

INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

A Mixed-Methods Approach to Identifying Ethical Issues Pertinent in Interscholastic Athletics

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate three research questions: (a) What are the ethical issues most pertinent to interscholastic sport today, as well as in the next 5 years? (b) How important are those ethical issues to interscholastic athletic administrators? (c) What are the potential implications of those pertinent ethical issues to practicing interscholastic athletic administrators? For the first inquiry, the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) provided 14 contemporary ethical issues that were most pertinent to interscholastic sport today, as well as in the next 5 years: behavioral issues, competing club sports, competitive balance, emphasis on winning, health concerns, nontraditional sports, outside sport organizations, participation for all, pay-to-play organizations, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, sportsmanship, too much structure, and win at all costs. For the second proposition, a national study was conducted with athletic directors from the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association ($n = 170$) annual conference. Following a survey in which participants ranked issues according to importance, a one-tailed analysis of variance determined significant differences among the 14

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ethical issues identified by the MSHSL. Four issues exhibited significant differences based on region: behavioral issues, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, and win at all costs. A Games-Howell post hoc determined significant differences across geographical regions of the United States for these four ethical issues. For the third research question, semistructured interviews provided insight on the implications for practicing athletic administrators. Athletic administrators generally emphasized the importance of the issues identified in this study.

Under the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), it is reported there are more than 24,000 high schools throughout the United States and Canada, with more than 300,000 administrators and coaches, and nearly 8 million male and female athletes who compete in interscholastic sport competitions (Forsyth et al., 2019; NFHS, 2019). With this many schools, administrators, coaches, and participants in high school athletics, interscholastic sport programs have been considered the “single most significant dimension” (Robinson et al., 2001, p. 21) in the sport enterprise (Forsyth et al., 2019; Forsyth & Olson, 2013; Whisenant et al., 2014; Whisenant & Forsyth, 2011). Despite the economic and sociological impact of interscholastic sports on North America, the body of research is scarce. Compared with the number of articles published in academic journals regarding Olympic, professional, and collegiate sports, the number of articles published in academic journals regarding interscholastic sport has fallen well behind as a research focus (Johnson et al., 2019). With the void in sport management academic journals regarding contemporary issues of interscholastic sports, we elected to research interscholastic sport issues in an attempt to help address this void. This study, which focuses on ethical issues, is part of a larger study designed to identify salient issues facing interscholastic athletic administrators.

We have close working relationships with our respective state interscholastic athletic administration associations. After attending several business meetings over the years during our respective state high school athletic conferences, it became apparent that a research study focused on a multitude of issues about interscholastic athletics could be conducted. Two research studies published in *Sport Marketing Quarterly* served as a model for this investigation (Branch

& Crow, 1994; Drain & Ashley, 2000). These research studies identified contemporary issues about collegiate sports. Given the gap in the academic journals, we modeled our analysis in a similar way to these intercollegiate studies.

Results of this study, supported by the literature, indicate a multitude of ethical issues facing interscholastic athletic administrators. Fourteen ethical issues were identified and classified into four categories: (a) scholarships and professional promises (i.e., scholarship myth, promises by camp organizers), (b) sportsmanship (i.e., sportsmanship, emphasis on winning, behavioral issues, win at all costs), (c) non-school program concerns (i.e., club sports, outside sports organizations), and (d) school program concerns (i.e., competitive balance, health issues, nontraditional sports, participation for all, pay-to-play, too much structure). This section explores literature findings related to these issues.

Scholarships

Sport specialization has become an increasing phenomenon in the interscholastic sports scene. The ever-elusive college scholarship drives many of the nation's high school athletes within their competition. This has started a trend within interscholastic sports of athletes beginning to specialize in their chosen sport progressively earlier than in the past (Erickson, 2018). Brooks et al. (2018) found that the mentality of needing to specialize at a young age is prevalent throughout youth sport athletes. The study showed that about 80% of participants ($n = 974$) believed specialization increased their chances of making their high school team, while about 70% believed that specialization increased their chances of earning a college scholarship. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) statistics on high school athletes who obtain a college scholarship sits at 2%; however, 16% of the participants felt as though they were very or extremely likely to receive a college scholarship (NCAA, 2019). Brooks et al. noted that this perception was highest among highly specialized high school athletes. Another explanation for the increase in sport specialization comes from Landers et al. (2010). They outlined how sport specialization has emerged over time due to "the privatization and commercialization of youth sport" (p. 15).

Identification of talent and scholarship offerings establishes challenges for interscholastic athletic administrators. Baker and

Wattie (2018) addressed the theory of innate talent and its implications toward athletic scholarships. They mentioned that colleges and universities have offered scholarships to athletes as young as the age of 11. This can create unrealistic expectations, given that a small percentage of high school athletes receive athletic scholarships to compete at the intercollegiate level. Furthermore, acceptance of the concept of innate talent can discourage adolescent athletes who are not scouted by collegiate coaches.

Professional Promises

Another related issue to athletic administrators is promises by camp organizers. DiFiori et al. (2019) noted the expansion of recruiting showcase events, year-round sport clubs, and personal coaches and trainers. These nonschool-affiliated activities have been correlated with youth sport specialization and the overall commercialization of adolescent sport. This trend is alarming because Post et al. (2019) determined that 20.0% of parents believed their child's ability to participate in interscholastic athletics was limited "quite a bit" or "a great deal" by travel requirements to tournaments or showcases. The barrier of travel for showcase events superseded the concern over cost, time demands, and computer or TV-based entertainment.

Summer sport camps are a valuable tool for high school athletes to gain new knowledge and develop their skills. But unlike club sports, summer camps provide an intense training experience in a very limited time frame, making it more accessible for many families than committing to a club for a whole semester or year. One of the other drawing cards of summer camps is they are usually conducted by current or former college athletes and/or coaches. Mitchell (2012) noted that athletes, and their parents, often go to multiple different camps each summer to gain face time with coaches and other people who can promote their abilities to recruiters and coaches. But as Alsever (2006) highlighted, "The extra help may or may not transform [them] into a professional" (para. 3). Summer sport camps border on an ethical dilemma as camps are only a feasible option for families with the financial means to pay. For one summer of camps, a family stated they paid \$4,000 to send their daughter to six camps (Mitchell, 2012).

Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship of coaches and athletes is another ethical issue that affects high school athletic administrators. Arguably, the issues within this category (i.e., sportsmanship, emphasis on winning, behavioral issues, win at all costs) are interrelated. Strand (2013) completed a study in which high school coaches were asked to review 25 statements related to sportsmanship or gamesmanship and determine whether the behavior was clearly acceptable. Strand highlighted that nearly half of coaches viewed a situation in which their athlete remained silent after receiving an incorrect call in their favor to be acceptable. Another notable finding was that 23.3% of coaches felt it clearly acceptable to send their athletes into a game to intimidate opponents. Following observations of diminished sportsmanship, Stewart (2014) encouraged athletes' and coaches' respect and concern for their full commitment toward sport, officials and the rules, their opponents, social conventions, and avoidance of negative approaches toward sport participation.

Rutten et al. (2011) explored the effects of sportsmanship and fair play on prosocial and antisocial behavior among adolescent athletes. Expectedly, sportsmanship was a significant positive predictor of prosocial behavior and a significant negative predictor of antisocial behavior. Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) observed that many parents whose adolescent child discontinued sport participation attributed this dropout to politics and an overemphasis on competition. In response, these parents surmised that increased opportunity on fun and better leadership would encourage their child to continue sport involvement.

Through a focus group study, Ettekal et al. (2018) observed the belief of high school athletic directors that sport can promote positive character development through sportsmanship. Emergent themes included collaborative relationships, clear expectations, sense of understanding, tailored content, personal connection, interesting and engaging activities, and third-party voice. Athletes in the Garcia and Subia (2019) study similarly indicated that sportsmanship can be developed through athletic participation. Participants generally strongly agreed that sport involvement led them to maintain strong principles, act in an ethical manner, and portray sportsmanship.

While sportsmanship can be cultivated through high school sport, it remains a pertinent issue for administrators.

Non-School Program Concerns

One of the major concerns threatening interscholastic sports is club sports. The participation in and popularity of club sports has grown rapidly in the past 2 decades (Bennett et al., 2019). While this popularity has not taken anything away from interscholastic sports, it has added more time commitments to high school students and their parents. As mentioned, the rise of club sports was the first spark on the trend of sport specialization. Erickson (2018) and Bennett et al. (2019) both conducted extensive research into club sports and how that has changed the sporting landscape in interscholastic athletics. One of the most prevalent issues with club sports is the lack of academic restrictions for their athletes (Erickson, 2018). Before the rise of club sports, athletes who faced academic probation and subsequent suspension from their sport had no other option than to improve their grades to be able to participate again. However, with club sports becoming more popular, if an athlete faces academic probation at school, they can continue to participate on their club team.

According to Bennett et al. (2019), one of the primary challenges club sports brings is coach behavior. This is because many sports clubs employ coaches without any coaching training, especially training in coaching children (Gregory, 2017). Parents believe that through the provision of more coaching, unregulated opportunities to develop their skills, and exposure to top college coaches, club sports are their child's ticket to securing the elusive college scholarship (Erickson, 2018).

Another major ethical issue in youth sports is the ever-rising cost associated with club sports (Bennett et al., 2019; Erickson, 2018; Malina, 2010). Many parents see the cost as simply a necessity for their child to become a better athlete. As Bennett et al. (2019) noted "club sport is the domain of those who can afford it, restricting access for lower [socioeconomic status] children and families" (p. 92). Parents estimate that they spend upward of \$30,000 to improve their child's athletic ability (Alsever, 2006). For less fortunate families, this cost is seen as a barrier that restricts them from being able to provide the same opportunities for their children.

While most people believe that club sports are the biggest competitors for interscholastic sports, there is an increasing amount of competition coming from clubs and organizations outside of the sport realm. The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported that 44% of high school seniors reported participation in some kind of sport and 21% reported participation in music activities and clubs. However, the positive relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and academic outcomes may not apply across all activities (Martinez et al., 2016). Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that “high school extracurricular participation predicted several indicators of academic, psychological, and behavioral adjustment” (p. 708). The study analyzed the connection between participants in organized activities and their developmental outcomes currently and 2 years later. By highlighting the difference between participating in sport and participating in other extracurricular activities, Martinez et al. (2016) outlined the effects of sport specialization at a young age and the subsequent increase in club sport participation on nonsport extracurricular activity participation.

School Program Concerns

The last category of ethical issues in this literature review is school program concerns. A lack of competitive balance can manifest in mismatching of athletes (Miller & Lanehart, 2004). As Miller and Lanehart (2004) stated, injuries related to mismatching can result in legal consequences. One example was an injury that occurred to Harvey James Prejean, Jr., and ended up in a successful negligence lawsuit. To prevent mismatching, Miller and Lanehart urged coaches to acknowledge physical differences and foreseeable risks.

Health concerns also pose a significant concern for high school athletic administrators. Among a range of injuries, concussions have emerged as the most serious consequence. Bryan et al. (2016) estimated 335,342 sport-related concussions among high school athletes on an annual basis. However, according to their research, approximately 22.5% of concussions that occur in high school sport are not reported. Dowdy et al. (2015) observed that 14.0% of high school students face elevated or extremely elevated risk for emotional or behavioral problems. Therefore, a behavioral and emotional

screening system, in addition to a social-emotional health survey, was recommended.

Nontraditional sport programs and activities present an alternative to organized interscholastic sport. A study of female adolescents concluded that 74% preferred fitness activities, 18% favored organized sport, and 8% sought both fitness and sport (Wilkinson & Bretzing, 2011). The major themes that led to their preference toward fitness programs were health benefits and fun/variety.

Interscholastic athletic programs have had difficulty ensuring participation for all. Respondents in a mixed-methods study noted that the mission of granting everyone a participation opportunity had transformed into an emphasis on winning (Spaaij et al., 2019). Boler (2016) reported that student-athletes with intellectual disabilities are not provided with equitable participation opportunities. The U.S. Government Accountability Office held that intellectuals with disabilities were afforded sport opportunities at significantly lower rates than their peers (Boler, 2016).

As costs for athletic programs are increasing, certain districts have chosen to charge families for athletic participation. The pay-to-play phenomenon, including fees on average of \$100, has caused some adolescent athletes to discontinue participation (Sawyer, 2015). In response, Forester (2015) suggested that interscholastic programs seek public funding through bonds as well as private investment. Forester also noted that sponsorships present an opportunity that has not yet been taken advantage of in interscholastic athletics.

An overemphasis on structure may exist in some high school athletic programs. In the Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) study, parents responded that two crucial reasons for their child quitting the sport were too much time and travel and too early or late practice times. Similarly, the Dunn et al. (2016) study revealed that sport commitment was significantly negatively correlated with pressure and that 38% of the variance in commitment was predicted by pressure.

Results from these studies demonstrate the reality that ethical issues permeate interscholastic sport. This study sought to gain the perspectives of athletic directors about the most impactful issues.

Purpose

The literature reviewed for this research study offers an overview of salient ethical issues that pertain to interscholastic sport. However, the literature does not provide insight to the importance of these issues to athletic administrators who oversee their respective high school athletic programs. To address this gap, this study identifies the importance of ethical issues to practicing interscholastic athletic administrators today, as well as in the next 5 years. By addressing the importance level of these issues, this study supports and complements the body of literature on interscholastic sport. Additionally, this study enhances stakeholders' understanding of the pertinent issues related to ethical issues and thus creates policy action. Thus, this research investigation seeks to identify the pertinent issues about ethical issues. Three questions guided this research study: (a) What are the ethical issues most pertinent to interscholastic sport today, as well as in the future? (b) How important are those ethical issues to athletic administrators? (c) What are the potential implications of those pertinent ethical issues to practicing athletic administrators?

Method

This mixed-methods nonexperimental descriptive study was driven on the expertise of well-rounded, renowned athletic administrators. Although state laws and regulations can vary, those who are employed within interscholastic sports encounter the same baseline issues within their profession. The methodology for this research study consisted of four phases: (1) establishing a panel of experts, (2) identifying and defining contemporary issues, (3) survey development and distribution, and 4) data analysis and interviews. Out of convenience, we approached the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) to begin this investigation.

Establishing a Panel of Experts

The MSHSL executive director was contacted by phone. After discussing a possible research study that would eventually make its way to the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) annual conference, the MSHSL executive director agreed to have his executive board, 20 high school administrators well accustomed to contemporary issues in athletic programs,

serve as a panel of experts. The 20 members of the MSHSL executive board represent (a) athletic administrators, (b) coaches, (c) principals, (d) superintendents, (e) Minnesota school board association members, (f) Minnesota association of secondary schools administrators, (g) middle school and high school sports coordinators, (h) interscholastic activities administrators, (i) all district coordinators across Minnesota, and (j) the general public across Minnesota. In other words, all 20 board members have vested interest in high school athletics; thereby, the executive board had a well-rounded holistic membership representing interscholastic sports throughout the state of Minnesota.

Identifying and Defining Contemporary Issues

During a scheduled MSHSL board meeting, the executive director shared the purpose of the study with his executive board. Each executive board member was instructed to identify five contemporary issues pertinent to interscholastic sports today, as well as in the next 5 years. The executive director collected responses from each of his board members and forwarded them to us.

When we received the issues by mail, some of the issues were not fully defined, only offering descriptive words. Therefore, the MSHSL executive director worked with his board members to properly define all contemporary issues as related to the day-to-day operations of practicing athletic administrators. Once all contemporary issues were properly defined, the MSHSL executive director forwarded all definitions to us electronically.

Survey Development and Distribution

The MSHSL submitted 100 issues; however, 30 of those issues overlapped. Therefore, the panel of experts identified 70 contemporary issues, which were labeled under one of 14 categories: Administration, Classification, Coaches, Ethics, Finance, Officials, Parents, Participation, Scheduling, Specialization, Sportsmanship, Title IX, Tournaments, and Other. These categories, along with 70 pertinent issues, were placed into a Likert scale with values ranging from 5 (*extremely important*) to 1 (*very little importance*).¹ The categories were created after a review of all issues submitted by the

¹ This manuscript only focuses on 14 pertinent issues labeled under the Ethics, Sportsmanship, and Other categories.

panel of experts. In other words, the issues were the driver in the establishment and naming of the categories.

Pilot Study

The North Dakota Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NDIAAA) was selected to serve as the pilot study out of convenience due to proximity of Eric Forsyth. The NDIAAA executive secretary was contacted by phone and requested to have the survey completed during their state conference. In consultation with the acting president, the association agreed to assist with this pilot study. The NDIAAA agreed to have the survey completed during their spring conference business meeting. Forsyth attended the NDIAAA state conference and presented copies of the instrument during the pre-business meeting. Before respondents completed the instrument, Forsyth explained the intent of the research study, as well as welcoming any comments respondents deemed necessary. The participants ($n = 56$) then completed the survey. The respondents to the pilot study were all practicing athletic administrators throughout the state of North Dakota who elected to attend the NDIAAA annual conference held in Fargo, North Dakota. These participants had a wide variety of experience, and each represented their respective schools and districts. Forsyth also had the opportunity to welcome suggestions to help improve the survey's clarity and purpose before approaching the NIAAA. Although no suggestions were presented to improve the survey, compliments were shared from the NDIAAA membership regarding the ease of rating contemporary issues in interscholastic sports.

National Survey

After the pilot study, the NIAAA executive director was contacted by phone for permission to have the instrument completed during the association's annual national conference. After further discussion, the NIAAA executive director agreed and selected to have the survey completed during the scheduled Section 8 district business meetings. Each of the Section 8 districts consists of athletic administrators representing their respective state:

- Section 1: CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT
- Section 2: KY, MD, OH, PA, VA, WV
- Section 3: AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN

- Section 4: IL, IA, IN, MI, WI
- Section 5: KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD
- Section 6: AR, CO, NM, OK, TX
- Section 7: AZ, CA, HI, NV, UT
- Section 8: AK, ID, MT, OR, WA, WY

The Section 8 business meetings were suggested to help ensure a national perspective was achieved. This natural distribution resulted in a cluster sample by section. The survey instrument was sent electronically to the NIAAA executive director, which was then distributed to each of the business meeting leaders. Each Section 8 leader was presented a sufficient number of surveys, and in turn each leader distributed hard copies of the instrument to those who attended their respective Section 8 business meeting. All completed surveys were labeled by section and returned to the executive director ($n = 170$). The respondents of the national study were all practicing athletic administrators throughout the United States representing their respective region. Individuals serving as a regional representative during the NIAAA annual conference are typically experienced athletic administrators who have a full grasp of today's contemporary issues in interscholastic sport. Their service as a regional representative is up to 4 years, serving as the gatekeeper of their respective state membership and the national membership. The executive director then mailed all completed surveys by section to Forsyth. We were informed that 447 athletic administrators attended their respective section meeting; thereby, a 38% response rate was achieved.

Validity and Reliability

We put multiple procedures into place to ensure validity and reliability for the quantitative component of the study. The MSHSL served as the panel of experts to establish face validity (Andrew et al., 2011). After we identified 70 potential issues, placed them into 14 categories, and created a three-level 5-point Likert-scale to rate each issue, the survey was sent back to the MSHSL for review. The board members expressed confidence that the survey represented the contemporary issues in interscholastic athletics; thus, no changes were made. Reliability was generated through a pilot study (Andrew et al., 2011), which consisted of attendees at the NDIAAA meeting.

Participants in the pilot study responded that the survey was concise and understandable, so the existing survey was completed with the sample population.

Interviews

Following the survey, four seasoned athletic administrators were contacted for follow-up semistructured interviews. Each interviewee agreed to respond to the participation issues that were deemed “high importance” through the survey. Interviews were conducted via email due to logistical challenges. Responses were developed into codes and themes based on the verbatim responses. Member checks were collected, and each interviewee validated their responses.

Data Analysis and Interviews

The 170 surveys provided 11,900 data points. Through the SPSS statistical software program, the following descriptors were computed: number, range, minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. To determine whether a significant difference existed among the contemporary issues across sections, we conducted a one-tail analysis of variance (ANOVA) set at an alpha level of .05. The analyses indicated several contemporary issues were significant. Therefore, a Games-Howell post hoc test then determined significant differences across geographic sections. The justification behind selecting the Games-Howell post hoc test was twofold: (a) This particular post hoc uses a nonparametric approach in comparing groups and regional sections, and (b) the Games-Howell post hoc test is the most appropriate when variances and sample sizes are not equal (Maxwell & Delaney, 1991). As sample sizes varied across regional sections, the Games-Howell post hoc test was most suitable.

After completion of the data analysis, the data revealed participation issues that athletic administrators determined to be significant. Four semistructured interviews from four interscholastic athletic administrators were then conducted for a deeper understanding of these contemporary ethical issues, which included the executive director of an interscholastic athletic association (personal communication, February 2, 2017), executive secretary of a state high school athletic association (personal communication, January 27, 2017), executive director of a state interscholastic association (per-

sonal communication, August 18, 2016), and president of a regional athletic administration board (personal communication, July 18, 2016). These seasoned interscholastic athletic administrators have a combined experience of more than 100 years of knowledge as practicing athletic administrators.

Results

This section discusses the results of this interscholastic sport research study in regard to definition of terms, expanding variances for level of importance, comparison of pilot and national descriptive results, and sectional differences by issues.

Definition of Terms

The contemporary ethical issues were presented and properly defined by the MSHSL executive board members specific for this investigation. The Appendix reviews the contemporary ethical issues that are pertinent today, as well as in the next 5 years.

Expanding Variances for Level of Importance

Athletic administrators rated all ethical issues according to level of importance (5 = *very important*, 1 = *of least importance*). Once the data were calculated, we wanted to interpret athletic administrators' importance level through the lens of additional variances when ranking mean scores. Therefore, Table 1 shares the expanded variances regarding athletic administrators' level of importance on participation issues.

Pilot Study and National Results

The NDIAAA served as the pilot study to test the level of importance for each of the 14 ethical issues. The NIAAA served as the national sample. Table 2 shares the descriptive comparison of both the pilot test results and the national sample results. In the pilot study, the three most important participation issues were (1) sportsmanship, (2) behavioral issues, and (3) health concerns. The national sample ranked (1) sportsmanship, (2) behavioral issues, and (3) two issues, emphasis on winning and outside sport organizations, in terms of importance.

Appendix

Definition of Terms

Ethical Issues

1. **Behavioral Issues:** Inappropriate conduct of student athletes.
2. **Competing Club Sports:** Nonschool sports that cause student athletes to not participate on their school team to participate in club sports.
3. **Competitive Balance:** School sports programs that compete equally with other school sports programs. Contests are not one-sided.
4. **Emphasis on Winning:** Attitude of placing winning above all else.
5. **Health Concerns:** Placing the health and safety of the student athlete above all else.
6. **Outside Sport Organizations:** Lack of cooperation of school programs and programs outside the school that provide opportunities for sports participation.
7. **Nontraditional Sports:** Nontraditional sports programs that provide alternative participation opportunities for students who do not have the desire or skill to participate in traditional school sport programs.
8. **Participation for All:** A goal not possible in the world of today because of the diverse culture and the multitude of opportunities available to students.
9. **Pay-to-Play Organizations:** Requiring student athletes to pay a fee to participate in a sports program.
10. **Promises by Camp Organizers:** Showcase events operated by nonschool entities in which athletes come together to compete and demonstrate skills.
11. **Scholarship Myth:** High percentages of high school student athletes are going to be able to obtain college scholarships.
12. **Sportsmanship:** The act of winning with dignity and losing with grace. Respectful treatment of participants, officials, and spectators.
13. **Too Much Structure (e.g., less play):** More emphasis on the team (we) concept rather than the student athletes allowed freedom to do as they please (I).
14. **Win at All Costs:** Doing whatever is necessary to win even if it means violating the rules and disrespecting the opponent.

Table 1*Athletic Administrators' Level of Importance on Ethical Issues*

Survey rating scale	Expanded rating lens
5 = <i>extremely important</i>	5.0–4.5 = <i>extremely high importance</i>
4 = <i>very important</i>	4.4–4.0 = <i>very high importance</i> 3.9–3.5 = <i>high importance</i>
3 = <i>important</i>	3.4–3.0 = <i>important</i>
2 = <i>somewhat important</i>	2.9–2.5 = <i>somewhat important</i> 2.4–2.0 = <i>low importance</i>
1 = <i>very little importance</i>	1.9–1.5 = <i>very low importance</i> 1.4–1.0 = <i>extremely low importance</i>

Table 2*Ethical Issues for National and Pilot Samples*

Issue	National sample		Pilot sample	
	X	SD	X	SD
Behavioral issues	3.79 ²	.905	3.66 ²	.919
Competing club sports	3.70	1.13	3.00	1.29
Competitive balance	3.50	.973	3.23	.899
Emphasis on winning	3.71 ³	.890	3.02	.990
Health concerns	3.64	1.09	3.51 ³	1.01
Nontraditional sports	3.22	.989	2.76	.971
Outside sport organizations	3.71 ³	1.07	3.00	1.09
Participation for all	3.67	.952	3.35	.988
Pay-to-play organizations	3.33	1.10	2.80	1.16
Promises by camp organizers	3.28	1.07	2.54	1.04
Scholarship myth	3.45	1.00	2.87	.981
Sportsmanship	4.26 ¹	.836	4.26 ¹	.763
Too much structure	3.14	.923	2.60	.903
Win at all costs	3.70	.964	2.91	1.03

¹ Rated most important. ² Rated second most important. ³ Rated third most important.

The descriptive results from the pilot study conducted with the NDIAAA indicated sportsmanship, behavioral issues, and health concerns as the three highest rated issues, very high importance to high importance. Results from the national sample revealed sportsmanship, behavioral issues, emphasis on winning, and outside sport organizations as the most important issues, very high importance to high importance.

Sectional Differences

The NIAAA executive director's suggestion to have surveys completed during the Section 8 business meetings, presented us the opportunity to review data results across sections (e.g., regions of the country). The one-tail ANOVA revealed significance for four ethical issues: behavioral issues, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, and winning at all costs (see Table 3).

While importance levels differed between the regions for competing club sports, competitive balance, emphasis on winning, health concerns, nontraditional sports, outside sport organizations, participation for all, pay-to-play organizations, sportsmanship, and too much structure, the differences were not significant ($p < .05$). However, sectional differences were significant for behavioral issues, $F(7, 156) = 2.814, p = .009$; promises by camp organizers, $F(7, 156) = 2.676, p < .012$; scholarship myth, $F(7, 158) = 2.654, p = .013$; and winning at all costs, $F(7, 149) = 2.185, p = .039$.

Once computed, the Games-Howell post hoc test indicated significance across sections for behavioral issues, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, and winning at all costs. Significant differences that occurred across sections (e.g., regions of the country) for these four issues extended beyond the original scope of this investigation. However, we offer recommendations for consideration and further study in the Discussion section.

Table 3*National Sample: Ethical Issues by Section*

Ethical issue	Nat'l	Section							
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Behavioral issues *									
N	164	9	23	17	14	19	20	37	25
X	3.79	4.33	3.83	3.65	4.00	3.26	4.30	3.70	3.64
SD	.905	.707	.834	.606	.784	.872	.864	.812	1.19
Competing club sports									
N	163	9	24	16	14	20	19	36	25
X	3.70	3.89	3.54	3.50	3.93	3.75	3.63	3.75	3.72
SD	1.13	1.05	1.10	1.21	1.14	1.12	1.26	.967	1.34
Competitive balance									
N	165	9	24	16	14	20	20	37	25
X	3.50	3.11	3.63	3.38	3.57	3.05	3.80	3.68	3.36
SD	.973	.601	1.13	.806	1.09	.605	1.20	.973	.907
Emphasis on winning									
N	161	9	23	16	13	19	20	37	24
X	3.71	4.22	3.74	3.44	3.77	3.47	4.15	3.57	3.71
SD	.890	.972	.864	.814	.599	.964	.933	.867	.908
Health concerns									
N	159	9	23	17	12	18	18	37	25
X	3.64	4.22	3.70	3.94	3.92	3.33	4.11	3.41	3.28
SD	1.09	.833	1.10	.966	1.08	.970	1.13	1.09	1.14
Nontraditional sports									
N	162	9	22	16	14	20	19	37	25
X	3.22	3.78	3.32	2.94	3.14	3.35	3.21	3.35	2.84
SD	.989	.833	.894	.929	.949	.988	1.36	.823	1.03
Outside sport organizations									
N	161	9	22	16	14	20	18	37	25
X	3.71	3.56	3.86	3.88	3.93	3.80	3.56	3.51	3.72
SD	1.07	.882	.941	1.02	1.07	1.00	1.42	1.02	1.17

Table 3 (cont.)

Ethical issue	Nat'l	Section							
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Participation for all									
<i>N</i>	165	9	24	17	14	20	20	37	24
<i>X</i>	3.67	3.67	3.75	3.41	3.79	3.65	3.95	3.68	3.50
<i>SD</i>	.952	.500	1.07	.939	.892	.933	1.15	.884	.977
Pay-to-play organizations									
<i>N</i>	156	9	22	16	14	19	18	36	22
<i>X</i>	3.33	3.00	3.82	3.44	3.21	3.11	3.22	3.19	3.45
<i>SD</i>	1.10	1.00	.907	1.15	1.19	1.05	1.40	.951	1.18
Promises by camp organizers *									
<i>N</i>	164	8	24	15	14	21	22	37	23
<i>X</i>	3.28	2.63	3.79	3.53	3.71	3.00	2.95	3.38	3.00
<i>SD</i>	1.07	1.19	1.02	.990	.914	1.09	1.09	.893	1.19
Scholarship myth *									
<i>N</i>	166	8	24	17	14	21	22	37	23
<i>X</i>	3.45	2.88	4.04	3.65	3.71	3.24	3.27	3.43	3.10
<i>SD</i>	1.00	1.46	.806	1.06	.825	.995	.883	.959	.996
Sportsmanship									
<i>N</i>	163	9	23	17	13	19	20	37	25
<i>X</i>	4.26	4.44	4.22	4.12	3.85	4.16	4.50	4.22	4.48
<i>SD</i>	.836	.726	.850	.857	.689	.958	.761	.821	.872
Too much structure									
<i>N</i>	157	9	23	16	14	19	16	37	23
<i>X</i>	3.14	3.44	3.48	2.94	3.14	3.26	3.13	3.11	2.78
<i>SD</i>	.923	1.01	1.04	.680	.770	.991	1.20	.809	.850
Win at all costs *									
<i>N</i>	157	9	23	16	13	19	17	36	24
<i>X</i>	3.70	4.22	3.78	3.56	3.85	3.37	4.29	3.61	3.42
<i>SD</i>	.964	.972	.951	.892	.801	1.01	.849	.903	1.0

* Sectional significant difference ($p < .05$).

Discussion

The first two propositions have been addressed. First, ethical issues have been identified that are pertinent to interscholastic sport today, as well as in the next 5 years (Appendix). Second, athletic administrators rated the importance of those ethical issues within the day-to-day operation of their athletic programs (Table 2). The third proposition will now be addressed: What are the potential implications of those pertinent ethical issues to practicing athletic administrators?

To complete this mixed-methods nonexperimental descriptive study, semistructured interviews were conducted for insight on the potential implications of the contemporary participation issues. Quantitative data alone do not provide the breadth and depth needed for understanding why these issues are important to athletic administrators. Therefore, in an attempt to connect the literature review and the findings of this investigation, we relied on Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) suggestion that interviews have the ability to bring insight that analysis of quantitative data alone do not provide.

Ethical Issues

The findings of this study were in agreement with the literature, in that the prime concern of athletic administrators regarding ethical issues are behavioral issues, competing club sports, competitive balance, emphasis on winning, health concerns, nontraditional sports, outside sport organizations, participation for all, pay-to-play organizations, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, sportsmanship, too much structure, and win at all costs. All were rated very high importance, high importance, and important. Four seasoned athletic administrators were interviewed for this investigation. They presented specific commentary reflecting (a) scholarships, (b) sportsmanship, (c) participation for all, (d) club sports, (e) professional promises, and (f) professional development.

Scholarships

Regarding athletic scholarships, an executive director of an interscholastic athletic association said,

While many ethical issues exist, the pursuit of college athletic scholarships is an out-of-control expectation in our society

today. While the interscholastic athletic administrator supports, assists, and applauds the efforts of potential college athletes, the vast majority of our efforts generate opportunities, equity, safety, support, and recognition for school athletes.

An executive secretary for a state association said,

This is a factor with a small group of parents who are looking at their child with tunnel vision. Not every child is going to turn pro or get an athletic scholarship to college. Parents need to love and nurture their children, while not living their former athletic lives through their children.

A residing president of a regional athletic association said,

Scholarships—we must continue to educate parents and athletes about the realities of earning a college scholarship. The percentage of athletes that receive scholarships in relation to the number of participants at the high school level is something that must be publicized to our public.

An assistant executive director of a state association said,

Athletic administrators can best serve these students by providing information about the NCAA recruitment process and data related to their odds of earning a college scholarship. The NCAA Eligibility Center has worked in conjunction with the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association to assist working athletic directors with this challenge. As has been evidenced by recent court rulings, helping student-athletes and their families receive a realistic picture of where their future in athletics lies beyond high school has become part of the job description.

Sportsmanship

Regarding sportsmanship, an executive director of an interscholastic athletic association said,

Research does show that participation in interscholastic athletics teaches qualities that we would consider part of a good citizen. The lists of these individual benefits include work ethic, respect, self-discipline, commitment, industriousness, integrity, and cooperativeness. To help in the focus on this area the NIAAA, NFHS, and many, if not all, state activity/athletic associations have made citizenship a priority. Through promotional programs, public service announcements, school recognition programs, and advertising, efforts continue to set the example and point the way to proper behavior.

An executive secretary for a state association said, “Sportsmanship is a concern. What we are seeing in high school is really modeled after the professional and college sports. Until they reform, it is going to trickle down to the high schools.” A residing president of a regional athletic association said,

Sportsmanship—overall, I would say that sportsmanship has improved significantly in the past 25 years as schools have made it a greater priority. I think the fact that character education and respect have been emphasized in our schools has improved sportsmanship at all levels.

An assistant executive director of a state association said,

Many state associations and conferences sponsor sportsmanship awards at the conclusion of the competitive season, and these honors have become highly sought. Athletic administrators have placed additional emphasis on this initiative by working with captains’ councils and student leaders to promote the ideal of good sportsmanship on the playing fields and in the bleachers. Inappropriate cheers or chants can occur at any time during a game, and school administrators oftentimes find themselves reacting to these phenomena after the fact. The importance about education on expectations for behavior at school-sponsored activities—for players, coaches, student spectators, and adults—cannot be understated.

Participation for All

Regarding participation for all in interscholastic sport, an executive director of an interscholastic athletic association said,

While we have more students participating in interscholastic athletic programs today (7.8 million), there remain those diverse student groups that are not participating in as large a number. This may be in the form of some athletes choosing club participation over representing their school team, sitting out due to the financial cost of participation, or being unable to conform to rules due to cultural circumstances.

Club Sports

An executive secretary for a state association said this regarding school versus club sports:

It is a smaller concern here than in most of the country. Minnesota has strong school programs. Any student who leaves for private clubs, opens a spot for others to start or be on the team. One may not win at a high level, but the door has been opened for others to play and participate.

Professional Promises

With respect to professional promises, a residing president of a regional athletic association said, "I also believe that we need to be very up-front with parents and athletes about the economics of 'showcases' and other events put on by groups who stand to benefit financially from hosting these events."

Professional Development

An assistant executive director of a state association said this about professional development regarding health concerns of student-athletes:

The nationwide interest in concussions and the NFHS's efforts to promote professional development on a wide variety of other sports medicine topics, such as preventing heat illness and identifying sudden cardiac arrest, are reminders that the safety and well-being of student-athletes is the

primary responsibility of the adults managing the program. Communication with parents, health care providers, and others who have a stake in the safety of the student-athlete is critical.

Summary

In sum, issues rated very high importance to high importance were behavioral issues, competing club sports, competitive balance, emphasis on winning, health concerns, outside sport organizations, participation for all, sportsmanship, and win at all costs. As observed in the qualitative component of the study, athletic administrators perceive these issues to be connected.

Programmatic Recommendations

Now that all three propositions have been answered, one final question remains: Where do we go from here? This section provides suggestions on how interscholastic stakeholders can evaluate programmatic goals based on findings of this study. Possible directions include the NIAAA leadership training program, new course developments, state associations, and collaboration between NIAAA regional sections.

NIAAA Leadership Training Program

The leadership training program, also known as the certification program, is designed to better prepare future, as well as current, athletic administrators to tackle the training and preparation needed when engaging the complexity of this challenging yet rewarding profession (Forsyth, 2015). As of 2019, there are five certification levels: (a) registered athletic administrator, (b) registered middle school athletic administrator, (c) provisional certified athletic administrator, (d) certified athletic administrator, and (e) certified master athletic administrator. The primary goal of the leadership training program is a self-improving program to better serve the administrator's school, district, community, and the profession (NIAAA, 2019).

The leadership training curriculum consists of 47 courses with a focus on foundational, operation management, and leadership concepts. Foundational courses cover legal issues, philosophy of interscholastic sports, shareholders' professional development, and

budgeting and finance strategies. Operation management courses cover field and equipment management, contest management, management, marketing, and technology. Leadership courses cover personnel issues, assessment issues, and other administrative issues (NIAAA, 2019).

Ethical issues rated in this investigation are considered as either foundational, operation management, or leadership concepts within the leadership training curriculum. Therefore, it is within the leadership training curriculum that we believe this research investigation can have a direct impact.

New Course Developments

The leadership training curriculum consists of two courses: LTC 710-A and LTC 710-B titled “Athletic Administration: Current Issues in American Sports.” We would like to propose three possible directions. First, address the issues discussed in this investigation on a rotating basis. In other words, during odd number years LTC 710-A would include issues currently being offered and on even number years include issues rated in this investigation. The same for LTC-B, that is, rotating issues on odd versus even number years. During odd number years, include issues currently being offered; during even number years, include issues rated in this investigation. This rotation of courses would reach all members throughout the association.

Second, results from this study indicate that it is worthy of considering development of an additional course titled “Athletic Administration: Current Issues in American Sports,” however, numbered LTC 710-C. The LTC 710-C course description would include the 14 ethical issues identified in this investigation. Once again, we believe this research investigation can have a direct impact.

Third, although ethical issues are briefly mentioned in several leadership courses, such as pay-to-play and sportsmanship, no courses address ethical issues specifically. Given the number of issues identified in this investigation, perhaps this study can serve as an anchor in highlighting the importance of ethical issues and the need to address these concerns in a stand-alone new leadership course.

State Associations

The NDIAAA served as the pilot for this investigation. Although this investigation also includes findings from a national sample,

other state associations could follow in replicating NDIAAA's lead. The national findings could serve as a benchmark; however, just as the NDIAAA now has a comparison study upon which to weigh ethical issues, the other state associations could also have their own comparison study upon which to weigh ethical issues among their own state membership.

Under this investigation, the ethical issues of behavioral issues, health concerns, and sportsmanship for the national sample were rated relatively the same as those in the pilot sample, very high importance to high importance. Beyond these issues, the remaining 11 issues for the pilot study were rated important to somewhat important. Therefore, it is conceivable that other state associations could rate participation issues relatively the same, as well as differently. We believe such comparison studies would allow individual state associations a data set upon which to derive future directions for their respective memberships.

NIAAA Regional Sections

The national sample allowed the data to be evaluated across regional sections (Table 3). Four issues were found to be significant across regional sections: behavioral issues, promises by camp organizers, scholarship myth, and win at all costs. Although reasons why these particular issues were found to be significant go beyond the scope of our pursuit; however, these findings could be pursued more closely in future research. What decisions and practices are being made regarding issues found to be significant? A discussion among the NIAAA section leaders could help explain such findings. The same can be said regarding issues that were not found to be significant across regional sections.

Limitations

Although this study can be considered unique as it is the first of its kind to gauge athletic administrators' perceptions of relevant issues in high school sport, there are a few limitations to the study. Both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study were cross-sectional in nature. Therefore, findings do not offer the ability to track longitudinal analysis of these issues. Also, the NIAAA national conference typically hosts approximately 1,200 athletic administrators/year from around the country. With over 24,000 high

schools across the country, not all athletic administrators are able to attend this national conference. Many athletic administrators who are representatives of smaller high schools having less resources for professional development might not have attended. It is also conceivable that athletic administrators from larger high schools might not have attended this national conference due to personal reasons. Therefore, athletic administrators representing their respective sections might have been unable to attend this annual conference. Thereby, only those athletic administrators who were present during their respective section business meeting would have completed the survey questionnaire. It is also possible that some athletic administrators that were present may have elected not to participate. Nonetheless, we are very pleased to have received the number of completed surveys under this investigation.

Recommendations for Further Research

We are aware this investigation did not identify an exhaustive list of pertinent ethical issues within interscholastic sports. A follow-up study that identifies other ethical issues sought to be pertinent in the interscholastic sports arena is warranted. As we alluded to earlier, determining why sectional differences exist among administration issues goes beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, additional studies that seek to better understand the sectional differences related to ethical issues are warranted. One possible approach could be case studies that consist of states belonging to the regions where significant differences might exist. Finally, interviews can serve to add valuable context to the issues that data analysis alone does not provide. Therefore, interviews among other experienced athletic administrators' local, district, state, and national levels to confirm the findings of this study, as well as additional issues that are pertinent in interscholastic sports, are encouraged.

Conclusion

This investigation identified ethical issues that are pertinent within interscholastic sports today, as well as in the next 5 years. Given the lack of research in this area of study, this investigation is warranted regarding the enormous size of interscholastic sports. We hope others will continue this line of research that helps benefit and educate all shareholders within this exciting arena: athletic

administrators, superintendents, principals, coaches, parents, and student-athletes. We would like to point out that educating all shareholders should be a priority of all athletic administrators as overseers of their respective interscholastic athletic programs.

As expressed through the literature and this study, interscholastic athletics are impacted by various issues related to ethics. For the national sample, pertinent issues that emerged as very high to high importance were (a) behavioral issues, (b) competing club sports, (c) competitive balance, (d) emphasis on winning, (e) health concerns, (f) outside sport organizations, (g) participation for all, (h) sportsmanship, and (i) win at all costs. Based on these results, it is incumbent upon administrators to identify solutions to these pressing issues.

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