In 1966, Ohio University started the first graduate-level curriculum aimed at preparing students for jobs in the sport industry (Parks & Quarterman, 2003). Since that time, the growth in the number of sport management programs continues to proliferate in colleges and universities across the United States, with over 300 undergraduate and graduate programs offering degrees in the area of sport management (NASSM, 2010). Within a typical sport management program, various courses are offered including: sport finance, sport marketing, sociology of sport, sport ethics, sport facilities, event management, and sport law. Of the courses listed, the one course that tends to be the most challenging because of its theoretical basis, abstract and subjective nature, and multiplicity of pedagogical methods is teaching sport ethics.

Two basic methods prevail in the teaching of sport ethics within the sport management curriculum, the theoretical – model based method and the less theoretical learning through case studies approach (Malloy, Ross, & Zakus, 2003). A theory-based approach reaches the learner through the reading of great works, classical pieces, or combinations found in anthologies (Boxhill, 2003; Morgan, 2007; McNamee & Parry, 1998; French, 2004). The student learns to act as a philosopher, asking questions such as: are moral standards universal, is an ethical decision based on individual subjectivity, and why do people behave morally (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003)? In contrast, the case study method challenges students to become active participants in the learning process, working together in small groups (Malloy, Ross, & Zakus, 2003). The case study method offers the students a cursory description of theories, but the strength lies in various scenarios in which the students are to ferret out the solution and to give their reason why.

Implementing a successful pedagogical approach involves knowing the ethical issues that exist and why the issues are ethical as well as knowing how to develop interactive discussion sessions on sport that represent or dramatize elements of our personal and social life (Clifford & Feezell, 2010). Classroom discussion is greatly enhanced when the instructor and student have a common knowledge base of the current and significant historical, philosophical and sociological events involving ethical dilemmas in sport. Having a common starting point provides the student relevance, a sense of reality (Schaupp & Lane, 1992), level of confidence, openness, and readiness to learn.

Sport is considered a microcosm of society (Eitzen & Sage, 2009) and there are many scenarios in sport and our society that can be discussed in the classroom (McMillan & Gentile, 1998). For example, a discussion of ethical issues in intercollegiate sport may include, but is not limited to: paying student athletes, gender equity issues, and recruiting violations (Hums, Barr, & Gullion, 1999; Lumpkin, Stoll and Beller, 2002). However the challenging part of teaching sport ethics goes beyond identifying broad topics containing multiple discussion points in sport. Instead, the instructor must overcome the misconception that there are no good answers and that ethical decisions are based purely on personal opinion (Kretchmar, 2005).

The ability to make ethical decisions is a critical skill for future sport leaders (DeSeni & Rosenberg, 2003), as decision-making encompasses a variety of the tasks a manager is responsible for (Chelladurai, 2006). Through open discussion of alternatives, predictions can occur and the instructor can assist the class in developing the ability to think both critically and ethically (McMillan & Gentile, 1988). We offer one perspective of an effective method in teaching sport ethics. Therefore this session will: 1) discuss common methods for teaching sport ethics in the classroom, 2) examine an effective methodological approach to teaching sport ethics based on established research, and 3) provide an example of an effective pedagogical method for teaching sport ethics in the classroom.