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[Addressing the Questionable Va...](#)

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The Sandusky/Penn State protection of a pedophile and the Rice/Rutgers coach abuse of athletes cases appear to be different in kind. However, a closer examination should reveal that the American sport culture not only accepts but often celebrates values and behaviors that are often predicates to unlawful behavior.

Within this sport culture, we embrace the Vince Lombardi image of heroic coach demanding and getting the best from his players through yelling, quasi-angry instructions or demands for toughness. Within this sport culture, playing with pain, going back into the game when injured, sacrificing one's body for the team is admired and applauded. Within this sport culture, loyalty to the team requires solving problems within the team and keeping information about those problems secret from those outside the team.

We readily accept a double standard for teachers compared to coaches in the educational environment. Behavior that would be bazaar and totally unacceptable in the math or English classroom is not only tolerated but applauded on the playing field. Would we ever accept physical punishment in the

classroom: “Run “suicides” until you puke” or “Give me 100 push-ups”? Intellectually we understand that conditioning activities, taxing the human body, requires measured, gradually increasing stressors delivered in strict adherence to mechanical and physiological principles with safety a primary consideration. Yet, we don't question clearly unreasonable physical demands intended to be punishment.

Similarly, would we ever accept yelling or taunting in the classroom: “Don't be a pussy”, “Speak up and don't talk like a sissy” or “You are stupid!”? While there is a place for raising one's voice in praise or urging increased effort, there is no place for disrespect or assault. Yet, without even thinking, too many parents, when faced with a child complaining about such treatment by the coach, respond with two clear messages, although not necessarily with these words, “Do whatever your coach says and always respect your coach” and “Stop whining and be tough.” One could arguably ask whether the Rutgers basketball coach's actions would have ever been questioned if gay slurs and swear words were not a part of the physically abusive behavior. The sheer weight of these two predicates to unlawful behavior (physical assault and hate crimes) made the coach's misconduct more clear.

Keeping team problems private and resolved within the team, never to be revealed outside the locker room is an integral part of our sport culture. This secrecy is considered noble. In fact, all of these unacceptable behaviors – physical punishment, verbal and emotional abuse, bullying, hazing, degrading team rituals, pulling or hitting a player – are quasi-glorified by the “coach is God” and “building tough and resilient competitors” sport culture.

Why aren't more people questioning those behaviors that have obviously gone “off the reservation”? These extremes have been around for a long time. Several reasons deserve consideration. Who is writing about and glorifying these behaviors? Is there an inherent conflict of interest or at least lack of objectivity when the 90% male media is paying exorbitant rights fees and writing about their heroes in the sports they love best, especially when media access might be withdrawn if heroes are criticized? Does society need heroes so badly and are there so few with widespread visibility that we put on our blinders when it comes to sport? Are our professional sport heroes part of the problem when they use their access to the media to advance questionable sport culture values such as when Derek Jeter espouses the need to play with pain. Is the hero educating future generations to accept these values?

Has commercialized sport and the need for educational sport to make money enabled the Penn State conspiracy not to reveal Sandusky's behavior for fear the Paterno or Penn State football reputation would be sullied and become less profitable? Was Rutgers' retention of a successful coach as key to profitability at the root of not taking a stronger initial personnel action? Have we let the rules of sport get too permissive with regard to allowing brutality or increasing risk of injury (concussion, ultimate fighting, fights in ice hockey, etc.) to make sport more exciting and entertaining and therefore capable of making more money? In looking at the 2013 NCAA Men's Final Four's lax officiating and commentator glorification of the game as the ultimate in “street basketball”, is brute force and physical contact now becoming more important than the unique skills of each sport in determining the outcome of the game? The answers to these questions are revealing about cause and advancing solutions.

Who are the guardians of educational sport in the USA? Are state high school athletics associations, the NCAA, the NJCAA and other school/college governance organizations exhibiting control of rules to maximize player safety? Are they requiring strong policies regarding training and ethical conduct of coaches? Are they exhibiting sufficient control of officiating training programs to maximize player safety

and ensure that the skills of the game determine who wins? There is a need for a stronger statement of educational sport values and guiding principles that emphasize a clear separation from questionable practices embraced by a more permissive professional sports and entertainment environment.

Now appears to be the time for educational and open amateur sports governance associations to gather together to develop a clear blueprint for the ethical conduct of sport – not flowery rhetoric but clear statements about misconduct, secrecy, rough play and similar occurrences that destroy skill as the primary determinant of contest outcome and endangers the welfare of participants. Guidelines need to be clearly stated because only then can they be encompassed within policy statements and be enforced. The beauty and noble nature of the rightly played sport contest needs to be restored and we are all responsible for making this happen.

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