

Assessments of NCAA athletic conference codes of ethics: An analysis of division I and III team captains' perceptions

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Abstract 216**

Recent events involving college athletic programs such as the hazing incidents occurring at Northwestern University among both the men's and women's soccer programs and the intentional foot stomping by Virginia Tech quarterback Marcus Vick on an opposing player after the play was whistled dead offer continued examples of inappropriate behavior by intercollegiate student-athletes. These incidents have caused many to wonder what conduct is actually acceptable for student-athletes both on and off the field. A review of the history of intercollegiate athletics would reveal many similar lapses in judgment by student athletes with regard to questionable conduct in a variety of areas including hazing, sexual impropriety, gambling, sportsmanship, and improper contact with agents to name a few areas to consider. The persistence of these behavior-related issues is an area to carefully consider for future improvements by sport managers.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic conferences have established codes of conduct to address ethical problems and to encourage future ethical choices from employees and athletes (Greenwell, Geist, Mahony, Jordan, & Pastore, 2001; Greenwell, Grube, Jordan & Mahony, 2004). Sport organizations establish these codes in response to the very problems mentioned previously. These codes standardize the expected behaviors from athletes, coaches, administrators, and game officials (Shea, 1996). The ability to abide by these codes of conduct creates possible ethical dilemmas facing individuals and groups within sport settings when differing values come into conflict with each other (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2005). Significant previous research into the importance of conference codes of ethics for athletes and employees. Greenwell, Geist, Mahony, Jordan, & Pastore, 2001 determined there were seven major areas or ideals covered among reviewed codes of ethics including sportsmanship, values, creating and maintaining a healthy environment, compliance with the code of ethics, receiving equitable treatment, the welfare of student athletes, and guidance to professional conduct were definable consideration areas to be included in these codes of ethics. Greenwell, Grube, Jordan & Mahony, 2004 surveyed student athletes from one NCAA Division I conference to determine both their general knowledge and their perceptions about the implementation of these codes of conduct. Greenwell et al. (2004) found student athletes within this conference believed strongly in the implementation and use of these codes, but had not read through them leaving these student athletes unaware of the complete standard of acceptable behavior.

Because of the potential for a breakdown in the communication of expected ethical behavior from coach to student-athlete, there needs to be an investigation into the role of other team leaders and the development of ethics among student-athletes. This study examined the perceptions of conference codes of ethics by team captains among NCAA Division I and III team sports. There is little, if any, prior research from the perspective of the team captain and his or her impact on their respective teams' adherence to acceptable standards of behavior. It is important to look at team captains because they likely have a significant impact on their fellow teammates. Accordingly, this sample from among the population of student-athletes provided important insights into how this specific group of student-athletes perceived these conference codes of ethics.

To address this issue, team captains of six sports were surveyed. Captains of men's and women's basketball were selected to represent the more visible intercollegiate team sports in the United States. Men's and women's soccer, as well as men's and women's golf, were selected to represent less visible intercollegiate team sports across the United States. Sports information directors at each NCAA Division I and III institution were contacted to identify team captains for each of these sports during the 2006-2007 academic year and to provide email addresses for each captain. An online version of an instrument developed by (Greenwell et al. 2004) was utilized to assess team captain's perceptions of codes of ethics. Specifically, team captains were asked to address their general understanding and awareness of their conference's code of ethics, indicate their agreement with several themes commonly found in conference codes of ethics, and give their opinions in regard to responsibility for conduct, enforcement, and reduction of ethical violations.

Responses were received from 291 captains (97 basketball, 120 soccer, 41 golf, 33 did not indicate their sport). One hundred and three of the captains were male and 180 were female (8 did not indicate their gender). Overall, responses indicated team captains felt they were somewhat responsible for encouraging ethical conduct among their teammates ($M = 4.49$). Team captains were only somewhat familiar with their conference's code of ethics ($M = 3.64$) and they did not show strong support for the need to

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be familiar with a conference code of ethics ($M = 3.90$). Further, they did not feel strongly that their teammates followed their lead with regard to ethical conduct ($M = 3.79$). MANOVA revealed no significant differences attributable to gender or sport. In terms of themes commonly found in codes of ethics, team captains rated student athlete welfare ($M = 6.49$), sportsmanship ($M = 6.48$) and values ($M = 6.44$) as the themes they agreed with the most. Compliance with conference rules ($M = 5.36$) was the theme they agreed with the least. MANOVA revealed no differences attributable to sport, but female team captains rated sportsmanship, values, healthy environment, and equitable treatment higher than their male counterparts. In terms of unsportsmanlike conduct, team captains agreed with the definitions included in codes of ethics as each was rated highly. Physical abuse received the strongest ratings ($M = 6.50$).

As the results showed, team captains across all three sports agreed with the themes found in codes of ethics, but they were often unfamiliar with their own code of ethics and noncommittal as to the necessity to be familiar with a code of ethics. Given these results, it appears that codes of ethics are not being effectively communicated to athletes and athletes do not necessarily see the importance of knowing their code of ethics. Even more troubling was the idea that team captains were also dispassionate as to their role as encouraging ethical conduct. This is disturbing considering coaches and administrators often look to team captains to be role models for their peers. To alleviate this disconnect, conferences need to ensure codes of ethics are being conveyed to athletes through coaches and administrators. Further, team captains should be encouraged to take an active part in the dissemination of their codes of ethics. By involving team captains in this process, another level of leadership besides coaches and administrators will help to make student-athletes more knowledgeable about their expected standard of behavior both on and off the field and more accountable to team leaders, in this case team captains.