in any area of human endeavor leads to the corruption of those most precious values that make us a team, a community or a society. Time and time again we hear reports of athletes and coaches involved in dishonorable situations that tarnish the reputation of teams. Sometimes these offenses lead to suspensions, firings and a total disruption of the team's focus on winning. The Cincinnati Bengal's with their high number of players arrested in the last few years are a case in point. How do you build a cohesive, competitive team when the organization doesn't seem to have a true understanding of how to institutionalize the concept of honor? Talent doesn't matter when there is no sense of honor because the team becomes an army of mercenaries. On top of all the arrests, individual player's egos become more important than winning with honor and decency. Like a self-fulfilling prophesy, a team without

honor sinks into a quagmire of actions that lead to destruction. When the going gets tough they come apart at the seams.

Honor must become a discussable subject. If a team is recruiting an athlete, this discussion should be very frank. Each athlete and organization needs to set the ground work for the future and clarify expectations and standards of behavior. A head in the sand approach to an athlete's future is usually disastrous for both parties. When the team convenes an honest, open discussion of the subject of honor during the preseason, it creates a clear line of understanding among all parties. Coaches and players alike become aware of not only the meaning of honor but also how honor shapes and creates a winning team. Clarify and institutionalize it into your program at the beginning of each season. Be specific! Be serious! Be sensitive! Be inspirational! Be committed!

How do you introduce the concept of honor to your athletes and sports programs?

- Leadership starts at the top. The Head coach should define honor and lead a discussion of why it is important to the team.
- Captains and team leaders should have small group discussions about how to apply honor to their decision-making on and off the field.
- Each group should present their ideas to the whole team.
- Team should create its own honor code and post it in the locker room and in the Team Program.

Please contact us at Competitive Principles LLC for more information on how institutionalize honor in your athletic program.