



Guide to Administrative Fair Play. for Sportsmanship in the Boardroom

By Fredy M. Iuni

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.

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Continued from page 1 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. ■

The SDRCC wishes to wholeheartedly thank Anna Nicholas, LLM Candidate, Straus Institute at Pepperdine University, for her outstanding volunteer work in developing the Guide.

1. Rudd, A., & Stoll, S.K. (1998) *Learning to Practice Sportsmanship*. Fair Play Column September/October 1998. Retrieved from: <http://sirc.ca/newsletters/july10/documents/S-13067.pdf>

2. Stewart, C. Craig. (1996) Parents and Sportsmanship: Contemporary Expectations. *Physical Educator*, 53, 51-55. Retrieved from: <http://sirc.ca/newsletters/july10/documents/414406.pdf>

3. Shields, D.L. & Bredemeier, B.L. (1995) *Character Development and Physical Activity*, Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics.



Sport, Communication and Dispute Prevention

By Fredy M. Iuni

The Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC) has three major objectives¹ Objective one: the SDRCC will “enhance excellence in sport by improving the sport system through the prevention or reduction of sports-related disputes, thus creating a culture of fairness in Canada”; Objective two: the SDRCC will “strengthen the capacity of our sport community leaders and participants by creating a positive culture of fairness”; Objective three; he SDRCC will “operate and manage an organization promoting excellence and transparency.” Of the many strategies and suggestions given by the SDRCC through its website, publications, kiosks and workshops to help reach these objectives, the one constant that is advocated as the key to the prevention or proper resolution of disputes in the Canadian sport system is good oral and written communication. While the idea of “good communication” is obvious and stated frequently by the SDRCC, the concept itself seems ambiguous. What are some principles that allow for communication? There are examples that apply in a sport context. As Mayer (2000), a leader in the field of conflict resolution, states “at the heart of both conflict and resolution is communication.”² With this in mind, we need to delve into this further, to explore ideas of communication in a conflict prevention context, and then to apply it to the Canadian sport system.

As stated by Krauss and Morsella, professors at Columbia and San Francisco State University, “the positive role of communication in ameliorating conflict seems so obvious that the premise is seldom given serious examination”³. While a full examination of communication is beyond the scope of this article, the important idea is that, often, communication is used as a blanket fix-it solution without necessarily examining what communication means: Therefore, it would be practical for us to take a look at a few of the principles³ that Krauss and Morsella lay out.

Principle 1: *Stay away from communication channels that have too much noise associated with them; if that is impractical to restate the ideas in different ways, that is be redun-*

“Use as many communications avenues as possible to ensure NSO members fully understand their obligations”

dant. According to Krauss and Morsella *noise* is “any undesired signal”³. *Noise* can obstruct the proper understanding of a message and thus hamper communication. To overcome *noise*, the authors suggest redundancy as a one possible solution; that is to relay the same message in different ways. They do, however, caution that redundancy only increases the likelihood that a message will be received, it does not guarantee it will be understood. How would this look in a sporting context? Every year each National Sport Organizations (NSO) will produce carding criteria which will help determine which athletes receive cards, and every year the criteria is different to some degree. So how is this criteria transmitted to the athletes? NSOs have several different options available to them 1) mail it to the athletes; 2) email it to the athletes; 3) have in-person sessions/discussions; 4) have coaches discuss the criteria with their athletes; 5) post it on the website; 6) ensure that the criteria is available in both French and English. It is strongly encouraged to use as many communications avenues as possible to ensure that NSO members fully understand all of their obligations with regards to carding, team selection and conduct.

Principle 2: *When listening to someone, try to understand the intended meaning.* This principle specifically deals with intention, and not just the literal words being used. The question is what is the speaker intending to say, “understanding consists of recognizing communicative intentions - not the words used”³. In the sport context for example, an athlete just asked his coach “why was I not selected?” If the coach immediately reacts defensively and assumes that the athlete is dissatisfied and is looking for an indication that the process was flawed or biased, he also eliminates any chance to have a productive discussion. The athlete may be sincerely looking for an explanation to better understand the reasons and realign his preparation for the next selection process. By jumping to conclusions without knowing the athlete’s intent, the coach risks compromising a positive relationship with an athlete simply wishing to obtain constructive feedback on his performance.

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Notable Dates

- **October 29-31, 2010:** The SDRCC will be at the AthletesCan Forum in Ottawa, ON, with its kiosk and a presentation on the programme.
- **November 18-21, 2010:** The SDRCC will be at the Sport Leadership Conference in Ottawa, ON, with its kiosk and two roundtables.
- **November 25-26 2010:** The Executive Director will be a guest speaker at the University of Windsor, ON.



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Principle 3: *When preparing a message, consider what your listener will take you to mean.* This principle seems to be a natural extension of Principle 2; when taken together the emphasis is on both the listener and speaker/author to work together, cooperatively, to engage in the communicative process. How do these two principles look in a sporting context? Many NSOs have behavioural conduct requirements from their members. But are these written and communicated to those members? For example, NSOs should put together their code of conduct in such a way so that their members can understand it. On the other side of the coin, Principle 2 gets at what the listeners, or audience, needs to try to do to understand the message. So, for example, when reading a code of conduct, the reader (NSO member) is also responsible for trying to understand the meaning. That is to say, are your messages written in a clear and concise way as to avoid as much ambiguity as possible? We see that Principles 2 and 3, espoused by Krauss and Morsella, involve an almost synergistic approach to communication where all those engaged are responsible for successful communication.

Principle 4: *When speaking, take the listener's perspective into account.* The authors in this case refer specifically to oral communication and much of what was stated in Principle 3 holds true for Principle 4. An example in a sporting context may help explain the idea: the negotiation of athlete agreements with NSOs can at times become a heated topic, and how these, or any, negotiations are handled can go a long way in contributing to the relationship between NSO administrators and their athletes. As such, both the NSO administration and the athletes need to understand each other in order to effectively communicate; bearing down in the trenches probably is not the best strategy for effective communication. That is, when trying to communicate, in conjunction with what the listeners are trying to do, to try and understand what you

mean (principle 2); the speaker needs to also be aware of what the viewpoint of the listener is, and to take into account where they are coming from.

Principle 5: *Be an active listener.* According to Krauss and Morsella, "effective communication requires that listener's be responsive."³ The authors suggest that an active listener raises questions, asks for clarification if things seem ambiguous and ensures that the same understanding is had by all.³ Again, we see the authors referring to communication as a cooperative endeavour where to have any success, everyone involved needs to be actively and positively engaged. So for example, one of the main case types that comes before the SDRCC deals with team selection. Within those cases there have been many instances where a change to the selection criteria was made from one season to the next, and then communicated to the members with timelines for members to provide feedback. However, it is too often the case that those same members before the SDRCC did not proceed to provide any initial feedback. In a sport context, this "active" role is essential, in avoiding disputes.

As Krauss and Morsella suggest, communication is not a universal remedy, but rather a tool, a "neutral instrument" that can help in dispute prevention and in dispute resolution. While the context of their message dealt specifically with conflict resolution, their ideas can easily be used in the sport environment, as in the examples shown above. In the Canadian sport context, it is important to prevent disputes in a proactive manner, by engaging with members in areas that have the greatest potential for disputes such as team selection, carding, discipline and athlete agreements. Mayer says that "good communication stems from intention not technique", it is by good communication, that a lasting, stable and positive environment can be maintained and that the goals of bronze, silver and gold can best be achieved. ■

1. The three objectives can be found in the corporate plan of the SDRCC which is published annually and can be found online at: <http://www.crdsc-sdrcc.ca/eng/about-corporate-docs.jsp>, under the Corporate Plans heading.

2. Mayer, B. (2000). *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

3. Krauss, R. M., & Morsella, E. (2000). Communication and Conflict. In M. Deutsch, & P.T. Coleman, (Eds.). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. (pp. 131-143). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



New SDRCC Employee

The SDRCC is pleased to welcome Marie-Josée Duval to its team as the new Executive Assistant. Marie-Josée joined SDRCC on June 28, 2010. Her primary responsibilities are to deal with case management for the Dispute Secretariat and include other tasks related to the tribunal operations.

State-of-the-Art Technology at the Service of Parties

The SDRCC is proud to announce that it will be launching a new online case management portal that will allow parties to gain access, from anywhere at anytime, to their case files including party filings, administrative communications, calendar of events, and forms and resources. The SDRCC is confident that this new tool will help allow parties to better manage their cases. The launch is expected before the end of 2010.



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