

ELEVENTH  
EDITION



# COACHING

A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

MICHAEL D. SABOCK AND RALPH J. SABOCK



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Michael D. Sabock & Ralph J. Sabock

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I would like to dedicate the eleventh edition of this book to my wife, Sandy,  
and my two sons Dan and Kevin.  
Without Sandy being the head coach of our family during my coaching career,  
Dan and Kevin wouldn't be the men they are today.  
As Dan and Kevin continue in their young coaching careers,  
may the relationships they had with their grandparents and parents  
continue to have a lasting positive affect on them as men and coaches,  
and someday as husbands and fathers.  
And lastly, a special thank you for my mom and dad for all you did for me.





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## PREFACE

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This book is for you and your contemporaries who are preparing for or have just begun a coaching career. The title reflects its primary thrust. It is a book dealing with the coaching profession rather than a cookbook approach on how to coach. There is a vast difference between the two. No one can tell you the right way to coach, as each of us is unique, and so is the situation in which we find ourselves. The person who knows all the answers to the right way and only way to coach has yet to be born.

Experience has shown that few professionally prepared coaches get into difficulty because of a lack of knowledge regarding the skills of a sport. Rather, they get into trouble because of mistakes resulting from a lack of understanding of what coaching is all about. Therefore, much of what follows is an attempt to point out what coaching will demand of you physically, emotionally, and mentally. The book also explores a number of potential problem areas, along with some suggestions for dealing with them and, most important, preventing them. Finally, the book outlines guidelines and principles that should be helpful to you in organizing a program that will give youngsters under your tutelage the greatest opportunity for success in athletics.

It makes no difference what sport you coach or intend to coach, and there is little difference as to the level—the material in this book will be applicable. Naturally, the relevance and importance of specific material will be affected by your own experience and the situation in which you find yourself. There are also some generalizations throughout; therefore, some flexibility in your thinking will be necessary in applying the information that follows.

Be cautious about disregarding some of the information as being irrelevant or unworthy unless you have already experienced life in the coaching profession. There is, after all, a huge gap between the classroom and real life, and until you've experienced both, you'll want to avoid making snap judgments about the material in this or any book on coaching.

Coaching is fun, exciting, sometimes difficult, always time-consuming, and never dull. It is the epitome of a “people” profession. That is to say, your “product” is human beings, taught by you, using the sometimes

If I can supply you with a thought, you may remember it or you may not. But if I can make you think a thought for yourself, I have indeed added to your stature.

—Elbert Hubbard

highly emotional experience of athletic participation as a tool. This feature is what will set you apart from all other professional men and women. No one will ever be able to set a price tag on the value of the work you do in preparing youngsters to become productive citizens. Therefore, do not search this book trying to find specific coaching techniques for hitting a ball or “pumping iron.” You will not find any. You will find a realistic description of the coaching profession—which is what sets this book apart from all others.

The information that follows is a result of years of experience, input from other coaches, and reactions from my students over a long period of time. It is through this book and young men and women like you that we hope to make a worthwhile contribution to the coaching profession.

We wish you the best in life and hope you become one of the most successful coaches ever.

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—Mike Sabock





# 1

## COACHES, ATHLETES, AND ETHICS

Every book dealing with coaching should begin with a chapter on ethics, because nothing else will matter if you, as a coach, do not have a positive set of ethical values. All your knowledge of a sport, your teaching ability, and your goals and ambitions will eventually turn to ashes and your obligation to the youngsters you coach will have been violated if you fail to demonstrate personal and professional integrity of the highest order.

I do not believe anyone can be a dishonest, unethical person and still be a good coach. To deliberately break rules, to cheat, to be unethical is to violate a basic trust that is inherent in fulfilling the role of coach. Indeed, the more any individual breaks trust the more it becomes part of that person's being, so that when faced with moral dilemmas, his or her first impulse will be to cheat.

Unfortunately, a lack of ethical and moral behavior exists in all facets of our society, more so than ever it seems. As a result, some educators and parents are now insisting that values be taught in our schools again, simply because desirable attitudes such as scruples, ethics, honesty, and integrity have been ignored for too long. Some believe we are now in the throes of a moral cesspool. Athletic coaches are in an excellent position to influence this situation in a positive way, simply because they are the foundation, the rock, on which athletic teams are built.

Despite the fact that some of the greatest problems in the history of sport have been and will continue to be caused by rules violations, the topic of ethics is regularly given slight attention or completely ignored in many textbooks, classrooms, coaching workshops, and clinics.

Obviously, ethical behavior in athletics has been a concern of educators for many years; it is not some recent discovery or new problem area. Human nature and society being what they are, it would appear that the issue of ethical behavior in competition and coaching will continue to be of great concern as long as athletic programs exist.

The best chance you have of making a big success in this world is to decide from square one that you are going to do it ethically.

—Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve, 1987–2006

Integrity has no need for rules.

An absorbing interest of the public and students has created an atmosphere not always purest. . . . There has been evident improvement in the rules; what is needed most is to improve in the ethical standards of all persons interested in athletics. Conformity to athletic rules is too much of a technicality and not enough of a principle—athletics, like every other form of amusement or business, must eventually rest on sound ethics. It is unfortunate in the extreme that the public mind is so eager for amusement that it becomes indifferent to the ethical conditions surrounding the game—it is a manifest waste of energy to spend time in denouncing athletics; what is needed is efficient leadership by men to whom principle is dearer than anything else. . . . We shall never reform athletics simply by rules, we shall reform it only when we have inspired young men to cling to high ideals and to be governed by sound ethics.

—William Oxley Thompson, *President of Ohio State University, 1899–1905*

Some believe that ethics, fair play, and honesty are suffering more abuse in athletics today than at any time in our history. The literature and news media regularly report recruiting violations, altered transcripts, cheating, questionable coaching tactics, and abuse of officials at all levels of sport.

Throughout the world of athletics, sportsmanship, ethics, and honesty have become synonymous. Defining these terms is as easy as looking in a dictionary, but getting everyone to agree on the true meaning of such words as *standards*, *principles*, *moral duty*, *good*, *bad*, *right*, and *wrong* is quite another matter, and this ambiguity is where much of the problem lies. It is virtually impossible for any group of people with varying backgrounds to agree about the meaning of these terms.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

In actuality there are only three kinds of ethical standards: high, low, or none at all. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* offers definitions of *ethic* and *ethical* that seem appropriate for each of us in the coaching profession:

The discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.

A set of moral principles or values.

Principles of conduct governing an individual or group.

Conforming to accepted professional standards of conduct.

While all of these definitions are appropriate, the one that is of prime importance to coaches is the last one. Of course, it is also the one that causes the most friction between coaches, because of the unclear meaning

Those who ignore history are bound to repeat it.

of “accepted professional standards of conduct.” You would be hard pressed to find a unanimous interpretation of

this phrase among coaches. Nevertheless, coaches should still be able to agree on some basic expectations of themselves and others. For example, coaches are expected to teach their teams to play by the rules, to teach fair play, to teach good sportsmanship, and to observe rules and their intent.

Within this context lies another troubling factor: the vast differences in interpretation among coaches as to where they draw the line between

clever strategy and unethical conduct. This difference probably causes more conflict and antagonism between coaches than any other factor, because what one coach believes to be a great strategy might be perceived as unethical behavior by another.

### **Sportsmanship versus Gamesmanship**

Ethical behavior on the part of a coach involves not only observing the rules of a particular game but also, and more important, behaving according to the true spirit of the game, or according to the unwritten rules that are an integral part of every sport. These rules are concerned with the conduct of a coach or competitor and have been established and observed through the years under the heading of sportsmanship, or fair play.

Violating the spirit of a game is often referred to as gamesmanship—doing something simply to upset or psych out an opponent in order to win. For example, in golf it is not against the written rules to make a noise or “accidentally” develop a coughing fit while an opponent is putting. However, everyone is expected to be quiet at this time because it is in the spirit of the game to do so. Similarly, a track athlete shouldn’t play “silly games” at the starting line in an effort to upset other runners. According to the spirit of the game, athletes should simply line up and run the race to see who is fastest; mind games are not part of a race for true sportsmen.

Taunting an opponent, having an in-your-face attitude, and trash talking have become commonplace at all levels of competition today. The influence of television has been a major factor contributing to this behavior. College football used to be a big factor, but the NCAA rules committee cracked down on celebrations and actions on the field that drew attention to individuals as opposed to team celebrations. The NCAA’s message was that enthusiasm shared with teammates is a huge part of sport. Enthusiasm directed at calling attention to oneself is not in the spirit of the game. Unfortunately, in professional sport, there are minimal rules against taunting your opponent and engaging in individual celebrations. These actions, when seen on television by impressionable young men and women, send the wrong message to any youngster involved in team sport. Consequently, rule makers have adopted rules directed at curtailing or eliminating this kind of unsportsmanlike conduct. The irony is that conduct of this sort could be eliminated overnight if head coaches made it clear to athletes that such behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated—period.

In all game situations, officials are involved to see that the written rules are obeyed. But observing the unwritten rules, as dictated by the



spirit of the game in each particular sport, is governed by each coach's personal philosophy of coaching and standards of ethical behavior. Some coaches take great delight in studying the rule book to see how far they can bend certain rules without breaking them. Even though they often violate the true meaning of the rules, they justify their actions by stating that, according to the book, they have not broken any rules. In their minds, this is good coaching because it involves the strategy of making the rule book work in their favor. They feel they have outsmarted the opposition. Actually they are beating the rules, even though technically they are not. Some believe that such strategy is clever coaching even though it violates the spirit of the game. Others think this behavior isn't fair because, in their opinion, beating the rules has no place in athletic contests. Over time, the most respected coaches in any sport are the coaches who coach and whose players play within the spirit of the game. Good coaches respect opponents who play hard, and they coach hard within the rules.

### Teaching Ethical Conduct

For years coaches have been claiming that sport is a builder of strong character and honesty in those who participate, and this claim remained unchallenged for years. Sports have always had critics, but they were usually people outside the realm of sports competition. Today we are in an era of accountability. Critics demand proof or some evidence that coaches are doing the good things they claim to be doing in athletics. The number of cheating violations taking place in athletic programs across the country makes this evidence increasingly harder to produce.

The measure of a person is not money or possessions; a person's real wealth is character.

Participation in athletics can provide one of the greatest opportunities for youngsters to learn honesty, integrity, dignity, the need to obey rules, and

ethical behavior. However, young people can also learn the opposite of all these values through athletics.

According to a survey of 5,275 high school athletes conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, girls were less likely than boys to cheat or bend the rules to win. Some of the survey's most interesting findings came in the "sportsmanship and gamesmanship" section, where athletes were presented with various scenarios and asked to say if the conduct was proper, improper, or if they were not sure. The following examples show some of the results:

- A football coach whose team is out of timeouts in a big game tells a player to fake an injury to get one.  
37% of the boys said this was proper.  
29% said not sure.  
For girls, 20% said proper, 31% not sure.
- A soccer player fakes a foul in hopes that the opponent's star would get a red card and be booted from the game.

39% of boys said this was proper.

29% said not sure.

For girls, 21% said proper, 31% not sure.

- Players on the bench boo, taunt, and jeer opponents.  
42% of boys said proper.  
27% were not sure.  
For girls, 22% said proper, 29% not sure.
- A basketball coach teaches young players how to illegally hold and push in ways hard to detect by an official.  
43% of boys said proper.  
27% were not sure.  
For girls, 22% said proper, 26% not sure.
- A coach receives an opponent's playbook from an unknown source before a big game and uses it to prepare.  
41% of boys said proper.  
26% were not sure.  
For girls, 25% said proper, 28% not sure.

Looking at these results shows that only about one-third of the male athletes were sure that these examples were wrong.

One of the difficulties coaches encounter in attempting to teach or expect ethical conduct is the fact that people come from varying backgrounds and experiences with differing views as to what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, acceptable or unacceptable behavior. The following true-life example illustrates this point. In a meeting with my football players, I was attempting to get a feel from them on some ethical issues. I gave the example of a young person walking down the street and seeing a \$100 bill fall out of the pocket of a person walking in front of him. I asked my ten players what they would do. Not to my surprise, the room could not come to an agreement on the correct action. I had two players who insisted that the bad luck of one person was simply good luck for another. Where they grew up, they called it "Rules of the game." Other players said without hesitation that they would yell to the person and give the money back. As we argued back and forth, the lines of the argument were drawn on which players grew up in an affluent area and which grew up in the inner city. The main point of the argument settled around the idea of "You never lived where I did, so you don't know how you would have reacted." A happy end to this story occurred when two years after he graduated, one of these young men who believed in "The rules of the game" called me to tell me his story. He was in the grocery store behind a lady who dropped a \$100 bill as she was paying. Without her noticing, he said, he picked it up, thought of me, and gave it back to her! This young man is now the head football coach at the high school from which he graduated. What a positive influence he will be able to have on those young men.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that it does not matter one bit if you are a coach or an athlete, famous or unknown, rich or poor; there is no excuse for cheating, stealing, lying, or deliberately harming another person. These attitudes and actions simply cannot be tolerated in a civilized society and certainly not in an athletic program. This is an area that demands every coach's attention.

Ethical behavior is not inborn. Children must be taught right from wrong, and in athletics it is your sole responsibility as the coach, to teach it. There is an old saying that the actions you see are either taught or allowed. Just observe young children at play: They rarely show sportsmanship or generosity in their games. Children may take advantage of an opponent, make up rules for their own benefit, and possibly have temper tantrums when they lose. It is only when youngsters begin to mature and to observe adult behavior in athletics that they learn what sportsmanship means. This learning can be of a positive nature or negative nature.

Athletics provides excellent opportunities for youngsters to develop moral values. Athletic competition is loaded with circumstances involving ethical behavior. These instances are real and immediate and demand some action or decision from the participants.

For centuries, education has been concerned with the development of moral and ethical values in students. There is no invention or secret formula known to humankind that can ensure a good and solid society if personal integrity, honesty, and self-discipline are lacking.

Athletics can be a significant factor in developing young people's ethical values. It all depends on you, the coach, and whether you make a conscientious effort to teach youngsters the importance of high ethical

You are not a product of your circumstances, you are a product of your decisions.

standards by word or, more important, by deed. If you can instill these qualities in young people through sport, you can rightfully say that sport does build strength of character for those who have the courage to participate. These lessons will be

remembered long after game scores have been forgotten. It is also this kind of teaching that will enable you to live with the unhappy message the scoreboard sometimes carries, because you know that the outcome of a single game is not the beginning or end of the world. Good character is formed by living under conditions that demand good conduct.

### **Competition and Winning at All Costs**

High school athletes are at a stage where they urgently need to feel important to their peers. They need to have friends and to feel themselves loyal members of a group for which they have real enthusiasm. The craving for excitement and adventure is normal; yet today's world gives a youngster fewer opportunities than ever before to satisfy it. The drama and excitement of competitive sports, the demands for efficiency and excellence, for courage and self-discipline, meet many needs of adolescent boys and girls.

Plato said, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Competition brings out both the best and the worst in people. Competition is part of life, and we face it from the day we are born until we die. The infant vies with brothers and sisters for attention from mother, and the child competes with brothers, sisters, and playmates for access to toys. School-age children compete with each other for grades in school, to make the honor roll, to draw the best picture, or to write the best paper. Young people compete with each other to see who’s the coolest or the best dressed, and they go on to compete for girlfriends or boyfriends. Youngsters learn to compete for first chair in band, for parts in plays, for a place on a team, and for a teacher’s attention. As they grow up, they face competition for a mate and a well-paying job.

Wherever there is life, there is conflict, and life without rivalry, anxieties, and strains simply does not exist. As long as games are played, there will be a winner and a loser, and it is everyone’s lot to play both roles.

Many would have us believe that ethical violations occur in athletics mainly because of coaches’ desire to win. If it weren’t for this single factor, why would anyone bother to stoop to unethical behavior, they ask, because the outcome of a game wouldn’t matter.

To a degree this is true, but a parallel can be drawn with the common mistake people make in saying that “money is the root of all evil.” The real saying is that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Money itself has no moral properties.

And so it is in athletics. Wanting to win is natural. It is only when winning becomes the sole purpose of athletic competition that violating ethical conduct becomes a temptation some cannot resist. Doing what is right in the face of temptation is not easy. It requires not only courage but also the ethical commitment to do what is right no matter the consequences.

The following excerpt, from a letter sent by a former student now coaching on the Division I level, further illustrates this point:

And what a business—so many illegal things go on. . . . I feel I’m in a dilemma at times. I hope to be a head coach someday but the moral and





ethical question is a big one—do I want to cheat to win? . . . I could ask myself that as an assistant—especially with recruiting. I haven’t cheated yet and I don’t want to, but the unspoken rule here is either win or look for another job.

When the outcome of an athletic event is on the line, what will be most important to you, the game or your own integrity? This should not even be a question for you. If it is, you do not belong in the coaching profession—regardless of what other coaches do or what you believe they do. You still have to look in the mirror every morning, and you must remember what kinds of lessons you teach your athletes through example alone. Although you need to talk to athletes about values, your words will be meaningless unless you live them as well.

In too many instances, unethical acts committed in an athletic contest by a coach or player are explained away simply by saying, “I hate to lose; therefore I play (or coach) hard all the time.” There are coaches who have actually made the comment that “Cheaters are champions,” or “If you’re not cheating, you’re not trying.” This is plain rubbish—there is no excuse for unethical conduct.

### **Actions Speak Louder Than Words**

Can ethical behavior be learned through sport? The answer is yes, but the lesson is not automatic, and it cannot be assimilated through osmosis.

Unless you are honest in small matters you won’t be in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities.

—Luke 16:10, *The Living Bible*

Ethics must be taught by the coach. There is no other way. To teach ethics, you must be personally ethical. There are coaches who hold “open gyms” for their athletes with coaches present when it is illegal by their

state association rules. Many of these coaches justify this in their own minds by saying that everyone else is doing it, so we must do it to keep up. These coaches are teaching dishonesty, plain and simple.

There are no degrees of honesty. You cannot be just a little dishonest or a little bit unethical. A person is either honest or dishonest, ethical or unethical. There are no shades of gray. When you give lip service to the rules and then violate them yourself, you are advocating cheating—not by what you say but by what you do. When you say one thing and do another, your students will disregard the words and assume that your actions are truer indications of your beliefs. All the words in your vocabulary will not change this fact.

Coaches have been heard to say that they don’t want to violate any rules but feel they must because their opponents do. Therefore, to give their athletes a fair chance to compete, they have to cheat too. This is not a good reason, nor is it good logic. It is simply an excuse to break the rules. Coaches who actively practice this kind of reasoning do so because (1) they are ambitious and anxious to move up the coaching ranks on the basis of

their team's won-lost record, (2) they are afraid for their jobs, or (3) they are dishonest. Whatever the reason, behavior of this sort is unethical. It is such conduct that makes a mockery out of the claim that sport builds character. Sport by itself can neither build personality traits nor tear them down. It all comes down to you, the coach, and what you teach by your actions. Talk is meaningless when it is contradicted by action. Don't ever forget this. What you teach your team when the game is on the line can be no different than what you teach your team in the calmest moment of your off season.

If something is right but a lot of people don't do it,  
it is still right.

If something is wrong but a lot of people do it,  
it is still wrong.

## ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Many situations in athletic contests demand that coaches or athletes react to or make decisions involving honesty and ethics. You need to recognize these situations because they become important "teachable moments" for you and should not be ignored. Many of these incidents will not be covered in a rule book, but they do challenge fair play or the spirit of the game.

An ethical dilemma is defined here as a situation in which a person is faced with a difficult choice in which no clear-cut answer or action exists. People in athletics are faced with these kinds of circumstances regularly.

To help you clarify some of your values and to learn how others think, consider the following situations. Some have nothing to do with athletics, as you will see, but they do have a lot to do with your own personal code of conduct. No attempt has been made to tell you what course of action is correct; you will have to figure that out for yourself. Don't waste time arguing over whether these situations should have arisen in the first place. They did, so the question is: How would you deal with them?

1. While in the supermarket you notice a well-dressed woman in front of you. As she pulls her hand out of her coat pocket, she drops a \$50 bill on the floor without realizing it. She goes into another aisle, and there is no one in sight as you pick up the money. Will you keep the money or will you call after her to return it? Why?
2. In a girls' softball game, a runner trying to steal second base was called out. The second baseman dropped the ball but



recovered it quickly. However, the umpire did not see this, being blocked out by the runner and the dust. The runner told the umpire that the second baseman dropped the ball. The umpire then asked the second baseman whether she had indeed dropped the ball. This situation raises two questions: Should the umpire have asked the second baseman? Since she did, how should the player respond? Why?

3. One of the good clothing stores in town is having a big sale. You visit the store and purchase a sweater. The sale price is not on the tag, so the clerk has to figure out the price. You pay the bill in cash and leave the store. As you are walking down the street, you begin thinking about the cost of the sweater, and it occurs to you that the clerk actually charged you \$10 less than she should have. The clerk does not know you, and you probably won't be in that store again for six months or more. Anyway, the chances of the error being detected and connected with you are slim to none. Would you return to the store and point out the mistake? Why? What would you do if the same clerk had overcharged you? Why?
4. In tennis, players are responsible to officiate their side of the net. During a crucial match, player A makes an obvious bad call in her favor. How would you as the other player respond? Would you complain to player A, ignore the call, or make a bad call yourself to get even?
5. During the waning seconds of a football game, the team with the ball needed to stop the clock but had no time-outs left. An assistant coach quickly sent in a substitute with instructions to fake an injury. On the next play the boy faked a neck injury, which brought the game to a halt. Medics came on the field and took the boy to the hospital in an ambulance. The boy went through a series of x-ray exams, after which he finally confessed to his frantic parents and the doctor that he had faked the injury. What is your reaction to this behavior on the part of the coach? What do you think the young man learned?
6. The score in a women's field hockey game was 0–0 when a player broke loose down the field and flipped a shot into the lower corner of the net. The officials signaled a goal, whereupon the players on both teams moved to midfield to line up for the face-off. The girl who had scored the goal went up to an official and said, "It wasn't a goal. I hit the ball off the back of my stick." This is illegal in field hockey. The startled official thought for a minute, reversed her decision, declared no goal, and gave the ball out of bounds to the other

team at their end of the field. When questioned after the game, the girl said she knew the official hadn't seen it, but she thought it wasn't right that her team should have the goal counted. If you were the girl's coach, how would you react to the player and the official?

7. You are in your first coaching job in the role of an assistant. The head coach is a veteran in the profession, the situation is great, and you wouldn't mind being head coach there someday. Through midseason the team is struggling; for some reason it just isn't clicking. Naturally, the critics have noticed this, and, as usual, some grumbling is heard around town. One evening several members of the power structure in the community come to see you—unofficially, of course. They tell you that they believe the head coach is no longer effective and they are going to work to remove this person. They say that they would like to see you take over as head coach and ask if you would be interested. How would you react?
8. You are a graduate assistant at a prestigious Division I university. You call a high school coach to tell him that one of the university coaches plans on attending the university's next athletic event to look at a super prospect. The coach tells you that this would be a waste of time because the youngster in question just got hurt in practice and will not play, which is not public knowledge. This team's opponent happens to be coached by a friend of yours who gave you your first coaching job. If your buddy had this information, it would significantly alter his preparation for the game, which in turn would give his team a better chance to win. The question is, do you pass this information on to your friend or do you keep quiet? Why?
9. The final event of the girls' dual track meet was a relay. As the anchor runners from both teams crossed the finish line, the second girl yelled to the starter that the other team had passed the baton out of the exchange zone. If this was true, the winning team would be disqualified and lose the race. Because of an oversight, there had been no inspector at the exchange zone. Consequently, the starter called the third and fourth runners of the winning team together and asked them if their exchange was in the zone or out. If the official was justified in asking the questions, what kind of response should the two girls give?
10. During a junior high championship track meet, a coach was told that one of her very good runners could not compete

because the coach had left her name off the entry form. The girl burst into tears because she was so disappointed. The coach was upset because it was her fault, so she decided to enter the girl in her regular events anyway by using the name and number of one of her teammates who was officially entered in the meet. What lesson do you suppose the girl learned through this? Do you see anything wrong with what the coach chose to do, or was she justified in her action?



11. Many basketball coaches teach their players that when there is a scramble for the ball and it goes out of bounds, a player should get it and prepare to put it in play even if he or she had touched it just before it went out of bounds. The reasoning is that if the official wasn't sure of the call, he might give it to this player. No rule is being broken because the call is the official's decision, and if the official makes a mistake, it is his or her fault—correct? Or are these coaches teaching a tactic that really isn't ethical?
12. At the outset of a high school basketball tournament, one of the coaches decided that her team would have a better chance to advance to the finals if they could play in the losers' bracket (double elimination). So she played her junior varsity team the whole game and kept the varsity team on the bench. Naturally, the team lost and moved into the losers' bracket. The opposing coach was very angry. She charged the other coach with making a travesty of the game and violating coaching ethics. The other coach said she broke no rules and therefore her tactics constituted smart coaching. What is your reaction to this?
13. While you are driving on a bypass around a large city, an armored truck passes you at a high rate of speed. When the truck gets in front of you, the back door flies open, a bag falls out, and suddenly the air is filled with paper money. The truck keeps going, but a lot of cars come to a halt, including yours. People gather up money and drive away. You find yourself with \$15,000 in your hands, with virtually no chance of ever getting caught. That evening an announcement is made on TV requesting that people turn in whatever money they picked up and promising that no questions will be asked. What would you do?

14. You are one point away from winning the conference championship in tennis—a dream about to come true. Your opponent hits what appears to be a winner deep to your baseline with such speed that you cannot return the shot. But there is a legitimate question in your mind about the ball being in bounds or out. You honestly couldn't tell and neither could anyone else. If you call the ball out, the match is over and you are the champion—call it in and the match continues.

It is your call; what will it be, and why? Would your call be influenced by the score or by the fact that no one else would ever know if the ball was in or out?

15. A college quarterback was thirteen yards short of breaking the career passing record of a great former player. However, it was the last game of the season, there were only seventy seconds left in the game, and the other team had the ball. When the ball was snapped to start the next play, the defensive team dropped to the ground and allowed the ball carrier to score, untouched. After the ensuing kickoff, the quarterback completed two quick passes to establish an all-time passing record for college football. At this point, the opposing coach was livid with anger. He branded the action a disgrace to football, a lack of class on the part of the other coach, and a humiliating experience for his team. It was not clear who told the defense to collapse. No rules were broken. Was the spirit of the game violated? Were coaching ethics involved? Why?

#### The world needs men and women

- who cannot be bought;
- whose word is their bond;
- who put character above wealth;
- who are larger than their vocations;
- who do not hesitate to take chances;
- who will not lose their identity in a crowd;
- who will be honest in small things as in great things;
- who will make no compromise with wrong;
- whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires;
- who will not say they do it “because everybody else does it”;
- who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as prosperity;
- who do not believe that shrewdness and cunning are the best qualities for winning;
- who are not ashamed to stand for the truth when it is unpopular;
- who can say “no” with emphasis although the rest of the world says “yes.”

God, make me this kind of person.

—Leonard Wagner, *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville, TN: Paragon Associates, 1976, p. 532)

16. At the end of a busy week you decide to treat yourself and a friend to dinner in a local restaurant. After paying your bill,

you discover the cashier gave you back too much change.  
What will you do?

The preceding examples represent only a few of the vast number of ethical dilemmas that people face on a regular basis. This list could be multiplied many times over by anyone who has coached any kind of athletic team for any period of time.

Is it possible to practice one kind of ethics in athletics and another in one's personal life? If you believe in preparing youngsters for life through participation in athletics, it follows that ethical values have to be consistent whatever the circumstances.

Unless your answers to these dilemmas reflect complete honesty and integrity, you cannot expect your players to exhibit these qualities in similar situations—especially during the excitement of a highly competitive contest. This is one area in sport where the opportunity for character development is particularly great. But this lesson must be taught by you; athletes will not automatically learn from the situation itself—if they do, they might learn that dishonesty can be justified if it will help win a game.

Most people would agree that dishonesty is not a desirable quality. Many people believe that character is “caught” rather than taught and that each experience a boy or girl has at home, at play, or in school shapes that youngster's standard of conduct, good or bad. The coach who assumes that athletes will develop high ethical standards merely by participating in athletics is greatly mistaken. This process is not automatic.

## **PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

Professional ethics can be defined as a coach's conduct in fulfilling the obligations of the position in relation to other people in and out of the school setting. Professional ethics for a coach falls into five distinct areas.

### **Coach to Teacher**

Teachers have reciprocal responsibility to each other. Problems of professional ethics can arise when a student speaks critically of a teacher to the coach, when a student speaks critically of a coach to a teacher, or when a teacher or coach criticizes a fellow teacher in front of a student.

Professionally, such criticism is unacceptable. It can cause a great deal of friction and bad feelings within a faculty. Coaches are more apt to be involved in such situations than almost any other teacher in the school because of the role they fill and the informality of their relationship with many students. You should never be outwardly sympathetic toward any student's criticism of a fellow teacher.

### **Coach to Parent**

Conversations between a parent and a coach should be considered privileged communication. When parents talk with you about some specific

concern they have for their youngster, they usually preface their remarks with, “Don’t tell my child that I talked to you about this, or he will get really upset.” Naturally, parents expect their requests to be honored. Even if they don’t specifically state the desire to keep a conversation in strictest confidence, you should have enough good judgment to know when to keep a conversation to yourself.

Most conversations of this type come about because a youngster isn’t playing in the games or was playing but has now been benched. Naturally, parents would like to know why because of their interest and because their youngster comes home every night feeling discouraged. The youngster normally does not want the parents to go to the coach for fear that the coach will be annoyed and take it out on him or her. Talking to parents is the time for honest reflections on their son’s or daughter’s performance. As a coach, you owe it to your athletes and/or their concerned parents to be totally up front and honest about the athlete’s performance in practice as well as games and what the athlete must do to improve and thus see more playing time. Many times, athletes or parents don’t agree, but they at least know what you are seeing. Many times that is not what they are hearing when their child comes home.

In one case, a parent asked a coach why his son was benched, only to have the boy come home from practice the next day with tears in his eyes and ask his father, “Why did you call the coach?” The coach had told the boy that he definitely would not start the next game simply because the coach had a policy that any time a parent asked him about a son’s playing time, he would not start the boy in the next game under any circumstance. The boy was crushed.



### **Coach to Student**

Students sometimes feel the need to confide in an adult other than a parent. The logical person is often you, the coach. You might be flattered that a student wants to confide in you and ask for advice. But there is danger in agreeing not to tell the parents something, because you might discover that the problem is of such magnitude that the parents ought to be aware of it. In this situation you will have backed yourself into a corner. Unless you can convince the youngster to tell the parents, you must either keep quiet or violate a confidence—both no-win positions.

A safe approach to the opening statement, “Don’t tell my mother or dad what I’m about to tell you,” would be to say, “I can’t promise that. Let’s talk and then decide what is best for you to do under the circumstances.”



### **Coach to Administration**

In far too many cases the obligations of a coach to school administrators are clearly defined, whereas the obligations of administrators to the coach are not. There are three main areas of concern in this regard: honesty, loyalty, and support. The fact that coaches and school administrators deal with the public to a degree greater than most other teachers makes these areas essential to both of them.

The implications for the coach are clear. You must be truthful in all your dealings with an administrator. Under no circumstances should you speak critically of a school administrator to the public. Some coaches feel frustrated because they believe a particular administrator is hampering part or all of the athletic program. In desperation, they criticize this person to people in the community, hoping that these people will exert pressure on the administrator and get things changed.

Such criticism is not only unethical but also potentially dangerous to your professional career. In one or two instances, it might seem to work. But even though you may have won a battle, the administrator will eventually win the war, and it will prove costly to you.

One area in which school superintendents frequently violate ethical behavior is in the procedure for interviewing applicants for a coaching position. Unless the interview was a disaster, most applicants are told that they are fine prospects and will be contacted in just a few days about the position. Each applicant might naturally assume that he or she will be offered the job. Days and possibly weeks will then pass by without a word. Finally, the applicant summons up enough courage to call the superintendent's office, only to learn the job was filled quite some time ago and the school was just too busy to notify the applicant.

This practice could be classified as bait casting. All the legitimate prospects think the job is theirs. They are all kept on the hook until the employing officials find the person they want, whereupon all the rest are simply dropped. The fact that the superintendent promised to be in touch often means nothing; this practice is not unusual.

Another violation in this area of professional ethics occurs when coaching responsibility is taken away from a coach. In many states, since coaching is strictly an extracurricular activity, this assignment can be taken from an individual at any time by the superintendent of schools. There is no obligation to explain why.

More than one coach has settled down at the breakfast table to enjoy a cup of coffee and the morning paper only to read in the sports section that he or she was fired the night before. More than one coach has learned that his or her coaching job is gone by looking at next year's teaching contract and discovering that no coaching assignment is indicated. And more than one coach has been dismissed without any explanation other than, "We think it is time for a change." These are painful but real examples of a lack of professional ethics on the part of some administrators.

### Coach to Coach

This last category of professional ethics includes interactions between coaches within a school as well as between schools. The greatest single factor causing antagonism between coaches in the same school is the conflict that occurs when one coach expects his or her athletes to concentrate only on a specific sport at the expense of all others. This pressure is selfish, puts athletes in a difficult situation, and angers colleagues. Many schools are starting to develop policies to aid two- and three-sport athletes.

Ethics is knowing the difference between knowing what you have a right to do and what is right to do.

—Potter Stewart

The problems arise during the off season and summertime. All coaches seem to want their players with them during the off-season months, which puts pressure on the athletes to choose sports and can be a point of contention between coaches with the school.

Coaches, with the help of the athletic director, should work hard with each other to develop off-season schedules that mesh together well and aid multisport athletes. One sport may have priority in the morning, another in the afternoon, and another in the evening. Some coaches have broken the summer down into two- or three-week periods where certain sports take priority. No system will be foolproof and keep everyone happy, but we must remember that we are in this for the students. Whatever compromises coaches can make to give the multisport athletes a chance to succeed at the highest level in each sport should be a priority.

It is not unusual for conflict to develop between coaches in different schools as well. This occurs primarily because one coach views conduct by an opposing coach as unethical. Nothing will infuriate you more and stay with you longer than your perception of unethical behavior by an opposing coach. When coaches begin to feud, the games often become bitter grudge matches, which complicates the matter further. This kind of behavior on the part of coaches makes a mockery of the claim that they serve as positive role models for youngsters to emulate. Ideally, the winningest coach should also win the trophy for sportsmanship.

The Representative Assembly of the National Education Association adopted a Code of Ethics and Bill of Teacher Rights as a guide for the teaching profession. Since all teachers should be members of a united profession, the basic principles enumerated apply to all persons engaged in the professional aspects of education—elementary, secondary, and collegiate. This code is reprinted here by special permission of the National Education Association.

### RECRUITING ETHICS

An area that can very easily challenge someone's ethical backbone can happen during the recruiting process of a student-athlete. While this problem is usually associated with the higher-profile sports, no coach

can ever know for sure that he or she has done the right thing during the recruiting process.

One of the first areas that may be associated with recruiting and ethics is student grades. With the advent of tougher grade-point needs for students today, this is an area to be wary of. A coach, wanting to have a particular athlete recruited, may take it upon himself to talk to an athlete's teachers to convince them to give the student better grades. Many coaches try to justify this by saying that if the young person does not qualify for a scholarship, he or she will not go to college and will end up on the street. These same coaches would be far better off educating their athletes as freshmen in high school about the grades required if they want to be athletes in college. Coaches can then have mandatory study hall a few nights a week for their athletes. Almost every college has a "study table" for its athletes. Why not high school coaches? This, of course, demands more time of coaches, but it is a far better teaching tool for the students than teaching them to try to get their grades changed. It is never wrong to ask a fellow teacher how one of your athletes is doing in his or her class, but to ask for favors with grades is wrong.

Another area of recruiting ethics can occur when a college coach tries to "buy" your loyalty in hopes that you will entice your athlete to attend his or her school. There have been coaches who have received cash, clothing, travel, or larger gifts from college coaches, all in hopes that the high school coach will push an athlete in that school's direction. Any attempt by a college coach to "buy" you should be reported immediately to the college athletic director and to the NCAA. There is no place in coaching for the acceptance of bribes. This may never happen to you in your coaching career, but it does happen.

The last area I want to discuss about recruiting ethics is a "verbal commitment." A verbal commitment is when a student-athlete has been offered a scholarship to a university and shakes the college coach's hand and says "I am accepting this scholarship and coming to your school." The problem with a verbal commitment is that it is just that—verbal. There is no written contract until the national signing day when all athletes in that sport sign an official document locking the student and the school together. The ethical problem then arises when your student-athlete gives a verbal commitment to a school and then decides, a month or two later, to go to a different school. Technically, the student can change his or her mind because it was just a verbal commitment. Ethically, would such a change be justified? What does a commitment mean these days?

As a coach, it is your responsibility to educate the athlete and his or her parents on how serious a verbal commitment is. If the university changed its mind and took the scholarship away from your athlete after a verbal commitment was made, you and the parents would be livid. You and the parents need to understand that this is a two-way street. All this should be discussed with the family before the commitment is made, and if they

are not 100 percent behind their decision, then advise them to wait longer before making their decision.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Debate this statement: "There are no degrees of honesty."
2. Are there such things as situational ethics? If so, give examples.
3. Many coaches pressure or antagonize officials. What is your opinion of that type of coach? Does this behavior have anything to do with ethics?
4. Some coaches encourage their players to bend rules and attempt to upset their opponents. How do you feel about such tactics?
5. What would you do if your principal suspended a player from the team for causing a disruption during the school day?
6. What are professional ethics?
7. "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." Interpret this statement.
8. Is going on strike violating professional ethics?
9. Is it ever ethical to play not to win? Why?
10. When do strategy and ethics come into conflict?
11. What is meant by observing "the spirit of the game"?
12. Give a personal example of a situation involving honesty and ethics in athletics.
13. Several principles are stated in the Code of Ethics adopted by the NEA as a guide for teachers. Discuss how these relate to a teacher/coach.
14. Why do ethics and honesty pose problems in athletics?
15. Is a player ever justified in telling an official a call was incorrect in that player's favor?
16. Should officials ever ask athletes questions about something that happened during a game and then base their decision on the response? Why?
17. What is the message in the 1904 quote from President Thompson?
18. What is the best way for a coach to teach honesty, sportsmanship, and ethical behavior?

**CODE OF ETHICS**  
**of the Education Profession**  
**ADOPTED BY THE 1975 NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**Preamble**

The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of democratic principles. Essential to these goals is the protection of freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity for all. The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards.

The educator recognizes the magnitude of the responsibility inherent in the teaching process. The desire for the respect and confidence of one's colleagues, of students, of parents, and of the members of the community provides the incentive to attain and maintain the highest possible degree of ethical conduct. The Code of Ethics of the Education Profession indicates the aspiration of all educators and provides standards by which to judge conduct.

The remedies specified by the NEA and/or its affiliates for the violation of any provision of this Code shall be exclusive and no such provision shall be enforceable in any form other than one specifically designated by the NEA or its affiliates.

**Principle I: Commitment to the Student**

The educator strives to help each student realize his or her potential as a worthy and effective member of society. The educator therefore works to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals.

In fulfillment of the obligation to the student, the educator—

1. Shall not unreasonably restrain the student from independent action in the pursuit of learning.
2. Shall not unreasonably deny the student access to varying points of view.
3. Shall not deliberately suppress or distort subject matter relevant to the student's progress.
4. Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.
5. Shall not intentionally expose the student to embarrassment or disparagement.
6. Shall not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly:
  - a. Exclude any student from participation in any program;
  - b. Deny benefits to any student;
  - c. Grant any advantage to any student.
7. Shall not use professional relationships with students for private advantage.
8. Shall not disclose information about students obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law.

**Principle II: Commitment to the Profession**

The education profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professional service.

In the belief that the quality of the services of the education profession directly influences the nation and its citizens, the educator shall exert every effort to raise professional standards, to promote a climate that encourages the exercise of professional judgment, to achieve conditions which attract persons worthy of the trust to careers in education, and to assist in preventing the practice of the profession by unqualified persons.

In fulfillment of the obligation to the profession, the educator—

1. Shall not in an application for a professional position deliberately make a false statement or fail to disclose a material fact related to competency and qualifications.
2. Shall not misrepresent his/her professional qualifications.
3. Shall not assist entry into the profession of a person known to be unqualified in respect to character, education, or other relevant attribute.
4. Shall not knowingly make a false statement concerning the qualifications of a candidate for a professional position.
5. Shall not assist a noneducator in the unauthorized practice of teaching.
6. Shall not disclose information about colleagues obtained in the course of professional service unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law.
7. Shall not knowingly make false or malicious statements about a colleague.
8. Shall not accept any gratuity, gift, or favor that might impair or appear to influence professional decisions or actions.

19. Interpret the statement: "Character is caught, not taught."
20. What would you do if your "boss" asked you to do something you knew was a violation of the rules?
21. How would you handle a situation in which one of your student-athletes who had verbally committed to accept a scholarship came to you and wanted to change his mind because a better school offered him a scholarship?
22. What do you think about searching a rule book to find a gray area that might give you an advantage?



# 2

## WELCOME TO THE COACHING PROFESSION

Coaching is truly an exciting occupation, involving the whole gamut of emotions from super highs to heartbreak. And, as you will see, there is a great deal more to coaching than fun and games. This chapter is an attempt to aid you in understanding all that coaching entails so that you don't enter the field with stars in your eyes only to be caught by surprise when confronted by reality—hence the title of this book and the inclusion of this chapter. Keep in mind that a coach is in the “people business,” and that is not always easy.

One of the most important decisions you will ever make is what your profession will be—what you intend to do with your life. Perhaps this is not an issue for you because you have already decided. If so, things are somewhat simplified in your case, since everything you do from now on should have purpose.

If you have decided that coaching is what you want to do, so much the better. Read and study as much as you can about coaches and the coaching profession, participate as an athlete if possible, attend coaching clinics, and become as knowledgeable as possible as quickly as possible.

If, on the other hand, you are not sure that coaching is the right career choice for you but you think it might be, there is only one sure way to find out, and that is to try it. If you choose to stay in the profession, fine. If not, at least you won't go through life wondering whether you missed your calling because you never gave coaching a chance.

If you haven't yet decided to become a coach but are thinking about it, the first thing you should do is establish some priorities. Take a long look in the mirror and ask yourself what will be most important to you when you begin working for a living. If making a lot of money and acquiring material possessions and stability rank high in your desires, then coaching is the wrong profession for you. For every college or pro coach whose huge salary is reported on ESPN, there are thousands of coaches living month to month. Big salaries are not the norm in coaching. These three things are not normally experienced in coaching. On the other hand, if teaching young people, competition, excitement, challenge, giving of

A coach will impact more young people in a year than the average person does in a lifetime.



yourself, and self-actualization attract you, then coaching could be the right choice.

The following email, which I received from Dick Taylor, one of my father's ex-players who also ended up as an assistant coach on my father's staff, sums up what the coaching profession is all about:

Thank you so much for taking the time and making the effort to ensure that at least some of your dad's ol' coaching staff was made aware of his passing, especially those of us who also played for him. I've forwarded your message to my long-time friends Sterling Apthorp, Roger Campbell, Jeff Green and Roger Pinnicks. You may recall that we all coached for your dad. Roger Campbell, Jeff and I played for him at WHS; he was Roger Pinnicks' backfield coach and baseball coach at Wooster.

Your dad was a huge influence on my life. He was perhaps the most principled man I have ever known, very disciplined and unwavering in his beliefs. To say we respected him is an understatement. Indeed, as a player

there was also always just a tinge of fear as well; a "healthy dose," in my view. When we would mention this to him as members of his staff that had also played for him, he would laugh and say, "Heck, I'm just a pussy cat."

In my 14-year coaching career, no head coach I worked for ever had more concern and compassion for his staff and their families; and I worked for some good coaches. In addition, he was always helpful and willing to assist us when they had an opportunity for a positive career move. Once I became a head coach, I always tried to emulate what I had learned from your dad—the intangibles, frankly, as much if not more than the "X's and O's."

Early on, following your family's move to Penn State, we stayed in touch often; until family matters and a career change created new challenges and

I have come to a frightening conclusion:

I am the decisive element in the classroom.

It is my personal approach  
that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

As a teacher, I possess tremendous power  
to make a child's (student's) life  
miserable or joyous.

I can be a tool of torture  
or an instrument of inspiration.

I can humiliate or humor,  
hurt or heal.

In all situations  
it is my response that decides whether a  
crisis will be escalated  
or de-escalated,  
and a child humanized  
or dehumanized.

—*Author Unknown*

demands. I'm not ashamed to say that—although he never made any such comments or indications—I have always felt that your dad was one of the people I let down when my marriage failed. To be honest—hindsight being perfect, especially at age 67—I should've stayed in coaching. I clearly remember him saying, "Once you leave, you'll never go back."

If you do decide to become a teacher and remain one until you retire, you will spend approximately forty years in the profession. If you coach and teach full-time, you could be directly responsible for up to 500 students in any given school year, depending on the subject you teach. This adds up to some 20,000 boys and girls during your career.

Do you have any idea of the impact you can make on all those young lives, and of the incredible responsibility you will have over all those years? It is mind-boggling if you really think about it. We are not talking about the scores of athletic events here; we are talking about what happens to young people's lives because you were their teacher. If you firmly believe that one of your primary obligations as a teacher/coach is to help young people grow into healthy, relatively well-adjusted, productive adults, you are on the right track. One of the best days in my life as a coach was when one of my football players stood up at our senior banquet and spoke. He told the crowd of 500 "If you had asked me to say something good about Coach Sabock three years ago, I couldn't have done it, but I want you all to know he made me the man I am today." With that, he turned around and gave me a big hug. That, my friend, is what coaching is all about.

### **PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS**

One of the errors in thinking coaches frequently make is to assume that everyone views the existence and purposes of athletics the same way. This simply is not the case. It therefore becomes important for you to be aware of some common perceptions so that you can be more effective when dealing with the people most involved with high school athletics.

#### **Athletes**

Mostly you will find athletes "I" directed. That is to say, many of their basic concerns are self-centered. For example: Will I make the team? Will I be a starter? Will I play a lot? Will I earn a letter? Will I win an athletic scholarship?

#### **Parents**

The nature of being an athlete's parent is to view a team with tunnel vision. Regardless of the number of youngsters involved, parents tend to focus only on their own son or daughter. Of course, at the end of this "tunnel" they see a future scholarship athlete. It is safe to say that they lack objectivity. And therein lie the seeds of potential conflict.

#### **Principal**

The principal probably holds the most difficult position in any school, and many faculty members really do not appreciate the demands made on that position. Concerns of the principal include curriculum, band, school dances, plays, bus schedules, cafeteria, custodians, discipline problems, teacher strikes, teaching assignments, parent conferences, condition of the school building, leadership for the faculty, faculty evaluations, PTA meetings, special interest groups in the community, and interscholastic athletics, to mention just a few.

An athletic team is just one of many parts of a school community, not the major reason the school exists. Failure to recognize this fact

can create serious and needless misunderstanding between you and the principal who, by the way, is directly responsible for every program in the school, including athletics.

### Coaches

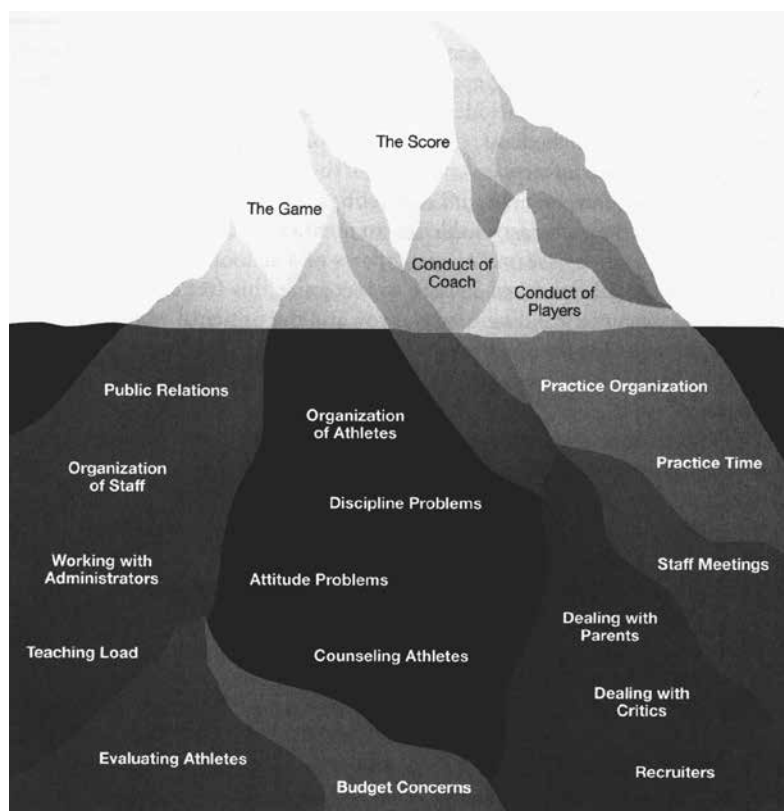
You will soon discover that a number of demands are placed on you as coach, beyond simply teaching skills and strategy.

About 90 percent of an iceberg is underwater and, therefore, unseen. So it is with coaching a team (Figure 2.1). While the tip of the iceberg is very important and the most visible, the bottom area, largely invisible and unrecognized by the public, illustrates the bulk of the coaching profession.

### Community

In the eyes of far too many citizens of the community, the most important consideration in athletics is the scoreboard—who won. The reasoning of a lot of these people is simple: If you are a good coach, our team will win; if the team loses, you must be a poor coach. There is nothing complicated about the issue in the minds of these folks. Of course, these statements are generalizations, but they are fairly typical on the secondary school level.

Figure 2.1  
*The coaching  
iceberg.*



## **IS COACHING THE CAREER FOR YOU?**

Coaching is anything but a dull occupation—there is no doubt about that—but only for those who are dedicated and who enjoy it. For others, coaching is simply a lot of time-consuming hard work that pays relatively little. There doesn't seem to be any middle ground. This is not a “ho-hum” profession to be entered into on a whim. Rather, it is one to prepare for because you really want to be a coach more than anything else. The late, great coach Paul “Bear” Bryant said, “The only reason to go into coaching is if you can't live without it.”

Lee Corso, a former college coach said, “Coaching is not a job, it's a privilege. Coaching is like being a sculptor. You can create something no one else has created. It's yours; it's from your soul, your work; it's like a painting. That's the thrill of coaching. You don't get bored doing it. You have to set your priorities straight.”

If someone were to ask you to give a reason for choosing coaching for a career, your answer might be similar to one of the following:

1. I like sports.
2. Since I enjoy playing the game, coaching will keep me in close touch with something I really like.
3. I liked my high school coach, so I decided to become a coach, too.
4. I want to be a college coach someday.
5. I needed to declare a major, and since I enjoy athletics I decided to try physical education and coaching.
6. I want the prestige of being a coach.
7. I think I would enjoy the excitement and glamour associated with coaching.
8. You get paid extra money for coaching.
9. I like working with young boys and girls.
10. I want to teach boys and girls to enjoy the game.
11. It looks like fun.

No doubt other reasons could be added to the list, but these are the most typical. Whether each reason is sound is not discussed here, but everything that follows in this book should help you determine the appropriateness of the factors that influence your decision to prepare for a coaching career.

### **Cautionary Notes**

I should clarify several points before we continue. The first is that coaching is rarely a lifelong occupation. There are a number of reasons for this—the drains of time and energy, age, health, stress, and getting fired,

to mention just a few—but the fact is that most people get out of coaching long before reaching retirement age.

Second, success at and enjoyment of athletics does not necessarily mean you will experience success and enjoyment in coaching. Participating in athletics and coaching a team are two entirely different experiences. This is due in part to the degree of individual commitment and personal responsibility a coach has for the overall success of the team.



Many people enter the profession because of an early interest in athletics, and although their reasoning is basically sound, they may need more insight into their true motives, along with a greater understanding of the profession.

Third, the fact is that money, glamour, and fame come to relatively few coaches, and even then not usually for long. The average sports fan and the typical school administrator have notoriously short memories

concerning coaches' past records and accomplishments. Coaches rarely have an opportunity to rest on their laurels. A winning team last season makes little difference to fans if the current season is going badly. What happened yesterday is history; in the eyes of the fans, the present is what matters.

This concept is illustrated by a speech from the movie *Patton*. With a little imagination, you can visualize a coach returning to town after a big win, saying something like this:

For over a thousand years, Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honor of the triumph, the tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeters and musicians and strange animals from the conquered territory with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments. The conqueror rode in a triumphal chariot with the day's prisoners walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children, robed in white, stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses. A slave stood behind the conqueror holding a golden crown and whispering in his ear the warning—that all glory is fleeting.

Will Rogers once said, "Being a hero must be about the shortest-lived profession on earth."

Emerson wrote, "Every hero at last becomes a bore." And so it is with coaches—and athletes, I might add.

The fourth point to be made here is that in most public school situations you will be hired as a coach with the understanding that your first responsibility will be to teach classes all day, every day, and that your coaching responsibilities are to be fulfilled above and beyond this work-

load. Naturally there are exceptions, but you should be aware that if it is the love of athletics that leads you into the profession, it is also necessary to have a similar feeling about teaching classes.

The salary structure should give you a good idea about the relationship between your daily teaching responsibilities and coaching. If, for example, the beginning teaching salary is \$40,000 or more and the coaching salary is \$4,000, you are being paid ten times as much to teach classes as you are to coach. That is precisely the way most school principals view the importance of the two assignments.

To further illustrate this point, compare a sport season that lasts three months and that involves approximately 2.5 hours a day for 10 to 100 athletes to a nine-month school year involving 7.5 hours a day with anywhere from 100 to 250 students each day. It is not difficult to understand where a coach's primary responsibility lies, at least in the eyes of the administration. Perhaps this is why school administrators say, "First we hire teachers, then we hire coaches." This is not to insinuate that coaches are not teachers but rather to emphasize a coach's first responsibility—the daily teaching schedule, not an extracurricular activity. This is the rule, and you need to be aware of it to avoid accepting a position with the false assumption that you will only be a coach. Things just aren't done that way in most high schools. The irony here is that in spite of this emphasis, many coaches are still judged by their win/loss record rather than their classroom record.

The final point to elaborate on is that coaching is many things above and beyond actually coaching a team, regardless of the situation in which the coach works. A high school coach wears many hats during the school year because of his or her unique role in the school community and because of the special relationship that normally exists between coach and athlete. You need to be aware of this and must try to develop an understanding of your various roles and responsibilities (see chapter 5).

### **Job Security**

One of the main concerns everyone has upon entering a new profession is job security. Security in the coaching profession can be described simply as the odds against getting fired. Those who are in the profession are well aware that being fired is always a distinct possibility, and the risk is not necessarily confined to college coaches or to coaches of professional teams. Until coaches are granted tenure, if ever, there will be no job security in the coaching profession.

Longevity in high school coaching depends on a number of factors, some of which you can control and some which you cannot. There are four considerations you should be aware of at the outset:

1. The visibility of the team you coach and how much you win.  
The greater the fan interest in a particular team (which varies from community to community), the greater the impact on the number of years you spend in that position.

2. Your own ability as a coach. It doesn't matter how many assistants you have. If you are head coach, your ability to deal successfully with all the competencies required of the position will be critical.
3. Your faith in the youngsters on the team and the assistant coaches. This means faith that the athletes will perform in the excitement of competition the way they were taught in practice and faith that your assistants are dedicated, loyal, and knowledgeable enough to do an outstanding job of teaching the skills and attitudes necessary for the athletes' success. To further illustrate this point, keep in mind that you are preparing for a profession in which your success or failure lies in the hands of teenagers playing a game. Whereas salespeople need complete faith only in themselves and their ability to sell a product and musicians must have faith in themselves to play well, coaches are evaluated by how well others perform as a result of their teaching. Men and women who choose to coach as a way of earning their living are placing their careers in "the hands of God and sixteen-year-old youngsters," as some coaches have put it. This takes faith. It also sets coaching apart from other professions.

This single factor, more than any other, is probably the greatest difference between a coach's approach to a season or a game and the approach of the young athletes. To the athletes, a game is to be played and enjoyed for the moment. To a dedicated coach, the game is a way of life and his or her future. This difference varies in direct proportion to the coach's level of ambition, which can become a trouble spot in the relationship between coach and team.

4. Cooperation with the school's administration. This requirement is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter; basically, it means that you should not expect administrators to adjust the school program solely to suit the needs of your athletic team. Schools can exist without sport, but sport on the secondary level cannot exist without the schools.

## **CONSIDERATIONS IN THE LIFE OF A COACH**

Coaching high school students can be described with almost any word except *boring*. Coaching can be a truly great way to earn a living, because every day brings new challenges. Dealing with teenagers who are predictably unpredictable is enough to ensure that the coaching profession will not be boring. Associating with high school students, watching them grow as athletes and as young adults, and sharing the ecstasy of triumph or the disappointment of defeat are aspects of coaching that set it apart from any other teaching position. Coaches who are so eager to climb the ladder to

bigger and better jobs that they are unaware of these aspects are to be pitied, for they have missed one of the most satisfactory experiences in the profession: associating with young athletes.

The competition surrounding every phase of a sport's season is another factor that ensures coaching will not be monotonous. No sooner is one contest over than the next one takes over in a coach's thoughts. You will rarely have much time to savor a team's or an athlete's victory until the last game or match has been played. The presence of another opponent on the schedule will keep reminding you that what happened yesterday makes little difference today in competitive athletics. This is also a lesson youngsters should learn: The newspaper that praised them, you, or the team yesterday is in someone's trashcan today.

### **Frustrations**

As in every profession, there are times of frustration. Many things can frustrate coaches, but generally the primary factor is impatience in trying to accomplish a specific goal in the sport they coach. Usually this goal is to have a winning team and the opportunity to organize the program in such a way that winning teams become the rule rather than the exception.

Some of this frustration will be directed toward the administrators of the school if they don't give you a free hand in organizing the program the way you think best. Their unwillingness or inability to grant every request you make in order to develop and expand a program can breed frustration. In such situations, coaches have a tendency to assume that the administrators just don't care and are "sitting on" the program. Occasionally this is true, but more often it is not true at all, and the coach, through an understandably narrow point of view, might be making a false assumption.

You can also become frustrated if you are impatient. Normally it takes time to develop a good program, and it might be several years before a varsity team meets your goals. In the meantime, a team can be losing games, which often compounds the feeling. Losing is particularly frustrating when a team comes out on the short end of the score in a game they should have won. Allowing frustration to grow and dwelling on it can seriously hamper your effectiveness as a coach.

#### *One Day at a Time*

There are two days in every week about which we should not worry, two days which should be kept free from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is Yesterday, with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed; we cannot erase a single word said—Yesterday Is Gone!

The other day we should not worry about is Tomorrow with its possible burdens, its large promise and poor performance. Tomorrow is also beyond our immediate control. Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds—but it will rise. Until it does we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day—Today! Any man can fight the battle of just one day. It is only when you and I have the burdens in these two awful eternities—Yesterday and Tomorrow—that we break down.

—Author Unknown



### Rewards

Coaching can, of course, be a highly rewarding experience—rewarding not in strictly financial terms but in ways that cannot be weighed or measured. Granted, rewards of this type do not pay the bills or put food on the table, but they do create a special atmosphere that makes coaching much more than a job. It is this aspect that will help you avoid the feeling of going to work when it is time for practice. (When practice becomes a chore, it is time for you to consider another occupation.)

These rewards include the inner satisfaction one feels from teaching, being able to share an important part of young people's lives, and occasionally seeing some evidence that your students learned something worthwhile because of you, their teacher. Sometimes you will only discover your influence years after an athlete has graduated, or you may never know for sure how much of an impact you had. The effect that any coach has on a student's life remains largely a mystery. There is no way to measure the influence, but coaches receive enough feedback from athletes and parents to know that through athletics they can, and do, make lasting impressions on young people's attitudes.

One of the greatest rewards in coaching is when your ex-athletes come back to see you or call you years after they have graduated. The conversation always comes back to stories of this game or this practice or "the time I . . ." One of the best ones is when they remind you of some of the funny or dumb things you did as a coach.

### Trauma

The life of a coach can be traumatic. This is especially true when an athlete suffers a serious injury. When we care about people, what happens to them also happens to us, and seeing an athlete get hurt cannot be shrugged off easily.

It can also be traumatic when you become the target of criticism. Every coach has to learn to cope with criticism, but it can be painful, especially when it affects your family. In his book *Goldwater*, the former United States senator Barry Goldwater addressed this point. He was talking about politics, to be sure, but he could very well have been talking to every coach in America as well: "You must have the courage to accept considerable criticism, much of it unjustified. You must feel it in your guts and have the courage to accept defeat and continue your goals. Finally, you must believe in yourself, in your principles and in people."

Benjamin Franklin wrote, after being elected to a second term as governor of Pennsylvania: "Popular favor, not the most constant thing in the world, stands by me. . . . A man who holds high office finds himself so often exposed to the danger of disobliging someone in the fulfillment of duty, that the resentment of those whom he has thus offended, being greater than the gratitude of those serviced, it almost always happens that while he is violently attacked, he is feebly defended."

The point here is that people who are satisfied with your work rarely step forward to say so. On the other hand, those who are critical, even

though they may be a minority, regularly make themselves and their criticisms heard. Right or wrong, it is the “nature of the beast.”

You should also be well aware that coaching is an extremely demanding occupation. It places demands on your time, energy, family life, social life, and physical well-being; eventually, it takes its toll. Rare is the individual who has been a head coach in a high school for more than fifteen years and still has the enthusiasm necessary to do the job well. This is particularly the case with people involved in the “pressure sports,” which vary from one part of the country to another but are generally the sports that draw the largest crowds and create the greatest community interest.

### **The Typical Working Day of a Full-Time Teacher**

One of the initial realizations that will strike you is how long and exhausting a working day is during the season, especially if you are a head coach. Every day is basically the same, yet you have enough variety to prevent monotony from ever entering your life. The demands on your time will depend greatly on the sport being coached, the number of students involved, whether or not game films are used, the incidence of injury to the athletes, and your desire or willingness to work at the sport over and beyond just practice time. Assuming that you will teach a normal schedule, a workday could look something like this:

7:45–8:00	Hall duty or homeroom
8:00–11:00	Classes
11:00–11:30	Cafeteria duty
11:30–Noon	Lunch
Noon–3:00	Classes
3:00–3:45	Preparation period
4:00–6:00	Practice
6:00–7:00	After-practice incidentals and return home
7:00–8:00	Dinner
8:00–9:00	Phone calls from parents or sportswriters, lesson plans, family and personal business
9:00–11:00	Review of game films or scouting reports

Also to be worked into this schedule are evening meetings with assistant coaches, athletic boards, booster clubs, league members, equipment salespeople, and sportswriters, who make it a point to call you at home to get their story for the week rather than attempt to get you out of class at school. Time also has to be set aside for grocery shopping, washing clothes, housecleaning, and other chores. Add to this occasional visits from athletes who have some reason to talk with you at some place other than school and you have another full day in the life of a full-time teacher and coach.

Obviously, a coach who is not a full-time teacher would have a different schedule, but the time factor is still substantial.

### The “Pressure Cooker”

If you become truly dedicated to a sport, you become thoroughly involved mentally, physically, and emotionally. Your life can come to resemble a pressure cooker because of the stress you create for yourself.

Suppose you accept a position in a school where the athletic teams have not been very successful. Your first goal is to turn them into winners and to create interest in the school and community. At first, each victory is appreciated and enjoyed by the community. But if, after a few years, you have met the goal and winning seasons become the rule



rather than the exception, the community's attitude will change from appreciation of a win to the expectation of a win. And so it becomes a vicious circle. No matter what the community or part of the country, everyone loves a winner. When fans get a taste of winning, they become addicted to it and expect the team to win all the time, which puts more pressure on you to keep winning. Coaches soon learn that in spite of

past accomplishments, one bad season can create pressure. As mentioned earlier, sports fans have notoriously short memories when it comes to winning and losing, which is another reason coaches often feel as though the world of coaching took place in a pressure cooker, at least during the season.

Emotional tension probably wears out more coaches than anything else. Unless a coach simply doesn't care about a team and what it does, this emotional strain is very real. In most cases it just isn't possible to sit or stand along the sidelines without being totally involved in what happens on the playing field. A doctor once told me that treating a coach during a season was like trying to repair a jet plane in full flight.

Another source of tension is the ever-present element of suspense when one is coaching high school students. This is related not only to the outcome of the game but also to how the team will perform once the contest begins. Sometimes, when a team seems absolutely ready physically and mentally, they collapse and play as though they had never been taught anything. At other times, the athletes don't seem ready, but when the contest begins they catch fire and perform well. The reason for the concern is simple enough. The way a team plays is a direct reflection on you: If the team looks bad, you look bad. And if they look bad too many times, your job might be in jeopardy.

Off-the-field problems can also become stressful for coaches. One of your athletes gets in a fight. Compound this with it being the day of the

big game. An athlete breaks up with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend and is crushed but has a game to play. Some of your players are reported to you as being at a drinking party, which is against school policy. The list can go on and on, but most days aren't always smooth. Be ready to deal with it.

The concern over winning and losing certainly adds to the emotional stress every coach experiences. This occurs in direct proportion to the coach's ambition, the popularity of the sport involved, and the interest of the community in that sport.

### **Coaching Salaries**

If coaches' salaries were extremely high, it might be easier to live with some of the tensions of the job, but as a rule the salary is low in relation to the demands of the position. To a beginner, the extra pay for coaching will seem like a lot of money, but when spread over twelve months, minus various deductions, this extra allowance is almost insignificant. (Of course, the extra pay for coaching varies with the sport.) For example, an allowance of \$3,600 for coaching breaks down to \$300 a month. When all deductions are taken out, this means about \$180 a month or \$45 a week in a paycheck. If you work six days a week, that's about \$8 a day, which breaks down to as little as \$3 per hour or less for some coaches. This added amount might help pay the bills, but it won't alter your style of living very much, and many question whether the compensation is adequate for the time a coach actually spends during a school year. Therefore, if extra compensation is your reason for becoming a coach, you have probably made a bad decision.

Extra pay for extracurricular activities has long been a source of irritation among high school faculties, particularly where coaches are concerned. One group—usually the teachers who are not involved in any extracurricular activities themselves—oppose any extra compensation for additional responsibilities. The members of this group argue that they work after school too, grading papers and preparing lessons for the next day, and they don't get extra pay for that. So why should a coach get extra pay?

Most of the criticism is directed at coaches simply because if school policy dictates additional pay for after-school activities, the coaches normally receive much more than the band director or yearbook adviser, for example. This fact fuels criticism of the role of athletics in a public school, and it is not unusual for coaches to find themselves being challenged over this point by fellow teachers in the lounge or school cafeteria from time to time. Trying to justify extra compensation to teachers who already have their minds made up is not easy.

Salaries for coaching should be based on a carefully thought out formula. Here is a sample of factors that could affect coaching salaries:

- Total hours involved after school
- Weekend and vacation time involved

- Number of students involved
- Experience
- Pressure
- Travel supervision
- Indoor or outdoor activity
- Total responsibilities, equipment, funds, facilities
- Risk of injury

A point value should be given to each item, and a dollar allotment per point should determine the salary in a system of this sort.

In some schools the coaching salary is based on a percentage of the teaching salary. Whatever system is used, chances are very good that the money paid to coaches does not adequately compensate them for the work they do.

### **Coaches' Families**

An important aspect of a married coach's daily life is the considerable impact this position has on the coach's family, whether by design or accident (see chapter 7).

Your spouse gets feedback from a source that you don't—the critic in the stands, who can be quite vicious. Of course, spouses hear compliments, too, not only in the stands but also from parents who write, call, or simply meet them in the local stores. Consequently, it becomes important for your spouse to develop a thick skin in order to survive the sometimes unpleasant world of the grandstand.

People sometimes say things around a coach's spouse that they would never have the courage to say to the coach. As a result, a coach's husband or wife is often aware of things, people, and attitudes that the coach on the sidelines never notices. Therefore, spouses are subjected to a different kind of pressure. Normally, unpleasantness occurs in direct proportion to the numbers on the scoreboard and the won-lost record. Winning seems to be the primary way to curb the vocal abuse in the grandstands.

A coach's children have unique experiences, too. They hear good and bad things not only in the stands but also at school, from classmates. Because one of their parents is a coach and probably well known, the children sometimes share in the special role their father or mother holds in the community. Their friends are happy to associate with the coach's son or daughter and may even be a little envious of the coach's kids. But when the team ends up on the short end of a score, particularly in the bigger spectator sports, some of the other students take the opportunity to cut the coach's children down to size by telling them what a lousy coach their mom or dad is. Children can be very nasty and cruel to one another. More than one coach's child has come home from school in tears because of abuse from other children when the team has lost. Of course, when the

team is winning, everyone wants to be that child's friend. This is not so strange; the same thing happens to the coach.

One temptation you should avoid is allowing a small son or daughter to dress up like a cheerleader and show off at a game with the school cheerleaders, or allowing a child to show off on the sidelines during a game. This idea might seem cute to you, but it tends to give small children a false impression of their importance, can cause criticism from their classmates and spectators, and can turn these youngsters into "coaching brats." Their showing off during a game can detract from the cheerleaders or from the game, which is unwise. Obviously, a coach's family cannot escape being affected by the coach's position and involvement in athletics. As a result, the family can be drawn together in a closeness that is unshakable. On the other hand, families have been broken up because a wife or husband could not cope with all the stressful aspects of a coach's life.



### **APPLYING FOR A COACHING POSITION**

Coaching can lead to a nomadic existence if you are eager to advance to bigger and better jobs, including those at the college level. Unless they are very lucky, ambitious coaches will probably make up to six moves before finally reaching the position they think they want.

High school coaches who apply for head coaching positions in large school systems frequently find themselves competing with applicants who are currently coaching in colleges. There are several reasons for this: college coaches become disillusioned with high-powered collegiate athletics, they dislike recruiting, they want to become a head coach if they have not had this experience, they find that the high school salary might be better than college pay, and the athletic program at a large high school might be better than one at a small independent college with limited financial support.

At any rate, under no circumstances should one apply for a specific coaching position until it has officially been declared open. Sometimes coaches hear via the grapevine that a certain coach is thinking about leaving a position, whereupon they immediately contact the superintendent of schools to apply. In most cases the superintendent has no idea of what is going on, and the current coach is put into a delicate situation. This matter is one of professional ethics and should be avoided.

Another situation you should avoid is one in which school board members, booster club members, or school administrators ask whether you

would be interested in a head job at their school because they are thinking about firing the current coach. The only catch is that the present coach hasn't been told yet. Clandestine offers like this are to be condemned, yet they do happen. Sometimes these situations become full-fledged emotional issues in a community, and the prospective new coach can suffer because of the secret negotiations that took place. Unfortunately, the old saying about there being honor among thieves does not always apply to some school administrators and members of the coaching profession.

### **Interviewing**

When you apply for a coaching position, the interviewer will be sizing you up to see if you will fit into the particular position available. You should (1) be honest and not try to guess what answers the interviewer wants to hear; (2) have a list of questions of your own to ask about the school and the community; and (3) be aware that seeking a coaching position in a tight job market is an aggressive, time-consuming, costly, and often frustrating experience.

Of course, in many school districts the need for coaches is so desperate that teachers other than physical educators are being hired and assigned coaching responsibilities, with little or no regard to their competencies or interest. As a matter of fact, athletic directors sometimes cannot get any teacher to coach. Teachers cite low pay, long hours, and family reasons for turning down the job. As a result, the first person who volunteers or is coerced gets the position. This often breeds other problems because of the lack of professional preparation.

Regardless of how attractive a situation might seem, it is a mistake not to ask questions that are important to you personally. The job should be one to which you can adjust without sacrificing your personal beliefs about teaching and in which you can be relatively happy. Since your questions reveal a great deal about you, give them a lot of careful thought. You should write down your questions and take the list with you to an interview, so you can refer to them from time to time—lest you forget to ask something that really is important to you. The questions you might ask include the following:

1. How did this opening occur?
2. Is there unrest among the staff because of this vacancy and the way it came about?
3. If the position is head coach, are any assistants currently on the staff being considered for the job?
4. What is the administration's goal for the athletic program?
5. How would you describe the students' attitudes toward sports? The community's?
6. Who will choose the assistant coaches? Does the head coach have an opportunity to sit in on interviews with prospective assistants, and is the head coach's opinion considered?