


SPORT

A Profile of Gamesmanship Attitudes Among Youth Sport Coaches

Joe Deutsch, Brad Strand, Sean Brotherson, Roman Waldera

Abstract

Youth in sport programs are not only gaining skills in sport techniques but also observing and learning ethical attitudes such as how to treat others in competition or whether to play in accordance with sport rules. Youth sport coaches influence youth directly through the provision of guidance and feedback and indirectly through the behaviors they model and attitudes they reflect. In the sport context, gamesmanship is any in-game misconducts that stay within the boundaries of the rules but still are ethically controversial and may lead to a competitive advantage. In this study, the gamesmanship beliefs of youth sport coaches across multiple sport disciplines were analyzed. The participants of this study were 109 youth sport coaches of a variety of sports. A 20-question gamesmanship beliefs survey was used in data collection for this study in which youth sport coaches were asked to determine their opinion of the identified conduct and respond with a rating on a 4-point Likert scale. Responses of youth sport coaches in this study suggest that only a small portion of them are inclined to instruct players to act in a way that utilizes gamesmanship practices. This study's examination of whether formal coaching training or years of coaching experience influence attitudes toward gamesmanship found that there appeared

Joe Deutsch , Department of Health, Nutrition, and Exercise Sciences, North Dakota State University. Brad Strand, Department of Health, Nutrition, and Exercise Sciences, North Dakota State University. Sean Brotherson, Department of Family Development and Family Science, North Dakota State University. Roman Waldera, School of Health and Consumer Sciences, South Dakota State University. Please send author correspondence to Joe.Deutsch@ndsu.edu

to be little effect on coaches' attitudes. As gamesmanship situations are typically present in the youth sport context, this study provides value in understanding how youth sport coaches think about gamesmanship and their awareness of ethical concerns.

Involvement in organized sports is a common activity for many youth between ages 6 and 18. In fact, participation in sport activity typically exceeds involvement in any other type of extracurricular activity. For example, a study in Canada using the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth showed that sport was the most common activity of choice for children (86%) among extracurricular activities for youth (ages 6 to 17) (Guèvremont et al., 2008). Similarly, youth in the United States as high school seniors were twice as likely to be involved in sports than other extracurricular activities (e.g., 44% vs. 21%), according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012). In a study of character profiles among youth, children profiled as Future-Minded Leaders, Joyful Givers, and Creative Leaders were all most likely to participate in organized sport over other extracurricular activities (Shubert et al., 2016). Youth participation in sport can promote physical activity participation into adulthood when the athlete feels competent, confident, and connected with their experience (Miller & Siegel, 2017; Prichard & Deutsch, 2015). Young individuals participating in sport not only receive physical health benefits but can also develop in the motor, psychological, and social domains while learning skill sets that transfer to life outside of sport such as goal setting and teamwork (A. Jones, 2018; Pierce et al., 2017). However, such positive outcomes are not inherent in youth sport participation, and when sport participation is not administered properly to youth, negative results can occur (A. Jones, 2018).

Youth Sport Coaches and Ethical Education

The administration and oversight of youth experiences in sport is often the job of youth sport leaders such as sport coaches, recreational instructors, camp counselors, parents, and program administrators (Tarkington et al., 2016). Due to the number of youth they interact with and the amount of time they spend in contact with youth, youth sport coaches occupy an influential role in the lives of young people involved in extracurricular sport activity (Vella et al., 2011).

Coaches' effectiveness encapsulates coaches' ability to access and use a combination of sport-specific content and instruction, as well as their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships with athletes, parents, and the community (Bergeron et al., 2015; Christofferson & Deutsch, 2017). Additionally, coaches influence youth directly through the provision of guidance and feedback and indirectly through the behaviors they model and attitudes they reflect. Youth in sport programs are not only gaining skills in sport techniques but also observing and learning ethical attitudes such as how to treat others in competition and whether to play in accordance with sport rules (Christofferson & Deutsch, 2018).

Youth sport programs, such as after-school activities, can vary in staffing from full-time leaders to part-time or volunteer coaches, or a combination of any of the three (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2007). Most youth sport coaches do not have formal coach training (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2007). Coaching is not an easy job. Given the ambitious nature of long- and short-term goals in youth sports that are influenced by employers, sponsors, the community, and coaches themselves, a coach's experience will likely contain much tension and some perceived failure (R. Jones & Wallace, 2005). Côté and Gilbert (2009) described the difficulty required to become an expert coach due to the absence of shared curriculum, limited infrastructure for coaching development, and lack of long-term employment potential in many coaching jobs. Amid this swirl of competing tensions, sport coaches are encouraged to win and may be pressured to cut corners to do so. At the same time, youth athletes are very impressionable and are likely to emulate the demeanor of their coach not only on the court but also in contexts outside of sport, even if it is unsportsmanlike or unethical. This context necessitates a youth coach's ability to outline and model the good sportsmanship that they want to see in their athletes (Strand, 2013).

Literature on the contemporary youth sport context emphasizes the intensive, competitive, adult-directed trends that have become common in sports from basketball to soccer (Capranica & Millard-Stafford, 2011; Christianson & Deutsch, 2012; Merkel, 2013). Winning is too often emphasized at the expense of healthy development and life skills. The pressures to win and the lack of coaching education can combine to produce some ethical dilemmas

for youth coaches. As a result, youth sport coaches may become inclined to push boundaries or encourage breaking or bending of the rules. Such tendencies can then extend to youth who feel pressure to cheat or take unfair advantage of others to win. For example, a British study of more than 1,000 children aged 8 to 16 carried out by the Marylebone Cricket Club and the Cricket Foundation revealed that 2 out of 3 youth in the United Kingdom feel pressure to cheat in school sports because they feel pressure to win (Garner, 2013). Unethical acts by youth sport coaches differ in time frame and category of misconduct, which can be demonstrated by specific examples. Some coaches break the rules outside of the game situation to gain a competitive advantage. For example, the NJSIAA (New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association) had a private investigator attend several illegal out-of-season boys' basketball open gyms of the St. Patrick's high school basketball team. The St. Patrick's basketball team was banned from the state tournament that year by the NJSIAA Controversy Committee due to this violation of rules (Scott, 2017). In another example, the AIA (Arizona Interscholastic Association) stripped the Sabino High School baseball squad of its 2018 state title and put the team on warning for the coming year. This action occurred following a months-long investigation by Tucson Unified School District that revealed the team's coaches violated AIA rules regarding prior contact with student athletes in baseball clubs and illegal use of booster funds to pay for an additional coach (Schmidt, 2018). Such situations send young athletes the wrong message about ethical decision making and often negate the positive developmental benefits typically associated with youth sport activity.

Youth Sport Coaches and Gamesmanship Attitudes

While high-profile examples of cheating or unfair play in sports get recognition, such as doping in professional sports or other questionable practices, the day-to-day sport experiences of millions of youth are less noticed. However, in these daily sport situations, the influence of youth sport coaches is most critical and the opportunities for instruction and example in ethical attitudes and behavior are always present. In the sport context, in-game misconducts that stay within the boundaries of the rules but are still ethically controversial and may lead to a competitive advantage can be classified as "gamesmanship" (Potter, 1947; Strand et al., 2018). Coaches' gamesmanship

beliefs were first depicted in a study by Strand (2013), in which 49% of high school coaches believed it was acceptable that “on the winning point of the game, a volleyball player touches the ball before it goes out, but the referee misses the touch, the player says nothing.” In such a case, and in 24 other brief scenarios to which these coaches responded, a coach interacting with a young person has an opportunity to teach and model the positive values that involvement in sport is meant to encourage (Green & Gabbard, 1999; Strand, 2014). Another study illuminated how gamesmanship attitudes stick with young athletes as they mature. A survey of more than 450 college athletes from multiple universities showed that over 50% of these college athletes found mental intimidation acceptable, which occurs when athletes trash-talk, harass, taunt, and provoke their opponent in hopes to produce a competitive advantage (Strand et al., 2018).

Gamesmanship scenarios provide a mechanism for the exploration of how adults who coach sports tend to think about ethical situations in coaching youth (Strand, 2013). Many of the youth who come into contact with sports do so through participation in extracurricular settings outside of the school environment. While an initial understanding of gamesmanship attitudes among high school sport coaches has been established, there is no current information on such attitudes as reflected among youth sport coaches outside of school settings. This study seeks to explore gamesmanship beliefs and ethical thinking among youth sport coaches involved in settings outside of school sport contexts. The primary research questions for this study were

- What do youth sport coaches believe about gamesmanship practices across varied sport scenarios and find to be ethically acceptable versus unacceptable?
- Are there differences among youth sport coaches who identify gamesmanship practices as acceptable based on years of coaching experience or formal coaching education?

Method

Participants

As Table 1 shows, the participants of this study were 109 youth sport coaches of a variety of sports including football ($N = 83$), baseball/softball ($N = 68$), basketball ($N = 32$), hockey ($N = 38$), soccer

($N = 16$), and wrestling ($N = 24$; note: participants could list multiple sports they had coached and so numbers do not add to $N = 109$). The sample contained far more males ($N = 105$) than females ($N = 4$). The age of respondents ranged from 20 to 60 years, with the majority ($N = 98$, 89.9%) being between ages 31 and 50. On average, the coaches had experience with 2 youth sport teams. Years of coaching experience varied, with respondents reporting experience of 1 to 5 years ($N = 38$), 6 to 10 years ($N = 41$), 11 to 15 years ($N = 12$), 15 to 20 years ($N = 9$), and more than 20 years ($N = 8$). Among the youth sport coaches, 73 (67%) had received formal coach training beyond their own playing experience.

Table 1
Demographic Data

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	105	96.3
Female	4	3.7
Formal coach training		
Yes	73	67
No	36	33
Age		
20–30 Years	6	5.5
31–50 Years	98	89.9
51–60 Years	5	4.6
Years coaching experience		
1–5 Years	38	34.9
6–10 Years	41	37.6
11–15 Years	12	11
More than 15 years	17	15.6
Sports coached		
Basketball	32	29.4
Baseball/softball	68	62.4
Football	83	76.2
Hockey	38	34.9
Soccer	16	14.7
Wrestling	24	22

Measures

A gamesmanship beliefs survey was used in data collection for this study. This survey has been used in previous research (Strand, 2013; Strand et al., 2018). An earlier version was initially developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (<http://josephsoninstitute.org/>) and a modified version was used in the studies cited. The survey consisted of 20 sportsmanship and gamesmanship statements in which youth sport coaches were asked to determine their opinion of the identified conduct and respond with a rating on a 4-point Likert scale. The response options were *clearly improper - this is wrong and should not be taught or allowed* (1); *improper - though many people would think this is okay, it is inconsistent with my view of sportsmanship* (2); *acceptable - acceptable under existing standards and expectations, not improper to teach or promote* (3); and *clearly acceptable - a perfectly legitimate action that can be properly taught as "part of the game"* (4). Coaches were instructed to answer honestly based on their personal view as to the meaning of gamesmanship. They were instructed to leave questions blank that made them uncomfortable or did not apply to their coaching experiences. A reliability assessment of the gamesmanship survey items indicated a solid reliability score for the statements used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Procedure

Contact information for the directors of seven youth sport associations, representing six sports (baseball, basketball, hockey, wrestling, football, soccer), was obtained. Each director was contacted via email and asked if they would be willing to assist in sending the project survey to coaches in their respective associations. Upon agreement, each director was e-mailed a consent message web link to access the survey on Qualtrics. The director then sent the consent message and survey link to youth sport coaches in their respective associations. The message was sent two times for a substantial response. The University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study. All subjects were asked to read and acknowledge their willingness to participate on an electronic consent form that the IRB approved. All individuals surveyed were at least 18 years of age.

Data Analysis

Completed surveys were collected via Qualtrics and converted to an Excel spreadsheet. The data on the spreadsheet were entered into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 24) for analysis. Statistical methods employed in data analysis included crosstabs for percentages and a contingency chi-square test for statistical variations for age, years of coaching experience, and formal coaching education. For further analysis, the gamesmanship statement responses were combined into two categories: clearly acceptable/acceptable (aka acceptable) and unacceptable/clearly unacceptable (aka unacceptable). The coaching experience variable was transformed into three levels: 1 = 1 to 5 years of experience, 2 = 6 to 10 years of experience, 3 = 11 or more years of experience). A crosstabs analysis and Pearson chi-square tests of association were utilized in the identification of statistical significance within the variables.

Results

Table 2 illustrates percentages for youth coaches who answered each gamesmanship statement as acceptable or clearly acceptable. Among respondents, the item that the highest percentage ($N = 46$; 42.2%) found permissible was Statement 12, which noted that on a winning point in volleyball a player touched the ball but the referee missed it and so “the player says nothing.” In a sense, this scenario shows a “referee action” in which the player remains passive, and coaches seemed to put the burden on the official. The least acceptable gamesmanship statement among youth coaches was Statement 8, which describes an athlete proactively and “illegally [altering] his/her equipment (e.g., hockey stick, baseball bat) to gain an advantage,” with only one participant (0.9%) considering this acceptable. This section groups the 20 gamesmanship scenarios into seven categories and reviews each with regard to the frequency percentages of how youth sport coaches responded to the items. Then it presents the results of statistical analysis related to the influence of age, coaching experience, and formal coaching education.

Gamesmanship Attitudes of Youth Sport Coaches

Three of the gamesmanship statements related to using intimidation or attacking opponents (Statements 1, 2, and 3). Relatively few youth sport coaches found it was acceptable to “go after” a player on the other team, with only 5.5% ($N = 6$) of them agreeing that it is acceptable for a coach to instruct players to “go after” the injured shoulder of another team’s best player (Statement 1) and 7.3% ($N = 8$) finding it all right for a coach to tell his pitcher in baseball to throw at an opposing hitter if his own key player was hit by a pitch (Statement 2). In contrast, however, in a “contact sport” where intimidation is often used, 22% ($N = 24$) of respondents felt it was acceptable for an athlete to inflict pain deliberately on another team’s player to cause intimidation (Statement 3). An analysis of how the type of sport coached relates to the responses of youth sport coaches is beyond the scope of this study but would be an interesting inquiry to pursue in further research.

Another set of gamesmanship scenarios was linked by the pattern of gaining an unfair advantage over opponents by some means of coach or player behavior (Statements 5, 8, 10, and 17). The response of youth sport coaches to these scenarios varied widely. For example, only one coach (0.9%) felt it was acceptable for an athlete to “illegally alter his/her equipment (e.g., hockey stick, baseball bat)” to gain an advantage over opponents (Statement 8). This was the least-endorsed statement among all items. Similarly, few coaches agreed it was acceptable for either a coach to use the “authentic playbook” of the opponent received anonymously to prepare a team ($N = 5$; 4.6%; Statement 17) or for a coach to direct a grounds crew to “alter the field” in a way that gives an unfair advantage ($N = 8$; 7.3%; Statement 10). Finally, a gamesmanship statement (Statement 5) noted certain types of contact were illegal (holding, hand-checking, etc.) and then asked whether a coach ought to “teach players to violate the rules in ways that will be least likely to be detected.” For this item, 16.5% ($N = 18$) of youth sport coaches agreed such an approach would be acceptable, which suggests that some coaches perceive a difference between outright rule violations versus pushing the rule boundaries in a common sport context.

A third set of gamesmanship statements related to instances of intentional deceit in the sport context (Statements 7, 9, 11, and 14).

Again, there was relatively little endorsement of any of these items by youth sport coaches. Only 1.8% ($N = 2$) of coaches surveyed felt it was acceptable for a coach to “instruct a player to fake an injury to get an ‘official’ time-out” when none were left (Statement 7), and just 3.7% ($N = 4$) agreed that it was all right for a basketball team’s best free throw shooter to take the place of another fouled player “undetected by the referee” (Statement 9). In addition, about 1 in 10 coaches (9.4%; $N = 10$) felt it was acceptable for a soccer player to violate rules and move past the line before a penalty kick (Statement 11), while only 6.5% ($N = 7$) found it was acceptable for a soccer player to intentionally “fake a foul” in hopes the other team’s best player would be removed from the game (Statement 14). These “intentional deceit” gamesmanship scenarios found very little support among youth sport coaches.

What should a coach’s or player’s response be when there is a mistake in scoring that occurs during a sport contest? Two gamesmanship scenarios offered examples in this category (Statements 12 and 16). As noted, one of these scenarios received the highest amount of support among youth sport coaches, with 42.9% ($N = 46$) finding it acceptable for a volleyball player to “say nothing” if the player touched the ball before it went out on a winning point but the referee missed it (Statement 12). In a second “scoring mistake” scenario, just 13.9% of coaches ($N = 15$) agreed that it is acceptable for a coach to “say nothing” if an official makes a mistake in the score and the coach’s team benefits (Statement 16).

Gamesmanship instances in which a player trash-talks or showboats or otherwise uses mental intimidation to gain an edge over opponents are among the most visible and common uses of gamesmanship. Three statements (Statements 6, 15, and 20) fit this category. However, youth sport coaches offered relatively little support of such behaviors. Among coaches, 14.6% ($N = 16$) offered agreement that “effective taunting and trash-talking” to rattle an opponent is “a legitimate part of competitive sports,” with over 85% expressing disagreement with this idea (Statement 6). Additionally, just 7.3% ($N = 8$) of coaches felt it was acceptable to make a showboating display in front of a competitor after a great play (Statement 20), and only 2.8% ($N = 3$) agreed it was acceptable for players to

“boo, taunt, and jeer opponents” from the bench during a game (Statement 15).

Another category of gamesmanship involves motivation of players through the use of insults or profane language. Three scenarios (Statements 13, 18, and 19) aligned with this category. Nearly 1 in 5 youth sport coaches (18.3%; $N = 20$) felt it was acceptable to “argue with an official” with the intent to intimidate or influence future calls by the referee (Statement 13). In a related scenario, 14.6% ($N = 16$) of youth sport coaches found it was acceptable for a coach to “deliberately swear at an official” to get ejected from a game and energize the team’s players (Statement 18). However, in a scenario when such behavior was directed at young athletes and not an official, just 2.7% of coaches ($N = 3$) felt it was all right for “a coach to use profanity and personal insults while coaching” to motivate players (Statement 19).

A final stand-alone category involves embarrassing the opponent in a sport contest by “running up the score.” One gamesmanship scenario posited that the concept it is “wrong” to run up the score is “outdated” and that instead a “team should continue to score as many points as they possibly can” even when the outcome of the contest is not in doubt (Statement 4). This statement received the second-highest level of agreement among scenarios, with 23.9% ($N = 26$) of youth sport coaches finding it acceptable to continue scoring in a contest even if it may embarrass the opponent or the contest is clearly won by one team.

Does Coaching Training or Experience Influence Gamesmanship Attitudes?

Pearson chi-square tests of association were conducted between formal coaching education and acceptability for each gamesmanship scenario. If assumptions for expected cell frequencies were not met, then Fisher’s exact test was utilized. No statistically significant association was found at the $p \leq .05$ level between formal coaching education and any statement among the 20 gamesmanship scenarios that youth sport coaches expressed acceptance or nonacceptance. In other words, there seemed to be no association between a person’s formal coaching training and whether the individual agreed or disagreed with particular gamesmanship practices. In one case, a marginal association was found between formal coaching training

and agreement with the notion that it is not wrong to “run up the score” (Statement 4), $\chi^2(1) = 2.938, p = .086$, with those who had received training (28.8%) being more likely to say this practice was acceptable than those who had not (13.9%).

With regard to coaching experience, respondents were classified with 1 to 5 years of experience ($N = 38; 35.2\%$), 6 to 10 years of experience ($N = 41; 38\%$), or more than 10 years of experience ($N = 29; 26.9\%$). Pearson chi-square tests of association were computed between years of coaching experience and coaches’ acceptance of each gamesmanship scenario, with Fisher’s exact test being employed if assumptions for expected cell frequencies were not met. No statistically significant associations emerged between years of coaching experience and youth sport coaches’ gamesmanship attitudes for any item. These variables were also analyzed with coaching experience as an ordinal measure using the Somers’ d test statistic of association. Again, no statistically significant associations emerged between years of coaching experience and gamesmanship attitudes of youth sport coaches on nearly all of the specific items assessed. However, a small, positive correlation existed between coaching experience and acceptance of the idea that in a contact sport a coach can teach players to violate contact rules in a way likely to not be detected, which was statistically significant ($d = .181, p = .005$; Statement 5). More experienced coaches thus seemed a bit more likely to endorse this gamesmanship practice, but they showed no other association on any other item.

Other variables of potential interest that might influence gamesmanship attitudes include age, gender, and type of sport being coached. Analysis of these items was beyond the scope of this study and will be the subject of investigation in a separate study.

Table 2

Percentage of Youth Sport Coaches Who Believe the Gamesmanship Statement Is Acceptable or Clearly Acceptable

Statement	%
In a contact sport, a coach instructs players to go after the injured shoulder of the other team’s leading player to slow him/her down or get him/her out of the game.	5.5

Table 2 (cont.)

Statement	%
In baseball/softball, a key player for X is hit by a pitch. In retaliation, X's coach orders his pitcher to throw at an opposing hitter.	7.3
In a contact sport, an athlete deliberately seeks to inflict pain on an opposing player to intimidate him.	22
The idea that it's wrong to "run up the score" is outdated. A team should continue to score as many points as they possibly can even when the outcome is no longer in doubt.	23.9
In a sport where certain types of contact with an opponent are illegal (e.g., holding, hand-checking, pushing, or grabbing), a coach teaches his or her players to violate the rules in ways that will be least likely to be detected.	16.5
Effective taunting and trash-talking that throws an opponent off his/her game is a legitimate part of competitive sports.	14.6
In a sport where only a certain number of team time-outs are allowed, a coach with no time-outs left instructs a player to fake an injury to get an "official" time-out.	1.8
An athlete who knows other athletes have done so without getting caught illegally alters his/her equipment (e.g., hockey stick, baseball bat) to gain an advantage.	0.9
In basketball, player X is fouled. Player Y, the team's best free throw shooter, goes to the line to shot the free throw undetected by the ref.	3.7
A coach instructs a groundskeeper to alter the field if the coach believes it will give his/her team an advantage (e.g., soaking a field to slow down opponents, sloping a foul line to keep bunts fair, letting grass grow long, etc.).	7.3
In soccer, during a penalty kick, a goalie, hoping the referee will not call it, deliberately violates the rules by moving forward three steps past the line before the ball is kicked.	9.4
On the winning point of the game, a volleyball player touches the ball before it goes out, but the referee misses the touch. The player says nothing.	43

Table 2 (cont.)

Statement	%
A coach argues with an official intending to intimidate or influence future calls.	18.3
In soccer, a player deliberately fakes a foul, hoping the best player on the other team will be red-carded and removed from the game.	6.5
While on the bench, players boo, taunt, and jeer opponents.	2.8
In a game, an official makes a mistake in the score. The coach who benefits says nothing.	13.9
Before an important game, a coach receives an anonymous envelope containing an authentic and current copy of the opponent's playbook. The coach uses it to prepare his/her team.	4.6
A coach deliberately swears at an official to get thrown out of the game in order to energize his/her team.	14.6
To motivate players, a coach uses profanity and personal insults while coaching.	2.7
After making a great play, an athlete pounds his/her chest boastfully and does an "in your face" celebration dance in front of an opponent.	7.3

Discussion

The questionnaire used in this study contained questions regarding concepts of gamesmanship. Gamesmanship is considered to be a violation of the spirit of the competition that is not specifically laid out by the rules but disrupts the contractual integrity implicit to the competition wherein cheating is the explicit neglect of the rule structure of a sport (Lee et al., 2007). Potter (1947) originally described gamesmanship as sophisticated or less technically skillful players adopting strategies to upset their opponents and win without actually cheating. A coach's decision to speak up when an official misses a call is different from a coach instructing their athlete to act on the premise of gamesmanship. Due to the potential influence of youth sport coaches on the attitudes and practices of young athletes, this study sought to further understand how youth sport coaches think about gamesmanship practices in varied sport contexts.

Responses of youth sport coaches in this study suggest that only a small portion of them are inclined to instruct players to act in a way that utilizes gamesmanship practices. A third (35%; $N = 7$) of the gamesmanship statements received support from 5% or less of the coaches surveyed. Additionally, half of the gamesmanship scenarios (50%; $N = 10$) were deemed acceptable by a minimal percentage of coaches from between 5% and 20% of those surveyed. Of the remaining three items, two received support from just over 20% of coaches and the last item was considered acceptable by 43% of coaches. Twenty-two percent of coaches felt it was acceptable for an athlete in a contact sport to deliberately seek to cause intimidation by inflicting pain on an opponent (Statement 3). Pain and intimidation are often considered as just “part of the game” in contact sport settings, yet still only 1 out of 5 respondents felt this attitude was acceptable. Nearly 1 out of 4 coaches (23.9%) agreed that it is not really “wrong” to “run up the score” or continue to score points if a contest is clearly won (Statement 4). In this context, it may be that some youth sport coaches feel it is unfair to limit the opportunity for play and further development of young athletes who have worked hard and practiced to play, even if their efforts clearly outshine their opponents in a way that leaves the opposing team embarrassed or discouraged. The scenario that received most agreement as acceptable from coaches (43%) highlighted lack of player disclosure in touching the ball on a winning point in volleyball that was missed by a referee (Statement 12). This substantial level of support is consistent with similar findings from previous studies (Strand, 2014; Strand et al., 2018). In such a scenario, it may be that coaches and athletes feel “referee mistakes” are common enough that the consequences even out for each team and they do not bear responsibility for the official’s error. In general, it is encouraging that the majority of youth sport coaches surveyed were mostly unwilling to endorse questionable gamesmanship practices as acceptable in various sport scenarios.

For ease of discussion, the gamesmanship scenarios were grouped into seven categories of gamesmanship practice. The idea of intentionally attacking an opponent to intimidate was generally disagreed with, though as noted, causing some pain to intimidate in the normal course of playing a contact sport was seen as acceptable by some (Statement 3; 22%). The concept of gaining an unfair advantage by

means of clearly cheating (e.g., altering equipment, altering field of play, using other team's playbook) was also disagreed with by nearly all respondents. The slight exception to this was that 16.5% of coaches felt it was acceptable to instruct players in how to make contact in a contact sport in ways that would gain advantage (though in violation of rules) but not be detected (Statement 5). It may be that some coaches feel they will handicap their players if they do not instruct them in such techniques, as their opponents are likely to use them and it is also considered "part of the game" in contact sports (Howe, 2004). Four scenarios highlighting "intentional deceit" practices (e.g., faking an injury) also received very little support (less than 1 in 10 coaches endorsed any of these items), showing that "cheating" efforts (illegal and unethical shortcuts to win) are considered problematic by nearly all youth sport coaches in this study. Responses of coaches to the category of "mistakes in scoring" have already been mentioned.

Two other categories of gamesmanship relate to questionable behaviors by athletes or coaches, including taunting or showboating efforts and the use of profanity or insults by coaches to motivate. Verbal taunts and jabs or physical displays of taunting are considered to be a type of threat or aggressive signal used by athletes and coaches in competition to intimidate and establish a sense of dominance (McDermott, 2019). Of course, athletes such as Muhammad Ali (boxing) and Reggie Miller (basketball) are well known for such behaviors in their respective sports and used such efforts for competitive advantage. In youth sports, such behaviors are still developing among athletes and may be amplified or diminished if a coach either endorses or prohibits the behavior. In this study, it appears that youth sport coaches generally disagree with and discourage such behaviors, as only 14.6% agreed that "trash-talking" was a "legitimate part of competitive sports" (Statement 6) and very few endorsed either taunting from the bench or showboating. It may be that efforts to curb bullying behaviors in the youth sport context and to avoid politically incorrect language (slurs, etc.) have increased the likelihood of coaches not supporting such behaviors (Kniffin & Palacio, 2018). With regard to coaches' use of profanity or insults, there seemed to be a distinction between efforts to "work the officials" and coaches' language toward players. About 1 in 5 coaches (18.3%)

agreed it was all right for a coach to “argue with an official” to intimidate or influence future calls (Statement 13) and 14.6% agreed with the use of profanity toward a referee to get thrown out and “energize [the] team” (Statement 18). However, only 2.7% agreed it was acceptable to use profanity or insults to motivate players while coaching (Statement 19). The manner in which a coach uses language toward officials or players is likely to shape the attitudes of youth and their perception of whether something is mild and inoffensive as opposed to severe and threatening (Strand et al., 2017).

This study’s examination of whether formal coaching training or years of education influenced attitudes toward gamesmanship found that there appeared to be little effect on coaches’ attitudes. Only one statistical outcome showed a marginal linkage between coaching education and agreement with “running up the score,” and those with greater training seemed more likely to indicate this practice was acceptable. Similarly, youth sport coaches with more years of experience did not show much different gamesmanship attitudes than coaches with lesser experience, except on one item indicating a higher likelihood to endorse ways of showing players to get around contact rules. At the youth sport level, most coaches have limited formal training and in this study only a quarter of them (26.6%) had more than a decade of coaching experience. The limited influence of these factors on gamesmanship attitudes may be due to multiple reasons. It may be that, as noted, the endorsement of most gamesmanship practices by youth sport coaches is already quite low and additional training or experience does not substantially shift that pattern. A second possibility may be that more specific and extensive training in regard to multiple areas of questionable ethical action in a sports context is needed to really influence youth sport coaches. A third possibility may be that gamesmanship attitudes expressed on a survey are more strongly influenced by factors such as gender, sport experience, or other variables. Though an examination of associations between type of sport coached and gamesmanship attitudes was beyond the scope of this study, this subject is another one that is deserving of future investigation (Strand et al., 2018). Formal coach training of youth sport coaches across a variety of youth sports would benefit from the inclusion of gamesmanship situations and direction on the acceptability of particular behaviors.

Research by Skye et al. (2009) suggests that actions of significant figures in a child's life (parent or coach) are linked to the behavior of the child. During each game in their study, every time a spectator demonstrated four positive sportsmanship behaviors, there was an associated increase of one positive player behavior regardless of age or league. Similarly, when coaches demonstrated approximately five positive sportsmanship behaviors, there was an associated increase of one positive player behavior. Thus, players were more likely to behave positively if the team's spectators and coaches did so as well. This research suggests that coaches must realize that their actions have substantial implications related to what their athletes deem as acceptable. The specific attitudes and behaviors exemplified by parents, coaches, and spectators can strongly influence youth athletes' conduct in terms of sportsmanship and gamesmanship. Shields et al. (2005) suggested youth sport participation has direct relevance to the development of important qualities such as cooperation, unselfishness, attitudes toward achievement, stress management skills, perseverance, risk taking, and the abilities to tolerate frustration and delay gratification. The difference between coaches and athletes who do and do not express support for gamesmanship practices is somewhat explained by Nicholls' (1989) achievement goal theory, which suggests task-oriented individuals show competence in sport by working hard to master a task and ego-oriented individuals define success as superiority over others. The findings from this study suggest that the majority of youth sport coaches understand that sport participation for youth ought to be about more than winning, yet there is limited support for the usage of most gamesmanship practices at the level of youth sport.

Limitations

This research project involves limitations for evaluation of its implications. First, results from the project are dependent on the participants answering questions in a reliable and honest way. Since the survey poses scenarios that highlight ethical questions, some respondents may respond in a manner they feel fits the socially desirable response and not their honest opinion. Additionally, the statements must be interpreted with accuracy by the youth sport coaches, which could be a challenge if an individual is not familiar with the language or rule context associated with a particular sport.

Scenarios are written to be as clear and straightforward as possible to minimize this difficulty. The survey sample is a convenience sample with voluntary response and is not a randomized, representative sample of all youth sport coaches, so the findings may or may not be generalizable to other populations.

Conclusion

In general, youth coaches seem more likely to make unethical decisions because of external pressures from administration, parents, and the community combined with an obligation to respond in an emotional game-time situation. Thus, it can be said that situations arise in youth sport in which a coach has to emphasize the ethical decision, but this is often difficult for coaches when the atmosphere in athletics is overly focused on the priority of winning and making the ethical decision could cost the team a point, a match, a win, or even a championship. As gamesmanship situations are typically present in the youth sport context, this study provides value in understanding how youth sport coaches think about gamesmanship and their awareness of ethical concerns. Further investigation on factors that influence youth sport coaches in their ethical awareness and decision making will provide benefits for coaching education and instruction of young athletes.

Howe (2004) noted that the definition of sport participation requires that a participant or coach must be willing to accept the risk of losing. A refusal to accept that outcome is one factor leading to the use of gamesmanship strategies. Further, Howe commented that certain ways of doing sport encourage the worst in a human being and hobble the best. The best coaches have been found to use coping mechanisms such as preparation, self-talk, social support, advice, and venting to deal with pressures related to administration, overload, competition environment, athletes, and team atmosphere (Levy et al., 2009). Youth sport coaches should use such coping mechanisms to reduce stressors that may lead to unethical decisions. Such practices as deceitfulness may be used by athletes or coaches who feel the need to prove their competence to others, and such behaviors are perpetuated by positive reinforcement such as public accolades or endorsement by coaching figures (Kamis et al., 2016). Instances such as these were observed in coaches who accepted a mistake in scorekeeping that resulted in extra points or

a win in volleyball due to a missed call by the referee. Youth sport coaches need to look at the lessons learned by youth when a particular gamesmanship strategy is deemed acceptable if it results in a win. If the attitudes of youth sport coaches toward unethical strategies are outwardly opposed to their use, young athletes will be less likely to rely on using them in sport.

External pressures to win are present for coaches making these decisions, but a limited amount of formal coaching education likely also plays a role. Perhaps a volunteer youth coach with no experience outside of their own youth sport participation finds these statements acceptable only because they are modeling the attitude of those that instructed them. Formal coach training may not be a comprehensive solution, because some programs have been criticized, being incorrectly labeled “education” when in reality they are more akin to “indoctrination” (Nelson et al., 2006). If more youth coaches received formal education from programs with legitimate learning objectives, perhaps fewer instances of gamesmanship would be accepted by youth sport coaches and athletes alike. In summary, the ethical attitudes of coaches and parents are associated with the actions of youth sport participants; thus, youth sport coaches must demonstrate the desired ethics to athletes, parents, and spectators alike. If the sport atmosphere does not lead to athletes’ acceptance of proper ethical attitudes, it may have developmental implications for their growth and behavioral choices both inside and outside of sport.

References

- Bergeron, M. F., Mountjoy, M., Armstrong, N., Chia, M., Côté, J., Emery, C. A., & Engebretsen, L. (2015). International Olympic Committee consensus statement on youth athletic development. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 49(13), 843–851. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-094962>
- Capranica, L., & Millard-Stafford, M. L. (2011). Youth sport specialization: How to manage competition and training? *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*, 6(4), 572–579. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsp.6.4.572>
- Christianson, P., & Deutsch, J. (2012). Making a case for early sports specialization. *Journal of Youth Sports*, 6(2), 3–6.
- Christofferson, J., & Deutsch, J. (2017). Effective organizational and coaching strategies for youth traveling teams. *Strategies*, 30(3), 18–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2017.1297749>

- Christofferson, J., & Deutsch, J. (2018). More effective organizational and coaching strategies for youth traveling teams. *Strategies*, 31(2), 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2017.1418688>
- Coatsworth, J. D., & Conroy, D. E. (2007). Youth sport as a component of organized afterschool programs. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2007(115), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.223>
- Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(3), 307–323. <https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892>
- Garner, R. (2013, April 15). Win at all costs: Most children admit to cheating at sports. *The Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/win-at-all-costsmost-children-admit-to-cheating-at-sport-8572533.html>
- Green, T., & Gabbard, C. (1999). Do we need sportsmanship education in secondary school athletics? *Physical Educator*, 56(2), 179–185.
- Guèvremont, A., Findlay, L., & Kohen, D. (2008). Organized extracurricular activities of Canadian children and youth. *Health Reports*, 19(3), 65–69.
- Howe, L. A. (2004) Gamesmanship. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 31(2), 212–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2004.9714661>
- Jones, A. (2018). *Promoting positive youth development through sport* [Master's graduating paper, University of British Columbia]. School of Kinesiology. http://educ-kin2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2018/04/2018_JONES_Amanda_KIN-595-Paper-FINAL.pdf
- Jones, R., & Wallace, M. (2005). Another bad day at the training ground: Coping with ambiguity in the coaching context. *Sport, Education, and Society*, 10(1), 119–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332052000308792>
- Kamis, D., Newmark, T., Begel, D., & Glick, I. D. (2016). Cheating and sports: History, diagnosis, and treatment. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28(6), 551–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2016.1208162>
- Kniffin, K. M., & Palacio, D. (2018). Trash-talking and trolling. *Human Nature*, 29(3), 353–369. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-018-9317-3>

- Lee, M. J., Ntoumanis, N., & Whitehead, J. (2007). Development of the attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire (AMDYSQ). *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 8(3), 369–392. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.12.002>
- Levy, A., Nicholls, A., Marchant, D., & Polman, R. (2009). Organisational stressors, coping, and coping effectiveness: A longitudinal study with an elite coach. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(1), 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.4.1.31>
- McDermott, K. C. P. (2019). *Emotional manipulation and cognitive distraction as strategy: The effects of verbal insults on motivation and performance in a competitive setting* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut]. OpenCommons@UConn. <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/dissertations/2211>
- Merkel, D. L. (2013). Youth sport: Positive and negative impact on young athletes. *Open Access Journal of Sports Medicine*, 4, 151–160. <https://doi.org/10.2147/OAJSM.S33556>
- Miller, S. M., & Siegel, J. T. (2017). Youth sports and physical activity: The relationship between perceptions of childhood sport experience and adult exercise behavior. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 33, 85–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.08.009>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). Table 185. Percentage of high school seniors who participate in various school-sponsored extracurricular activities, by selected student characteristics: 1992 and 2004. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_185.asp
- Nelson, L. J., Cushion, C. J., & Potrac, P. (2006). Formal, nonformal, and informal coach learning: A holistic conceptualization. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 1(3), 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1260/174795406778604627>
- Nicholls, J. G. (1989). *The competitive ethos and democratic education*. Harvard University Press.
- Pierce, S., Gould, D., & Camiré, M. (2017). Definition and model of life skills transfer. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10(1), 186–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2016.1199727>
- Potter, S. (1947). *Gamesmanship: The art of winning games without actually cheating*. Penguin.
- Prichard, A., & Deutsch, J. (2015). The effects of motivational climate on youth sport participants. *Physical Educator*, 72(5), 200–214. <https://doi.org/10.18666/TPE-2015-V72-I5-6999>

- Schmidt, C. (2018, September 13). Removal of Sabino High's state baseball championship upheld. *Arizona Daily Star*. <https://tucson.com/>
- Scott, B. & Lower, L. M. (2017). Assessing the legality of state tournament bans in interscholastic athletics. *Physical Educator*, 74(4), 789–794. <https://js.sagamorepub.com/pe/article/view/8793>
- Shields, D. L., Bredemeier, B. L., LaVoi, N. M., & Power, F. C. (2005). The sport behavior of youth, parents, and coaches: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Character Education*, 3(1), 43–59.
- Shubert, J. J., Metzger, A., Wray-Lake, L., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2016). Exploring associations of character profiles and out-of-school time activities among children and adolescents. *Journal of Character Education*, 12(2), 11–27.
- Skye, A. B., Wells, M. S., Baker, B. L., & Hegreness, R. (2009). Parents behaving badly? The relationship between the sportsmanship behaviors of adults and athletes in youth basketball games. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32(1), 3–18.
- Strand, B. (2013). Gamesmanship beliefs of high school coaches. *Journal of Research*, 8(1), 20–24.
- Strand, B. (2014). A comparison of gamesmanship beliefs of high school athletes and coaches. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 4(3), 47–54. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v04i03/59410>
- Strand, B., Brotherson, S., Docheff, D., & Gorman, S. (2017). Athletes' recollections of inappropriate behaviors by their high school sport coaches. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 8(4), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v08i04/41-55>
- Strand, B., Brotherson, S., & Tracy, T. (2018). Gamesmanship beliefs and ethical decision making of college athletes. *Physical Educator*, 75(2), 302–320. <https://doi.org/10.18666/TPE-2018-V75-I2-7522>
- Tarkington, J. N., Ortega, R. M., Lower, L. M., & Paluta, L. M. (2016). Informing priorities for coaching education: Perspectives from youth sport leaders. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 11(3), 436–445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541166645207>
- Vella, S., Oades, L., & Crowe, T. (2011). The role of the coach in facilitating positive youth development: Moving from theory to practice. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2010.511423>