

# Ethics in Sports

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

It is now being increasingly realised that sports contribute to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of an individual. Sports play a significant role in healthy social development and interaction. It helps people learn how to set and achieve goals through discipline and hard work. It nurtures the development of decision-making and leadership abilities, while teaching people to manage both success and failure. Today, it has become one of the most popular activities being organised at regular intervals. In its true sense, *sports means much more than* just to compete in a few events organised at certain intervals for the highest honour of one's state/country.

Sports is a human activity that contributes to the holistic development of individuals. It is recognised as an individual activity which offers the opportunity for self-knowledge, self-expression and fulfilment of personal achievement; skill acquisition and demonstration of ability; enjoyment, good health and well-being. Sports also engages us in a collective effort to pursue human excellence. It provides us an opportunity for social interaction. It is a source of pleasure, but more than that, sports inspires, brings cultures together, and can bridge social divides. Sports can enrich society and foster friendships between nations. Sports is also responsible for the application of rules and for adherence to values such as mutual respect, solidarity and fair play.

Sports today, faces the pressures of modern society and new challenges. When sports events like Olympic games, Common-Wealth Games, Asian Games or those related to Cricket, Football, Volleyball, Tennis, Hockey or Badminton take place, millions of spectators, viewers on television, internet or listeners on radio become intensely engaged even though a selected few participate.

Sports is primarily a competitive activity where winning is the be all and end all. Do you agree with this statement? Perhaps that is why, in this highly competitive sports environment, we quite often hear about unethical behaviour which includes cheating, bending the rules, doping, abuse of food additives, physical and verbal violence, harassment, sexual abuse and trafficking of young sportspersons, discrimination, exploitation, unequal opportunities, unethical sports practices, unfair



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means, excessive commercialisation, use of drugs in sports and corruption.

These are just a few examples of what may go wrong with sports. There is not just one reason for these, part of the problem is that people ignore ethics while making decisions. It is in this context that ethics occupy a critical place. In the present chapter we shall discuss various dimensions of sports ethics.

## 8.2 WHAT IS SPORTS ETHICS?

Before discussing various dimensions of sports ethics, it is important to understand the meaning of ethics. Ethics, morals and values are used interchangeably in everyday language, though these terms are not synonyms. The concept of ethics is technically understood as a branch of philosophy that defines what is good for the individual and society and establishes the nature of obligations, or duties, that people owe themselves and to one another. But without going into the complexities of this concept, it is relevant to understand ethics as the practice of making principled choices between right and wrong: a code of conduct that guides human behaviour, a set of standards that guides our conduct. It is generally viewed as the system or set of rules, norms or laws by which attitudes and actions are determined to be either “right or wrong”. The fundamental problem of ethics is determining what constitutes proper conduct. It defines how individuals, professionals in different fields, organisations, associations, federation and corporations choose to interact with one another.

In view of the above, sports ethics is a positive concept that guides human action in sports. It is defined as the code of conduct for promoting and ensuring healthy sporting practices. Sports ethics signifies not just a certain form of behaviour but also a particular way of thinking. It promotes fair play among children and young persons via educational and preventive measures and encourages the dissemination of good practices to promote diversity in sport and combat all forms of discrimination.

Every child and young person has the right to play sport and games to gain satisfaction from the experience. The code of sports ethics applies to all levels of skills and commitment, recreational activities as well as competitive sport. It involves the elimination of all types of negative behaviour on and off the field. More importantly, it promotes equity and sporting excellence.

Sports ethics is also focused on equity in sport which should be an expression of human excellence. It has two dimensions:

### Box 8.1

Ethics is much more than playing within the rules, as it covers notions such as friendship, respect for others and the sporting spirit.

### Box 8.2

Institutions and adults must be the guarantors of the right to play sport and games.

(a) **Institutional:** Discrimination based on criteria other than performance must be rejected, rules must be applied uniformly and without resorting to arbitrary decisions;

(b) **Personal:** There is a moral obligation to abide by the rules, in accordance with the principles of fair play. It tries to ensure that sporting excellence must be an expression of human excellence and performance and results should emerge from the deserved and meritorious development of individual talent. The codes of sports ethics documented by the Olympic Committee and other international and national sports bodies, governments, sports federations and associations, sports sponsoring concerns and specialised research institutions provide a comprehensive view of sports ethics. These clearly suggest that sports ethics is a set of standards that guide the conduct of all concerned with sports — the sports persons, trainers, referees, managers, administrators, parents, teachers, journalists, doctors and pharmacists, nutritional expert, sports sponsoring concerns, top level sportspersons who serve as models and even spectators. These ethical standards are universal and objective and are not based on subjective guidelines. They have been proven over time.

### ACTIVITY 8.1

- Gather information from the literature on sports regarding the codes of sports ethics developed, documented and issued by various sports bodies at global and regional levels.
- Collect such codes of sports ethics documented by government and sports bodies in India.
- Compare the international and Indian codes of sports ethics.

## 8.3 SPORTS ETHICS: STANDARDS

What are sport ethics or standards? Commonly described as six pillars of fair play, Standards are integral elements of all sports activities, sports policy and management, and apply to all levels of ability and commitment, including recreational as well as competitive sports. These are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

### 8.3.1 Trustworthiness

- Always pursue victory with honour.
- Demonstrate and demand integrity.
- Observe and enforce the spirit and letter of the rules.
- Do not engage in or tolerate dishonesty, cheating, or dishonourable conduct.

### 8.3.2 Respect

- Treat the traditions of the sports and other participants with respect.

- Do not engage in or tolerate disrespectful conduct, including verbal abuse of opponents and officials, taunting and inappropriate celebrations.
- Win with grace and lose with dignity.

### 8.3.3 Responsibility

- Be a positive role model on and off the field.
- Safeguard your health. Know what you're putting in your body. Just because a substance is legal or natural doesn't mean it's permitted or safe in health context.
- Take responsibility and educate yourself about issues of anti-doping. It's up to you to comply with anti-doping policies.

### 8.3.4 Fairness

- Adhere to high standards of fair play.
- Ensure that teams and athletes play by the rules and treat others fairly.
- Anything that gives an unfair advantage violates the spirit as well as the integrity of the sport.

### 8.3.5 Caring

- Demonstrate concern for others. Never engage in careless behaviour that could injure yourself or others.
- Help the team by encouraging your teammates.
- Never tolerate unhealthy or dangerous conduct by your teammates. Encourage your teammates to make healthy choices and be prepared to report any dangerous behaviour.

### 8.3.6 Citizenship

- Play by the rules. Sports is defined by the rules. These rules may be yours or your team's or your teacher's.
- Follow the spirit of the rules. Resist the temptation of gaining an advantage by bending the rules. Take pride in your performance while abiding by the rules. You have worked too hard to throw it away by cheating.
- As a member of a community, whether in a team, in a classroom, or with a family, think how your choices impact other community members.

## Activity 8.2

Write a report about your own experience on sports ethics regarding any competition held in the neighborhood or at the school level.

## 8.4 RESPONSIBILITY FOR OBSERVANCE OF SPORTS ETHICS

The responsibility to ensure observance of sports ethics belongs to all those who are directly or indirectly, associated with sports and especially those who influence and encourage the involvement and participation in sports. These include:

- Governments at all levels, including the agencies working with governments.

- Sports-related organisations including sports federations and governing bodies, sports sponsoring concerns, physical education associations, coaching agencies and institutes, medical and pharmacological professions and mass media.
- The commercial sector, including sports goods manufacturers and retailers, sponsoring concerns and marketing agencies; and
- Individuals including parents, teachers, coaches, referees, officials, sports leaders, physical education expert, administrators, journalists, doctors and pharmacists and those role models who have achieved levels of sporting excellence and fame; those who work on a voluntary or on a professional basis. Individuals may also have responsibilities in their capacity as spectators.

Each of these institutions and individuals have a responsibility and a role to play. This code of sports ethics is addressed to each one of them. This can be effective if all involved in sports are ready to take on the responsibility identified in the code.

#### **8.4.1 Government**

Government has the following responsibilities:

- to encourage and follow ethical standards in all areas of society where sports are conducted;
- to improve controls with regard to integrity and ethics in funding of amateur and leisure sport;
- to stimulate and support those organisations and individuals who have demonstrated ethical principles in their sports-related activities;
- to cooperate in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the code of sports ethics;
- to empower and encourage physical education and sports teachers and instructors to promote sports ethics in school curricula and refer to the positive contribution of sports to humankind and society;
- to commit in preserving the integrity of sports under threat especially from match fixing, trafficking in young sportsperson and illegal betting;
- to support, as far as possible, all initiatives aimed at promoting sports ethics, particularly among youths, and encouraging institutions to make sports ethics a central priority;
- to continue to promote, in cooperation with the sports movement, the promotion and monitoring of the prevention of racism, xenophobia (hatred and fear of one another) and racial intolerance in sport;

- to encourage research, both nationally and internationally, in order to improve our understanding of the complex issues surrounding young people's involvement in sports; and
- to identify the opportunities for promoting sports ethics.

#### **8.4.2 Sports-related Organisations**

Sports-related organisations have the following responsibilities:

##### *A. Concerning the framework and context of sports ethics*

- to publish clear guidelines on what is considered to be ethical or unethical behaviour and to ensure that, at all levels of participation and involvement, consistent and appropriate incentives and/or sanctions are applied;
- to ensure that all decisions have been taken in accordance with a code of ethics for sports;
- to raise awareness of the concept of sports ethics within their sphere of influence by means of campaigns, awards, educational materials and training opportunities. Such initiatives should be closely monitored and their impact evaluated;
- to establish systems which reward sports ethics and personal levels of achievement in addition to competitive success;
- to consider and formulate rules governing the right to participate in competitions and the organisation of categories in competitions in the light of the principles of sports ethics; and
- to assist and support the mass media in highlighting the contribution made by sports ethics to education and society.

##### *B. Concerning work with young people*

- to ensure that the structure of competition acknowledges the special requirements of growing children and young people and provides the opportunity for graded levels of involvement from recreation to high-level competition;
- to encourage modification of the rules to meet the special needs of young people and put the emphasis not only on success in competition but also on sports ethics;
- to ensure that safeguards are in place within the context of an overall framework of support and protection for children, young male/female, both to protect them from sexual harassment and abuse and to prevent the exploitation of children, those with gifted abilities; and children with special needs.
- to ensure that including those associated with a sports organisation, who bear the responsibility for children and



young people are qualified at an appropriate level to guide, train and educate them. It is also to be ensured that they understand the physiological and psychological changes associated with the child's process of development and that they are familiar with and take into account the emotional and relational functioning of human beings.

### 8.4.3 Individuals

Individuals have the following responsibilities:

#### A. Concerning personal behaviour

- to behave in a way which sets a good example and presents a positive role model for children and young people;
- to refrain, in all circumstances, from rewarding unfair play, demonstrating it personally or condoning it in others and to take appropriate sanctions against such behaviour; and
- to ensure that their own level of training and qualifications is appropriate to the needs of the child at the different stages of sporting commitment.

#### B. Concerning work with young people

- to make the health, safety and welfare of the child or young sportspersons is the first priority and ensure that such considerations come before everything else, i.e., reputation of the school, club, coach or parents;
- to extend the initiatives taken by the international federations and organisations in order to promote quality standards in the activity of sports agents;
- to provide a sporting experience for children that encourages a life-long commitment to healthy physical activity;
- to avoid treating children as small adults, but be aware of the physical and psychological changes which accompany their development and how these affect sporting performance;
- to avoid placing expectations on children which they are unable to meet;
- to make the participant's pleasure and enjoyment the priority and never exert undue pressure on the child which impinges on their right to freely choose to participate;
- to take the same level of interest in all young people regardless of their talent and emphasise and reward personal levels of achievement and skill acquisition in addition to competitive success;

- to be attentive and responsive to children's needs, so that each child feels appreciated as an individual, irrespective of his or her sporting prowess;
- to encourage young children (a) to devise their own games with their own rules, to take on the roles of coach, teacher, official or referee in addition to that of participant; (b) to devise their own incentives and sanctions for fair or unfair play; and (c) to take personal responsibility for their actions;
- to provide young people and their families with as much information as possible to ensure awareness of the potential risks and attractiveness of reaching high levels of performance.

### Activity 8.3

The intent of this exercise is not to tell you what is right or wrong. These are just a few examples of ethical choices that sports provide. Out of the four options against each example, tick one out of four choices. Remember, it is important for you to decide what you will do when faced with these choices. Be proactive by setting your standards before you get to the heat of the competition.

Sl. No	Practical Examples	Clearly Ethical	Somewhat Ethical	Somewhat Unethical	Clearly Unethical
1.	In a basketball game, the coach tells the team to be as physically aggressive as they can and get away with it.				
2.	In football, a lineman deliberately seeks to inflict pain on an opposing player to intimidate him.				
3.	At a crucial point in a big game, a player fakes an injury to get a needed time-out for the team.				
4.	In tennis, the ball is called out though the player is certain it hit the line. The player says nothing and takes the point.				
5.	There is a loud appeal for caught behind, which was denied by the umpire. But the batsman goes back to pavilion, as he/she knows his/her bat had touched the ball.				



6.	A coach uses bad words and personal insults while coaching.				
7.	In soccer, the best player on the other team already has a yellow card. As an opponent you deliberately fake a foul hoping that player will be given a red card and removed from the game.				
8.	The team captain argues with an official intending to influence future calls.				
9.	Coming back from an injury, an athlete uses prohibited substances – not to get ahead – just to get back to where he/she was before the injury.				
10.	You know your teammate is doping and you do not confront him/her or anonymously report about it.				
11.	An athlete takes 25 different supplements with the intent to enhance the performance. None of the supplements have any prohibited substances listed on the label in text.				
12.	During a cricket match, some of the spectators move into the field and manhandle the umpire, because he/she has given LBW decision against a batsman who was in reality not out.				



## ASSESSMENT

**Answer the following questions**

1. Explain ethics in sports.
2. What is the importance of ethics in sports?
3. Write about the various standards of sports ethics.
4. Explain the responsibilities of Government regarding sports ethics.
5. Write about the role of sports related organisations with respect to sports ethics.

**Fill in the blanks**

- (i) Sports is recognised as an.....activity.
- (ii) Sports provides opportunity for .....interaction.
- (iii) Ethics, morals and values are used ....in daily life.
- (iv) Sports ethics signify not just a certain form of ..... but also a particular way of ..... .
- (v) Code of sports ethics promotes ..... and sports..... .

**Tick (✓) mark either Yes / No**

- (i) Truth worthiness is one of the standard of ethics.  
(Yes/No)
- (ii) Governments encourage adopting high ethical standard in society through sports.  
(Yes/No)
- (iii) Sports organisation formulates rules of the competition in the light of sports ethics.  
(Yes/No)
- (iv) Always adhere to the high standard of fair play.  
(Yes/No)
- (v) There are six standards of fair play.  
(Yes/No)