

Arsht Ethics Debates at SportsFest 2013

UNIVERSITY
OF MIAMI
ETHICS PROGRAMS


**Arsht
Ethics Initiatives**

Case Packet

Case One: Injured Players¹

Rookie quarterback Robert Griffin III, aka RG3, has had an exceptional season by rookie QB standards. He led the Washington Redskins this season and was able to help get them into the playoffs. In his first playoff game against the Seattle Seahawks, while trying to recover from an untimely snap, RG3 re-injured the knee that had been badly injured during the regular season game against the Baltimore Ravens. Griffin III did not return to the game and the Seahawks defeated the Redskins. It is common knowledge that knee injuries take more than a few weeks to heal. So who convinced RG3, if he needed convincing at all, to return to the game in the playoffs?

Initially, sports analysts and fans alike believed that the Redskins' coaches and management ignored the possibility of this potential and even predictable career-ending injury in the hopes of winning the playoffs and making a bigger profit. Indeed, some argue that a similar scenario plays out in the post-season of most sports. Who should decide whether an injury-prone athlete participates in a big game: the individual, their coaches, the team trainers or physicians, or management, each of whom have a potentially different stake in the outcome?

¹ Morissette, Mongoose. "Washington Redskins." *Bleacher Report*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

Case Two: Fighting in Hockey²

Fighting on the ice has been a tradition since the beginning of professional hockey. Officials tolerate fights and allow them to continue; teams will sign specific players who know how to fight to be “enforcers” and actually take on the job for the team. Penalties are given to players who engage in fights, but suspensions or fines are rare.

Advocates of fighting on the ice argue that it is and always will be a part of the game. The fans love it and 99.4% of NHL athletes support it, according to a 2009 Sports Illustrated survey of 325 players who answered the question, “Should the NHL ban fighting?”³ Further, the argument can be made that fighting builds bonds between teammates, creates deeper rivalries between teams that in turn leads to increased revenue for the NHL, and decreases the number of violent and potentially dangerous plays made during the course of the game.

Still, those who oppose fighting in the NHL believe that it delegitimizes the sport and creates a volatile, dangerous situation for players on the ice. They point to the significant health problems suffered by enforcer players who endure many blows to the head and face, including permanent neurological damage. Furthermore, many opposed to fights believe that they set a bad example for young NHL fans and promote acceptance of violent behavior among young kids.

Many hockey players make a living from their skills in a hockey fight; they understand the risk that they take when stepping onto the ice. These players have practiced fighting on the ice for years; it has become a tradition that is deeply embedded in the minds of NHL athletes. Still, unknown brain injury, players knocked unconscious, and even players dying from fights leave critics questioning whether or not fighting should continue.

*Submitted by Ethics Society General Member, Eric Ardman

² Gillis, Charlie. "Can We Please Now Ban Fighting in Hockey?" *Macleans.ca Can We Please Now Ban Fighting in Hockey Comments*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

Chandler, John. "Hockey Fights at Hockeyfights.com." *Hockeyfights.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

Steinbach, Paul. "Fighting in Ice Hockey Faces Unprecedented Scrutiny." *Athletic Business*. N.p., May 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

³ "SI Players NHL Poll." *SI Vault*. Sports Illustrated, 1 June 2009. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

Case Three: Journalism and Athletes⁴

There have been reports of a man in Milwaukee who has been posing as a journalist for a local newspaper and calling members of female high school sports teams at home to make appointments for an interview and photo shoot. After receiving a number of complaints about this “reporter,” the newspaper issued a statement clarifying that these calls were being made by an imposter and not an employee. The newspaper’s policy is that any interviews with high school students must be made through the school and athletic coaches. Indeed, the newspaper requires that coaches must give their permission for any reporter to meet the students and that interviews must take place in a supervised setting on school grounds.

Not all newspapers follow these protocols. For example, the New York Times came under scrutiny when one of their female journalists tried to schedule interviews with female high school athletes by contacting them through Facebook.

Of course, some students are not concerned by this practice. After all, most seniors are 18 years olds who welcome recognition for their athletic achievements and do not desire to seek permission to speak with reporters.

⁴Smith, Sydney. "Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Fake Reporter Teen Athletes for Pictures, Inter." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Fake Reporter Teen Athletes for Pictures, Inter.* Media Ethics, 17 Nov. 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

Case Four: Playing Sports with Both Types of Equipment

Is a transgendered or intersex⁵ athlete a male or a female? That is a question in contemporary athletics.

Traditionally, men and women have been separated in many athletic events for obvious reasons: uniformity, privacy, and parity. There are well-documented physical and physiological differences between men and women when it comes to athletic ability.⁶

What should be the policy for an athlete who is born a male and keeps a masculine form and musculature, but who identifies, lives and has had a surgical procedure to become a woman? Is it permissible to allow this athlete to compete in a woman's athletic event that demands a level of endurance or musculature strength associated with the masculine form?

In 2004, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) adopted the Stockholm Consensus regarding transgendered participation in the Olympic Games, which provides that those who complete their transgender transition before puberty can participate in the category of their chosen gender. Those who complete their transition after puberty can compete in their chosen gender under certain conditions: the entire sex-change procedure must be complete, including a removal of the original primary sexual gonads (ovaries or testes); the athlete must be at least two years post-surgery; and most importantly, each athlete must be evaluated by a special committee on a confidential case-by-case basis to determine their gender for the purpose of the athletic competition at hand.⁷

The Stockholm Consensus is considered the leading guide on transgender issues for the global sport community. The US Golf Association, USA Track and Field and the Women's Sports Foundation are among the organizations that have adopted the Consensus. However, Stockholm Consensus has also been criticized in certain quarters.⁸

Some argue that the individual case-by-case inspection of transgendered individuals to determine their "gender" is unfair and oppressive. It puts a third party in charge of labeling someone's gender, even if the individual truly feels a different way about their status. Some have argued that certain athletes may not be able to afford or simply choose not to get the expensive and invasive full sex-change operation, even though they still behave, identify and "are" the opposite gender.⁹

On the other hand, some women's groups have argued that the individuals who went through puberty as males but who have transitioned and are allowed to compete as female athletes have a strategic advantage over athletes born female.

⁵ "Sports: Transgender Issues" GLBTQ – Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture"
http://www.glbtq.com/arts/sports_transgender_issues.html

⁶ Conner, Michael "Understanding the Difference Between Men and Women"
<http://www.oregoncounseling.org/ArticlesPapers/Documents/DifferencesMenWomen.htm>

⁷ Griffin, Pat "Inclusion of Transgendered Athletes on Sports Team" Women's Sports Foundation
<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Articles/Issues/Homophobia/1/Inclusion-of-Transgender-Athletes-on-Sports-Team.aspx>

⁸ "Gender Identity Policy: Copenhagen 2008 worldOutgames"
http://www.copenhagen2009.org/Outgames/Registration/Policies/Gender_Identity_Policy.aspx

⁹ "Transgender Athletes Get Into the Game" Transgriot 2007 June 24 <http://transgriot.blogspot.com/2007/06/transgender-athletes-get-into-game.html>

Case Five: Separation of Church and Sport?

Religion is an important part of the lives of billions of people the world over. Not surprisingly, many star athletes are religious, choosing to pray for success on the playing field in an important game or to use their fame to spread the message of their faith. Certain groups espouse a goal of promoting a particular faith in sports. Even advertising in sport has acquired a religious slant.

Consider, for example, the most famous outwardly religious player, Tim Tebow, champion quarterback for the University of Florida Gators from 2006 to 2009. Throughout his career, Tebow wore eye-black inscribed with biblical verses, many of which would become “most common searches” on google.com after a game. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes is a group with a self-proclaimed mission to “Present to athletes and coaches and all whom they influence the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.”¹⁰

Consider as well the Birmingham Steeldogs, who decided to have biblical passages embroidered on their uniforms, a move that generated both concern and the threat of fines by the NCAA.¹¹ League officials argued that this sanction not because of the religion, but because athletic teams cannot “modify their jerseys on a whim” and “[p]romotions can’t spill onto the field of play.”

Some worry that the disparity in the number of athletes who display a Christian message as opposed to other faiths creates a notion of “Christian Privilege” in American sports. They wonder whether “[Tebow], or another player, would be able to have ‘Allahu akbar’ (translated, ‘God is Greatest’) in Arabic on his eye black?”¹²

Sporting events are no stranger to the notion of competition in terms of physical prowess and mental acuity, but is there room for competition between religious ideologies on the playing field?

¹⁰ "Mission and Vision." *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

¹¹ Lukas, Paul. "MLB Uniform-alities." *Page 2*. ESPN.com, n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

<<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=lukas/060413>>.

¹² "Tebow's Eye Black." *Tebow's Eye Black*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.tebowseyebblack.com/>>.

Case Six: The influence of professional athletes – does it mean more?

A role model is defined as “a person who serves as a model in a particular behavioral social role for another to emulate.”¹³

By the nature of what they do, every action of a professional athlete is subject to public scrutiny. In 1993, Hall of Fame basketball player Charles Barkley was accused of spitting on a woman in the stands during a game. When asked about the type of message even the mere accusation of such an act sends to his fans, especially younger individuals, Barkley famously responded with “I ain’t no role model.” He later explained that parents should be considered the true role models and professional athletes should not have to bear the entire burden on their shoulders alone.¹⁴

The Barkley incident put the notion of sports figures as roles models into the public consciousness; the discussion has continued with strong opinions being voiced on both sides of the argument. Of course, a significant scandal in the world of sports tends to increase the intensity of this debate, which is certainly true today after recent admissions by the disgraced Lance Armstrong.

In a recent *New York Times* article, columnist William Rhoden opines, “In light of the dramatic falls of Michael Vick, Marion Jones, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Tiger Woods and now Lance Armstrong, we need to either recalibrate our definition of the sports [role model] or scrap it altogether.”¹⁵

Others, however, believe that the focus should be less on the athlete and more on the media, whose focus on sensational negative developments has largely exacerbated the issue.¹⁶

¹³ "Role Model." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

¹⁴ Griffin, Geoff. *Are Athletes Good Role Models?* Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2005.

¹⁵ Rhoden, William. Seeing through the illusions of the sports hero. *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/sports/seeing-through-the-illusions-of-the-sports-hero.html>

¹⁶ Lines, G. (2001). Villains, fools or heroes? Sports stars as role models for young people. *Leisure Studies*, 20(4), 285-304.

Case Seven: Performing in the Pro Bowl? Yes or No

The four major professional leagues in the United States have an annual All-Star game, each run differently but all based on the premise of recognizing the best performers of the year. Not surprisingly, the competitiveness is toned down during these games; for many reasons, players take a more lighthearted approach. Yet, for baseball, hockey and basketball, the All-Star game matters in different ways. For MLB, the winning side gets a home field advantage in the World Series. For the NBA, players exert themselves less during the early stages of the game but have a long-standing tradition of going all-out in the fourth quarter. Finally, the NHL ensures that all proceeds from their All-Star game benefit the player's pension funds.

The NFL, however, seems to have no such motivating factor for its Pro Bowl. Perhaps due to lack of purpose or to a legitimate fear of getting hurt, the quality of the game can easily be confused for a "glorified walk-through practice that became a running joke for how little the players seemed to care."¹⁷

The NFL commissioner has announced that the league is considering cancelling all future Pro Bowls because players have not been giving "the same effort and energy that allowed them to become roster members of this Pro Bowl."¹⁸

Many close to the debate believe this is merely a threatening tactic by the league, given that it "makes pretty good money"¹⁹ from the Pro Bowl. The Pro Bowl certainly yields strong television viewership. For example, last year's game garnered a 7.9 rating whereas the NBA All-Star game earned a 5.4 rating, the second-best rating since 2005.²⁰

The sentiment among NFL players is mixed. They have previously indicated their intent to barely try if they do attend a Pro Bowl. On the other hand, according to NFL.com, 12 time Pro Bowl quarterback Peyton Manning recently made "an impassioned plea for a return to a time when players cared about the NFL's all-star game and played at full speed"²¹ so the game does not get cancelled. Two-time Pro Bowl cornerback Charles Tillman has stated, "We owe it to our fans, we owe it to our viewers, to give them a little more effort."²²

¹⁷ Garcia, Oskar. "NFL Hopes to Decide Pro Bowl Future by April." *Yahoo! Sports*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Schwab, Frank. "Peyton Manning Implores Players to Play Hard in Pro Bowl to save the Game." *Yahoo! Sports*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

²⁰ "All-Star Game Garner's Second-best Ratings since 2005." *NBA.com*. N.p., 27 Feb. 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.nba.com/2012/news/02/27/all-star-ratings/index.html>>.

²¹ Garcia, Oskar. "NFL Hopes to Decide Pro Bowl Future by April." *Yahoo! Sports*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.

²² Fenelon, Andy. "Peyton Manning Roasts Players in Pro Bowl Address." *NFL.com*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2013. <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap1000000129920/article/peyton-manning-roasts-players-at-pro-bowl-meeting?campaign=Twitter_atl>.