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Q: Should athletes be required to discuss issues with their coach before filing a complaint with the athletic department?

A: Generally, yes – with several exceptions. The athletic administrator must directly address the athletic program culture with both coaches and athletes at the beginning of each academic year in order to better offset the tremendous imbalance of power between coaches and student-athletes. There should be a clearly stated policy and expectation that athletes have the right to ask their coaches any question and the coach, as a teacher first and foremost, has an obligation to adequately respond to such questions. Included in this policy statement should be the requirement that such questions and conversations between athletes and coaches always be respectful in tone and occur in a proper environment – a scheduled meeting between the coach and athlete. In addition, the athletic administrator should clearly state that an exception to the "talk to your coach first to ask questions and resolve issues" requirement is any instance of serious misconduct or violation of the institution's sexual harassment policy. These are instances of a hostile educational environment that no student should be expected to resolve. Also key is the athletic administrator directly acknowledging the huge power differential between the coach and athlete and assuring athletes that there will be no tolerance of disrespectful coaching pedagogy or retaliation.

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