



Guide to Administrative Fair Play: for Sportsmanship in the Boardroom

By Fredy M. Iuni

October 2010

Some of the most important and enduring aspects of sport are not necessarily the ones related to physical health or exercise, but rather the lessons and values of sportsmanship and fair play that are learned. While sportsmanship can be difficult to define Rudd, a professor at Florida State University, and Stoll¹, a professor at the University of Idaho, define it as individuals who “value athletic competition as a moral practice. That is, each athlete tacitly agrees to play respectfully, honestly, and fairly.” They go on to say that sportsmanship is also the practice of “generosity, amicability, and compassion toward one’s opponent”. Stewart², professor at Montana State University, quotes Shields and Bredemeier’s³ in defining sportsmanship as “the continued display of ethical standards even when they conflict with some strategic gain in a sporting event”. Sportsmanship and fair play are exactly the sorts of qualities that one certainly hopes transcend to other aspects of life, but which are fundamentally important to pursue in a sport context. It is inconceivable to think that an athlete is not exposed to these ideas, on some level, throughout their athletic careers. In fact, the ideas of sportsmanship and fair play are so important to the Canadian sport community, the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) dedicated their entire July 2010 [Newsletter](#) to those concepts.

SIRC provided the sport community with numerous resources on the subject. There were articles dedicated to the subject of sportsmanship and fair play from a variety of perspectives philosophically and from a variety of “on the field” perspectives such as that of official, athlete, coach, and parent. Without getting into details, many of the articles dealt with ways in which those “on the field” groups can help contribute to sportsmanship.

Yet none of the articles addressed the need for administrators, from the club to the national level, to demonstrate those same sportsmanship and fair play values, at the administrative level, that are expected on the field of play. There seems to be a gap in the discussion of fair play at the administrative level, and this disconnect from the practice of administrative fair play may contribute to a lessening of those same values on the field of play. Stewart² says that sportsmanship has the potential to teach important values, and that it can be “introduced and reinforced, but without careful examination of the athletic environment, neither parents nor coaches can ensure that the desired behaviours will be perpetuated or valued”. It can certainly be inferred that a sport organizations administration is included as part of the athletic environment and while Stewart does go on to say that administrators should look at the application and reinforcement of sportsmanship, he seems to remain in the context of the field of play. What about the ideas of sportsmanship and fair play at the administrative level? Not simply directives, organization policies or goals, but also the practice of those same policies and goals towards the organization’s members and stakeholders.

With this in mind, the SDRCC has created the “Guide to Administrative Fair Play” (the Guide) a document that deals with some ways in which administrators can act fairly towards their



members and stakeholders. The behaviour espoused in the Guide begins to tie in the elements expected on the field of play and those that ought to appear administratively. The Guide is set up as a checklist with a dozen points that the SDRCC feel should be taken into consideration when organizations act. That is to say, that the Guide is a document created to outline organizational actions that may help prevent disputes. The SDRCC is in the process of publishing the Guide, in the hopes of having it ready for the 2010 Sport Leadership Conference. The following are a few examples of some of the topics explored in the document:

Transparency & Accountability: *In an effort to remain open, transparent and accountable, have we provided our member community (athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, administrators and others), in advance and in clear, plain language, with all documents, policies, rules and regulations that apply to them?*

The purpose here is to understand that Fair Play, in the administrative context, cannot exist in an environment where the information is not shared openly and fully explained to the organizations members. If members don't know organizational policies, rules, procedures or criteria, how are they expected to abide by them, let alone actively, and properly, participate in the organization? This is a fundamental responsibility of an organization.

Member Accountability: *Have we attempted to avoid conflict by encouraging all the members of our community (athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, administrators and others) to be accountable with respect to reading and understanding all relevant documents and policies and to stay abreast of changes, speaking up immediately if policies are unclear, incomplete or flawed?*

Equally important is to encourage members to actively engage in the policies, rules, procedures and criteria that affect them. This active participation may in fact produce fewer future conflicts, because if members are engaged earlier on, areas of potential conflict may be resolved earlier, before actions create unforeseen consequences.

Decision-Making Authority: *Have we made it clear to our member community (athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, administrators and others) in advance, what our decision-making powers are and what criteria we will use to make decisions in plain, easily understandable language?*

In order to properly govern, administrative bodies need to be able to make decisions; decisions that affect members. But there is a responsibility to ensure that not only are the members informed about decisions being made that affect them, but that the decisions made are made by those who have the authority to do so.

Acceptable Member Behaviour: *Have we tried to ensure that the members of our sport community (athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, administrators and others) realize the limits of acceptable behaviour and the penalties that may be applied for violation?*

Just as administrators are accountable for their actions, so too are the members accountable for theirs. Members need to be made aware of what is acceptable behaviour both on the field of play and off the field of play towards opponents, coaches, officials, fans, volunteers, administration, etc, and be told in advance what disciplinary consequences they may face, such as fines or suspensions, for violating the rules.



The continued discussion on fair play and sportsmanship in sport is important. However, it needs to be extended to include the actions and decisions of administrators of sports organizations. This is more than simply having administrators champion these qualities for the field of play (towards athletes, coaches, officials, parents and fans) but, just as importantly, in the context of running an organization. In order to be successful, an organization needs to ensure that it “plays” fair, both on the field of play and organizationally. The SDRCC feels that the Guide is a step in that direction. ■