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“What Should I Do?” 10 Steps to Making an Ethical Decision as a Coach or Athletic

Director

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Abstract

The notion of ethical coaching exists within many current coaching frameworks, such as the United States Center for Coaching Excellence (USA), the International Council for Coaching Excellence (International), and the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (UK). More recently, ethical coaching has received increased attention due to serious unethical practices (i.e., safeguarding malpractice) in the media. However, for athletic directors (ADs) and practicing coaches, there is, to date, little practical guidance on how to make ethical decisions within a coaching context. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to offer a model for ADs and coaches to view how and why (un)ethical coaching may arise, as well as a “worked example” of a real-world ethical situation for a coach. A step-by-step process outlines how ADs and coaches should approach the problem, whom they might turn to for advice, and how best to present the decision to all stakeholders. The article is intended to support real-world coaching practitioners who face complex challenges as part of their day-to-day practice."

Keywords: ethics; coaching practice; sport governance; athlete welfare; coach education

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“Again... again... again... again.” Herb Brooks shouted as he made his players skate up and down the ice after they had finished a pre-Olympics international Ice Hockey match versus Norway (Graney, 2020). In 1980, Herb Brooks was the head coach of the USA’s ice hockey team and would eventually win the Olympic gold medal a few months later, partly due to his relentless focus on physical conditioning and mental fortitude (Gilbert, 2010). How would athletic directors (ADs), coaches, and athletes view this type of coaching in today’s modern landscape?

In 2019, Chicago Blackhawks assistant coach Marc Crawford was suspended following public allegations from multiple former NHL players (prominent players included Sean Avery and Brent Sopel) accusing him of physical and verbal abuse, prompting widespread scrutiny of coaching conduct in professional ice hockey (Whyno, 2019). In a different example, Toni Minichiello, who coached Jessica Ennis-Hill to Olympic Heptathlon success, received a lifetime ban from UK Athletics in 2022 after an independent panel found that he had engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior, emotional abuse, and bullying over 15 years (Ingle, 2022). These incidents highlight some of the many unethical coaching practices that compromise athlete welfare and breach professional standards across elite and grassroots sports contexts.

Coaching at all levels inherently presents multifaceted challenges. For example, how hard should coaches push their athletes in training? What is “tough love” versus abuse? Fundamentally, coaching requires working with athletes with diverse personalities, needs, aspirations, and circumstances (Allen et al., 2013). Coupled with these variables, coaches are

often pressured to win, appease other stakeholders, and cope with stressors (Griffin et al., 2025; Quick & Baghurst, 2025). Coaches also have increased visibility with the development of technology, phones, and social media. Consequently, coaching often becomes messy and complex, particularly when navigating high-pressure and emotionally charged situations (Bergmann Drewe, 2002). These situations also leave coaches of being vulnerable to making biased decisions (Zavertiaeva et al., 2018). This raises the question: how can coaches act ethically under pressure, particularly when ethical training is inconsistent and principles differ across sporting contexts?

For coaches, deciding things like player selection, playing time, when/if to release players, and assignment of athletes to the squad impacts various stakeholders to some degree. These stakeholders include parents, other coaches, staff, fans, media, etc. (Barker-Ruchti & Purdy, 2021). Most frequently, athletes bear the most immediate consequences of coaching decisions, although these choices often ripple outward, impacting families, teams, and organizations (Baghurst & Parish, 2023). Often, these decisions are not life-changing (although they can be!), but they contain an ethical component because they affect the lives and well-being of those involved (Lyle, 2019).

Ethical dilemmas arise because coaches work in environments with stakeholders with different priorities and needs (Duffy & Passmore, 2010). For example, a coach may need to decide whether to substitute their best player to ensure all team members get playing time or leave their best player on the field to maximize the chance of winning. In a different example, the decision to release a player might be justified by their performance metrics (e.g., they have not scored as many touchdowns this season), but could negatively affect the individual's self-

esteem and long-term development. To what degree should coaches be loyal to their players who have given them high service? In short, actions (or even not taking actions) have consequences.

There are many real examples of ethical situations in sports (Loland, 2005). For example, a coach must decide how to handle a hazing situation on their team. What should a coach do if the team's superstar starts chirping to the management about playing style or time? How does a coach effectively juggle time at home with their family against the need to be present for practices and competitions, which is a common challenge (Baghurst et al., 2025)? Baghurst and Parish (2023) provided many other real-life ethical situations experienced by coaches.

Coaches must navigate these scenarios with sensitivity and moral clarity, recognizing that their choices influence not only athletic outcomes but also the lives of the athletes, coaches, and potentially many other stakeholders (Baghurst & Parish, 2023). For clarity, ethical coaching can be defined as a decision-making process guided by moral principles and values (Passmore & Mortimer, 2010). It involves selecting the action that aligns most closely with one's core values while considering each option's potential consequences and outcomes.

Ethical coaching involves making decisions that are morally sound and that consider the well-being of others (Hardman & Jones, 2013). However, some ADs and coaches have little practical writing or guidance on how to carry this out. Therefore, this article provides practical steps and considerations for coaches who wish to make ethical decisions. For the sake of simplicity, the shared examples and reasoning processes are intentionally written from a coach's perspective. However, the process and "train of thought" presented are equally applicable and relevant to ADs and other leaders in sports. It should also be noted that at times, coaches may also be the AD and responsible for more than just their sport, which adds the potential for additional role conflict (Ratts, 2025).

To begin, a view of ethical coaching using a model is presented based on decision-making types and codes of practice. Then, 10 steps for coaches are explained as a means to make ethical decisions. Finally, a ‘worked example’ of how a coach can practically use these steps in their coaching practice is shared.

Perspectives on Ethical Coaching

Codes of Practice

Codes of practice are offered by organizations that should assume a degree of responsibility for delivering a sport (Telfer, 2010). Typically, codes of practice are formal written documents and are part of policies. For example, a National Governing Body (NGB) responsible for Gymnastics should have clear codes of practice for the best and appropriate physical support of gymnasts when performing on apparatus. In this case, there is likely to be a clear set of expectations and expected behaviors for coaches to follow. In contrast, within other sports, codes of practice might more closely resemble “loose guidance,” which is more “open” to coach interpretation. This may increase the risk of inconsistent application. Therefore, when codes of practice are (perceived to be) more ambiguous, there is greater scope for coaches to potentially operate and practice unethically.

While having clear codes of practice is undoubtedly important, there is the adjacent issue of ‘how’ these rules are enforced and enacted in practical terms. In all domains, much coaching happens in the absence of other stakeholders. For example, a parent may leave their child at a sports practice. Equally, elite athletes in individual sports will spend hours each week with their coach on a one-to-one basis. Therefore, in some corners of coaching practice, there is an absence of scrutiny, and coaches operate without checks and balances (Lyle, 2019). Notable

examples of a lack of scrutiny and wholly unethical practice (i.e., safeguarding issues) have been found in gymnastics in the USA (e.g., Ropes and Gray, 2018) and the UK (Whyte Review, 2022). British Gymnastics now declares that coaches should always have another adult present as an example of a recently developed policy. The policy states, “Always ensure that a minimum of two responsible adults are present during training sessions. One of the adults must be an appropriately qualified coach, and the second adult must not be one of the participating gymnasts.” (British Gymnastics, 2025, p. 2). For coaches and athletes, the practical enactment of this policy is yet to be determined.

More broadly, recent and developing coaching frameworks detail more general codes of practice for coaches (e.g., USCCE and Shape America’s National Standards for Sports Coaches). These offer a valuable and wide-ranging set of standards. However, it is suggested that the goals should be: 1) for all stakeholders to know and understand the codes of practice, and 2) for coaches to practice in open environments in the presence of others.

Ways of Making Ethical Decisions

Ethical decision-making in academic sports coaching has been written about using philosophical approaches (Passmore, 2009). This article is intended to demonstrate a more pragmatic approach for coaches to understand and implement in practice. Therefore, coaches can make decisions in two opposite ways. First, decisions can be made using a consequential approach (Hochstetler, 2019). Put simply, this view is best described as the “best outcome for the most people.”. Therefore, coaches are required to judge what they perceive and deem as “good.”

Consider the following hypothetical of how a consequential approach may be problematically applied in a coaching setting. One of the coach's star players, Jason, is a key player and the team's top scorer. However, Jason has been caught cheating on his school exams. The school's policy is strict, and cheating is a punishable offense with the possibility of suspension. Moreover, the policy states that athletes cannot compete if caught cheating on academic tests. Therefore, the coach must decide whether to keep Jason on the team or bench him for the upcoming state championship game. If Jason is benched, the team's chances of winning the championship game could be significantly reduced due to his skill and importance on the field. However, if the coach keeps Jason on the team, it might send the wrong message to the other players about the importance of academic integrity and undermine the school's values. In this example, using a consequential approach, the coach could reason that allowing Jason to play makes the team more likely to win. This means that other players who have worked hard and shown a high level of commitment have the best chance of winning. In turn, winning the championship game means a high level of prestige, likely resulting in players being offered scholarships. In this instance, the coach considers that letting Jason play will likely provide more benefit for most people.

Second, decisions can be made using a deontological approach (Huddleston et al., 2024). This involves coaches following the rules and laws (i.e., what is legally binding) as written, at all costs, with no deviation. Using this approach, coaches do not have to make judgment calls; instead, they can use the written guidance to inform their decision (assuming it exists). Using the same example previously described, the coach will arrive at a different conclusion; the coach will bench Jason as the school's rules and policies prohibit student-athletes from competing if they have committed an academic offense. In this instance, the coach has sent a clear message to

the rest of the team about what is and what is not appropriate. This will reinforce messages about the coach's core values (e.g., honesty, fairness, and transparency). While ethics relate to broader principles such as fairness and honesty, rules and policies are more formalized and arguably context-specific. A coach may act ethically yet still breach a rule, or follow policy but face a moral dilemma, as in Jason's case. Therefore, understanding the interplay between personal morals, professional ethics, and institutional rules is crucial. Coaches must navigate all three to uphold both athlete welfare and sporting integrity.

A Model to View Ethical Coaching Practice

The two ways for coaches to make decisions presented in this article are at opposite ends of the spectrum. In reality, coaches work with people, emotions, connections, and attachments (Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, it is more likely that coaches will make decisions somewhere between these two approaches. Similarly, codes of practice will not be so prescriptive that coaches can follow them without having to interpret them to some extent (Telfer, 2010). On the other hand, it is suggested that there will always be some degree of guidance (i.e., a code of practice) for coaches, even if there is a policy document at a higher (e.g., national) level. The model presented next demonstrates how it is possible to consider where and how ethical/unethical practices are most likely to occur by considering decision-making and codes of practice together.

This quadrant model illustrates how ethical decision-making in coaching is influenced by integrity, fairness, and personal philosophy. In day-to-day athlete interactions, a coach's philosophy shapes how they interpret codes of practice and navigate moral dilemmas. For example, a coach who values athlete well-being may prioritize fairness in playing time and

injury management, even when guidelines are ambiguous. Integrity is reflected in the consistent application of ethical principles across all quadrants, while fairness ensures equitable treatment of athletes. By developing ethical awareness and reflective practice, coaches gain the tools to make decisions that align with both professional standards and personal beliefs.

For example, decisions taken using a consequential approach in environments with few/ambiguous codes of practice (i.e., the bottom left quadrant) mean that coaches are tasked with making decisions with little guidance and will adopt a “best outcome for the most people” approach. This blend of decision-making style and coaching environment has the highest chance of unethical practice as rules might be disregarded, and what is deemed ‘best’ is entirely at the coach’s discretion. It is reasonable to suggest that coaches in high-pressure environments who “need to win” are the most at risk of coaching unethically. Alternatively, coaches who adhere to the rules and in environments with clear guidance (i.e., the top right quadrant) can rely on clear policies and procedural documents to support their decision-making processes. Moreover, this is coupled with the mindset that rules are there to be followed and a belief that following them is ‘right’ and will result in ethical decisions that affect all stakeholders. Connections to other coaches, loyalties to players, and the need to win all have the capacity to complicate a coach’s decision-making process.

10 Steps to Make Ethical Decisions as an AD and Coach

The following table presents 10 steps to help coaches make ethical decisions. Although some decisions must be made quickly and, in the moment, coaches are more likely to make ethical choices when time allows and established processes can be followed. Next, these processes and steps are explained using a practical ‘worked example.’

A ‘Worked Example’ for Coaches Using the 10 Steps.

Context: The example described next is for a high school coach who suspects that one of their football players is taking performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs).

1. Identify Your Core Values

In this step, the coach must reflect on their personal and professional core values, which are often formed by their biography and playing experience (Quick et al., 2025). For example, core values could include honesty, integrity, fairness, respect, and the health and well-being of the athletes (Moreno, 2020). In the context of the suspected use of PEDs, the coach’s core values would guide how they approach the situation. For instance, if the coach values fairness, they may be especially concerned about the unfair advantage the player might gain over others who are not using PEDs. If health is a priority, the coach might focus on the potential long-term physical and mental harm that PED use can cause. The coach should consider how their potential actions might align with these values and how they can uphold them while addressing the situation.

For example, if a coach values transparency, this means openly addressing the issue with the player, possibly even before formal investigations start, to maintain trust and a relationship with the player. These core values will also influence the coach’s overall goal, whether it is protecting the integrity of the sport, ensuring fair competition, or ensuring the players' health. The coach should continuously “surface” these values to inform their decision-making process (Baghurst & Parish, 2023). Notably, in conjunction with values, the coach should also consider how they make their decisions (e.g., consequential or deontological). Importantly, the outcomes

of these decisions can result in both “positive” and “negative” outcomes. However, it is the ethical process that we are most concerned with in this article.

2. Clearly Describe the Coaching Situation/Issue

This stage requires the coach to define the ethical issue at hand clearly. In the case of suspecting a player using PEDs, the coach should attempt to do this objectively using only facts. This could include listing specific player behaviors that have been observed. Examples might include the coach noticing the player showing an unusually rapid improvement in performance (e.g., lap times or a significant gain in weightlifting performance), changes in body composition, or signs of aggression or anxiety. At this point, the coach must distinguish between what they know (i.e., observed) and what they have heard from third parties (i.e., potential rumors) and make an ethical decision on whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed. It could be argued that pursuing a claim based on hearsay is also an unethical practice.

The issue must be examined objectively, although this can be challenging. The coach suspects PED use, but there is no *proof* yet. The key process is listing what has been observed. In some cases, coaches might be able to refer to previous athletic assessments and compare the player’s physical gains. This emphasizes the importance of good record-keeping and detailed planning as part of the coaching process (Robinson, 2010).

The coach should also consider the broader implications of the situation. For example, they must contemplate whether this is an isolated incident with one player or might point to a broader team culture of PED use. The coach’s primary role is to ensure fairness, safety, and integrity, so they must evaluate the situation objectively before deciding how best to proceed.

3. Identify Who the Stakeholders Are

Stakeholders are individuals or groups affected by the situation or are interested in its outcome (Moreno, 2010). In this scenario, the primary stakeholders include the player suspected of using PEDs, the player's parents, the other players on the team, the coach, the school or athletic department, and potentially the wider community and league governing bodies. The coach must consider their position in the community and the various stakeholders that could be impacted. In some environments, coaches are highly influential and central members of communities.

Other players on the team are stakeholders because PEDs can create an unfair and potentially dangerous competitive environment (e.g., the player becomes significantly stronger than their teammates/opponents). The parents of the players on the team also have a deep interest in ensuring their child's safety and fair treatment. In addition, the school or athletic department will most likely have policies regarding drug use and will need to be consulted to reach a conclusion. The wider community and league governing bodies are also stakeholders. Commissioners can be considered stakeholders if the situation involves a potential violation of regulations or laws. Each stakeholder has different concerns and needs, and the coach must take time to list them. Failure to acknowledge stakeholders might result in an unethical decision being made.

4. Map How the Stakeholders Are Linked to You and One Another

Understanding stakeholder connections helps the coach navigate situations with diplomacy, sensitivity, and tact. However, these relationships are complex, and the coach's knowledge of stakeholder-to-stakeholder relationships is fallible. The coach may have a direct

relationship with the player, as well as with the other team members, the players' parents, and the school's administration. Additionally, the school may have a relationship with governing bodies that set and enforce policies about the use of PEDs.

It should be noted that acting on what is ethically correct can sometimes contradict personal values (Durocher & Kinsella, 2021).

For example, a coach may value loyalty but may be required to bench a long-time player for a new player who performs better, prioritizing fairness and team success over loyalty. Therefore, the coach must maintain a professional relationship with the player while being firm and not compromising their values as much as possible.

The connection and obligations to the other players on the team are important. For instance, if one player is suspected of PED use, it could affect the team's morale or, even worse, create jealousy and distrust among players and other coaches. The parents of the players are likely to (rightfully) want answers and assurances regarding their child's well-being and fair play. To be clear, coaches have a duty of care to their players. In this instance, most high school sports policies should clearly state this, and schools will have a code of conduct that encompasses all students and employees, even those engaged in activities outside of school hours. That said, the extent to which and the type of training the coach receives may impact how they initially view the situation.

Finally, the school/athletic department is another key stakeholder. They should, but may not always have, policies/codes of practice to guide the coach in handling such a situation. Their involvement could be necessary if the issue leads to disciplinary actions. Finally, governing bodies (e.g., state high school athletic associations) set regulations about PEDs, and the coach must ensure that any action taken aligns with these broader regulations.

5. Research and Consult Knowledgeable Others to Find If Any Relevant Policies Exist (e.g., Management)

At this point, the coach should reach out to other knowledgeable individuals, such as school administrators, athletic directors, or colleagues with experience managing ethical dilemmas in sports. This should be done carefully and ethically, respecting privacy concerns, avoiding speculation, and interacting with essential personnel only. Consulting with these individuals can help clarify whether there are specific policies or procedures in place for dealing with suspected PED use. The coach should also familiarize themselves with the school or district's code of conduct, which may include steps for addressing drug use among athletes.

In the case of PEDs, high schools have strict rules about drug testing and consequences for violations. If the school, district, or club has a specific policy for dealing with suspected PED use, the coach *must* follow it (i.e., there should be no space for coaches to misinterpret the guidance). If such policies do not exist, the coach may need to advocate for developing clearer guidelines in the future. However, in the immediate term, they will need to investigate what documentation exists that could support their decision-making. This step is critical for ensuring that the coach's actions align with the organization's expectations and that the issue is handled professionally and legally. The coach might also consult other coaches or mentors who have faced similar situations. They may provide insight into how they navigated ethical dilemmas involving PEDs, offering advice on how to balance fairness, health, and the integrity of the sport.

6. Research and Consult Others to Find Out What the Law States

The coach should be aware of the legal implications of PED use, particularly in a high school setting with minors. Many states and counties have laws governing the use of drugs in youth sports, including penalties/sanctions for athletes who test positive for PEDs. For coaches, understanding the legal landscape is crucial because failing to follow proper procedures could result in legal ramifications for the player, school, or even themselves. The legal requirements for involving the parents must also be investigated.

The coach should research local and state laws (which could be done earlier than step 6) regarding drug use in sports and any relevant school policies. If no immediate answers are available, the coach could consult with legal experts or contact a state athletic association to clarify what legal obligations exist. If the player is indeed using PEDs, the coach may (and most likely will) have a legal responsibility to report it to the relevant authorities. Moreover, if the coach fails to act upon suspicions, they may be liable for not safeguarding the athlete and the wider team and sport. Consulting with the school's legal team or district officials is another step towards ensuring that any action taken aligns with legislation. This process ensures that the coach's decision-making and the school's response are legally sound. Ignorance of the law will not be excused at any level.

7. Considering the Information Gathered, List Practical and Implementable Options to Identify “The Best Fit”

The coach can list possible options after gathering information from various sources, such as policies, laws, and consultations. These options could range from speaking with the player privately to recommending that the player undergo drug testing or reporting the issue to

school officials. Each option should be evaluated based on its practicality, legal compliance, and alignment with the coach's core values.

The coach may consider discussing their concerns directly with the player, offering them a chance to explain themselves, or voluntarily take a drug test. If this option is chosen, the coach should consider how best to handle the conversation sensitively to avoid damaging the relationship with the player. Alternatively, the coach might report the issue to school administrators, who could handle the matter formally. This situation requires a coach to operate in environments without a clear and prescriptive way forward. Put simply, there cannot be a policy for every interaction and decision!

Another option could involve educating the team on the risks and consequences of PEDs and fostering a team culture of honesty and integrity. This could prevent future occurrences and promote an atmosphere where athletes feel empowered to speak up if they suspect their peers are using PEDs. Each option requires careful consideration in conjunction with the coach's core values and the broader impact on the team and school community. Indeed, it is likely that each decision may have a negative component for a stakeholder. Nevertheless, situations like this in this scenario are inherently complex, so following a process like the one outlined in this article is essential. Moreover, coaches must also consider that they have legal obligations – these should be factored into the viability of all identified options.

8. Speak With Others Who Have Domain-Specific Knowledge (e.g., Mentors, Advisors, Coach Developers) for Their Perspectives

Once the coach has established all options, they should consult others with expertise in coaching ethics, sports administration, or even PED testing and enforcement. Speaking to a

mentor, advisor, or coach developer could provide a valuable perspective on handling the situation effectively and balancing the ethical and practical considerations (Quick & Baghurst, 2025). In the case of the coach, their AD would be a valuable person to speak with. These individuals are often highly experienced and may have faced similar career situations. Therefore, they can offer advice on how to approach the player and other stakeholders with sensitivity and caution and from a legally safe position.

In this scenario, the coach could also contact a professional association for coaches (e.g., SHAPE America, USCCE, CIMSPA), where they may find guidelines or best practices for dealing with PEDs. This guidance may also offer insight into navigating difficult discussions with the player, team, and administration. Seeking a broad range of perspectives may assist the coach in refining their approach and ensuring that their decision-making process is thorough and well-informed. A mentor or experienced advisor also helps the coach recognize their emotional biases (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018) when dealing with the player, thus ensuring the decision is made ethically.

9. For Each Option, Describe the Consequences for Each Stakeholder

In this step, the coach should carefully analyze the potential consequences of each option for all involved stakeholders using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. Such a process allows for structured reflection, clarifying ethical priorities, supporting transparency and accountability, and promoting collaboration (Chakrabarty, 2024).

If the coach chooses to confront the player directly, the consequences might include a possible breakdown in trust, the player feeling alienated from the team, or a situation with heightened emotion and conflict. If the player is found to be using PEDs, this could result in

disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion from the team, which could affect their athletic career and academic standing.

The consequences for other players should also be considered. If the suspected player is using PEDs and the issue is not addressed, it could lead to resentment among teammates or the perception of unfairness. The other athletes may feel they cannot compete on a level playing field, which could harm team morale. Equally, players may think the coach does not care and places winning above player welfare.

Finally, the coach should also consider the potential impact on the school's reputation. How will the wider community and league perceive the school if the issue is mishandled? Alternatively, addressing the issue head-on could demonstrate that the school is committed to ethical practices and high levels of athlete welfare.

10. Where Appropriate, Explain Your Decision to the Relevant Stakeholders and How This Links to Your Core Values

Once the coach has decided, it is essential to communicate the reasoning to all relevant stakeholders. Appropriate levels of transparency and communication are crucial in ensuring all parties understand the rationale behind the decision. The coach should explain how their decision reflects their core values (e.g., integrity, fairness, and the well-being of the athlete) and how it aligns with both the sport's ethical standards and any relevant laws or policies.

If the decision involves disciplinary action, the coach should ensure the player understands why the action was taken and how it relates to maintaining a fair and healthy competitive environment. The coach could also offer support to the player. However, rules and

laws may prevent the player from competing in the league again. Nevertheless, support can take many forms, even if it is simply signposting the player to supportive networks.

In communicating with parents, administrators, or teammates, the coach should highlight the importance of upholding the integrity of the sport and the health of all athletes, linking the decision to their core values (e.g., fairness, safety, and respect). It is unlikely that all stakeholders will be ‘happy’ with the decision – this is to be expected. Therefore, for coaches, the explanation of the final decision may not always be easy and might be accompanied by feelings such as anxiety and uncertainty. However, ethical coaching is about doing what is morally and legally right by and for the athletes. As demonstrated, there is value for coaches in taking time and following a process to arrive at an ethically sound decision.

Conclusion

This article provides a set of practical steps to support ADs and coaches in making ethical decisions. As has been discussed, ethical decision-making in coaching is complex. Coaches are faced with decisions that can deeply affect not only the individual athlete but also the entire team, the sport, and their own professional integrity. Intercommunication among coaches, administrators, and teams is common and influential. The difficulty lies in balancing competing interests and making choices that align with the coach’s core values, meeting the needs of all stakeholders involved, and complying with codes of conduct (i.e., rules and laws). It is important to recognize that all coaches will face slightly different situations. No two players are the same, each team is different, and all contexts are unique. However, understanding and articulating core values becomes paramount, as they serve as a compass for navigating these difficult choices.

For coaches, making decisions using a process, as shown in this example, is only the first step toward becoming a more reflective, conscientious, and ethical coach. While simplified for practical application, the 10-step process shared provides a helpful starting point for understanding how a coach might approach an ethical dilemma, acknowledging the need for contextual adaptation. This process offers valuable guidance for coaches to begin considering how they make decisions and the broader impact those decisions can have on their players.

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