

# THIS WEEK AT THE CENTER FOR ETHICS\*



Friday, April 4, 2008

- This Week at the Center on hiatus next week. Many of the Center staff will be in Fort Worth this next week: April 6 -11 at the American Alliance of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. April 6 -11: Dr. Stoll, TA's Barnes and Brunner, and Doctoral student Pete VanMullem, as well as former doc students, Dr. Lynda Cochran of SUNY Brockport, Dr. Amukela Gwebu of University of Iowa, Dr. Jackie Williams of Slippery Rock University, Dr. Jennifer Beller, Washington State University, and HPERD colleague, Dr. Grace Goc Karp will present papers and research abstracts. The largest international professional convention in the field of physical activity, the Alliance of five national associations, six district associations, and a research consortium support healthy lifestyles through high quality programs.
- Two Center graduate students, Kim Robertello and Pete VanMullem from the Center were nominated from the Department of HPERD for the University of Idaho Graduate Student Expo. Justin Barnes was nominated by the Center.
- We will be having a visiting doctoral intern for a few weeks this summer. Matthew Schantz from Central Michigan University will be here at the Center from May 12 -16<sup>th</sup> working and studying to for his doctoral work in character education. He will be bringing wife and three little ones with him.
- Attached find article, [Judgment Calls](#) by R.J. Anderson, that was published in Coaching Management about different character programs available across the country. WWC is mentioned as well as [our Center for ETHICS\\*](#). This journal is published for football coaches in the US.
- Received request from Cornell University to help with study on character education.
- Dr. Stoll reviewed one article for JOPERD, the largest educational journal for teachers in physical education, recreation and dance. Reaching 15,000 members and providing more information on HPERD issues than any other publication in the field. A peer reviewed journal, JOPERD has published for more than 100 years.
- Dr. Stoll is editor of the International Association of Philosophy of Sport's Newsletter. The March/April edition went on line this past week. Housed here at Idaho, the Newsletter is published four times yearly to members on all continents except Antarctica. Dr. Stoll has been editor for the past 12 years and is a former president.
- Justin Barnes, Dr. Stoll, Dr. Beller and Helen Brown are working on grant through the Templeton Foundation to offer an online CEU course in character education and servant leadership.
- Data for evaluation of WWC high schools were received this week. Center evaluates the assessment of character education programs.

- Student advising and Research outside of Center
  - Dr. Stoll wrote three letters of recommendation this week for undergraduate students.
- **Coming events:**
  - Kim Robertello's, doctoral candidate in COE and TA at Center, will defend her dissertation on April 21, 2008. Kim's research is focused toward philosophic program evaluation of alcohol treatment programs.
  - COE doctoral student and Center TA, David Brunner, has been selected for the keynote of the Northwest Graduate Sport Psychology Conference on April 26.
  - Dr. Stoll will be traveling to Louisiana Tech to present materials on character education and sport servant leadership to the athletic department, April 27 -29. This presentation is a part of the contractual agreement with Winning With Character.

# Judgment Calls

Coaching is more than teaching players who to block and where to run. Successful coaches talk about helping players learn how to make good choices off the field, not just on it.

*By R.J. Anderson, an Assistant Editor at Coaching Management. He can be reached at: [rja@MomentumMedia.com](mailto:rja@MomentumMedia.com).*

David Wetzel, Head Coach at Ronald Reagan High School in San Antonio, Texas, is a hands-on coach with a reputation for running a clean program that develops well-behaved young men. During an interview for this article, Wetzel, who is also the school's athletic director, was driving home and talking to us on his cell phone. Halfway through the conversation he pulled his vehicle to the side of the road and asked us to hold on for a minute.

As he stopped his car, Wetzel lowered his phone, and called out to a couple of his players he saw walking on the sidewalk. "Hey Joseph, what's going on?" Wetzel said. "How did you get home so fast?"

The player told Wetzel that he had rode the bus home. "Does your mom know where you are?" Wetzel asked. Joseph politely answered yes. "Okay then," Wetzel replied. "You guys be careful."

It may have only been a short exchange, but what Wetzel did that day is an example of a coach having a presence in his player's off-field decision-making process. Wetzel may or may not have caused the player to rethink his plans for the afternoon, but taking the time to check up on his players and remind them he is keeping an eye on them is one of many things a coach can do to encourage good decision-making.

Whether they're committing felonies such as assault, theft, or possession of narcotics, or relatively minor offenses like under-age drinking, more and more of today's student-athletes are making headlines for the wrong reasons. No matter the crime or misdeed, there is usually one common denominator when athletes get in trouble: poor decision-making.

Since players will inevitably make mistakes off the field, coaches are always looking for ways to help them build a better foundation for value-based reasoning. We talked with four coaches about their approach to addressing problematic behavior and keeping student-athletes in the game, on and off the field.

## Guitar Hero

Wetzel hasn't had many off-field problems during his time with the Rattlers, and he thinks part of the reason is a proactive approach to character development. "Every day during the off-season, we do a five-minute character lesson," says Wetzel, who by state association rules is allowed to meet with his team for a 40-minute period each school day outside the season. "Our lessons are designed to help players make good decisions off the field. It can be as simple as me or an assistant coach telling a short story about alcohol or counseling them about sex-related topics, academics, conducting themselves with adults, and how they act around their friends—we go through a little bit of everything."

Wetzel isn't afraid to use unconventional tactics to drive a point home. "I think the way a message is delivered really makes a difference in how effectively it's received," he says. "For example, one week we were covering the dangers of alcohol abuse so I brought my guitar and played the song "Alcohol" by Brad Paisley. The song talks about the perils of drinking and parodies the stupid things people do when they're under the influence of alcohol. The kids really paid attention to that one."

One of Wetzel's ongoing lessons reminds players of the importance of conducting themselves well in public. "We tell our kids that they are Reagan Rattler football players even when they're off the field. As a result, they are held to a higher standard, and they will be watched," says Wetzel. "I use myself as an example: When I go into a restaurant, someone there will know who I am and have certain expectations for my behavior. If I look or act like a slouch, that's the impression they'll have about our entire program. The same holds true for our players. It may not be fair, but that's how it is."

The classroom and field aren't the only settings where Wetzel makes his presence felt. In addition to holding team barbecues and swim parties, Wetzel likes to keep a watchful eye on his players' off-field activities. "We keep our ears to the ground so we can take steps to head off things like parties or kids running away," says Wetzel. "We also try to be involved in the community and encourage our players to be involved in other activities than just playing sports. We want them to be visible, positive members of the community."

“Discipline isn’t about screaming and hollering,” he adds. “It’s about young men having trust and knowing why we’re asking them to do certain things. If we can establish trust, and communicate that we care about them off the field, we can reach them, teach them, and guide them.”

### **Character Study**

To Mark Richt, Head Coach at the University of Georgia, teaching life lessons is simply part of the territory when dealing with college athletes. “I think college is the most volatile time for any person, and we need to help our players through this turbulent period,” Richt says. “This is the time when they first start making decisions independently—which can lead to both good and bad choices. We have to coach them to make the right ones.”

To help players improve their decision-making, Georgia hired Bobby Lankford, who is entering his sixth year as the team’s character education coordinator. Lankford, who players view as an assistant coach, is with the team at every practice and game and is continually encouraging and counseling the team about living moral lives.

Lankford also coordinates the classroom component of Georgia’s character education program, which involves 43 interactive lessons. The program’s curriculum is designed by Dr. Sharon Stoll, CEO and founder of the Center for Ethical Theory and Honor In Competition and Sport (E.T.H.I.C.S.) at the University of Idaho, and a partner with Lankford in a company called Winning with Character. In addition to Georgia, Stoll designs character-specific lesson plans for more than 40 high school programs and the Atlanta Braves farm system.

At Georgia, players are grouped by class level and meet with Lankford, Richt, and other coaches for a half an hour each week to talk about values such as honesty, fairness, and responsibility. Coaches are encouraged to talk about their past experiences and decisions former athletes made in similar situations. “The coaches serve as facilitators and ask questions that get the kids talking,” says Lankford. “The discussions cover tough issues like sex, STDs, drugs and alcohol, respecting and honoring women, and unplanned pregnancies.”

Richt, who leads Winning with Character classes for the team’s seniors, makes each player on the team aware of the role good decision-making plays in their development. “I ask each player what their goals are and what they picture themselves doing after they leave school,” says Richt. “Then I tell them that everything we do here is geared toward helping them achieve those goals. I also tell them that if they do something that keeps them from reaching those goals, we’re going to hold them accountable. But we’re also going to try to correct their mistakes and get them back in the right direction.”

Still, Richt and countless other coaches know no matter how many character-building programs you put in place, there are going to be episodes of negative behavior. “Let’s face it, everybody makes mistakes—we’re all human,” says Richt. “If a kid makes a mistake and admits to what he did, is remorseful, and wants to make it right, we can deal with him. If he can’t take responsibility for his actions, or it happens again, then we have a problem and it might be time for him to go somewhere else.

“We discipline our players because we love them,” Richt continues. “Every form of discipline I use incorporates an element of punishment and an element of education. You have to teach them why what they did was wrong and why it’s important to do things right. It’s a combination of punishment, education, and love.”

### **Global Approach**

When Dan Hawkins took over as Head Coach at the University of Colorado two years ago, he inherited a program stained by multiple controversies driven by poor decision-making. National news stories were ripping the school and its football team for using alcohol and sex to lure recruits.

For Hawkins, the goal of accruing wins was secondary to cleaning up the program and getting the team back on track morally. This meant spending as much time coaching his players off the field as on it. But for Hawkins, those demands meshed perfectly with his approach to the profession.

“I do way more parenting and mentoring than I do Xs and Os,” says Hawkins. “I like that part of my job—it’s a huge part of what coaching is about.”

Hawkins was hired at Colorado not just due to his impressive winning record, but also because of his reputation for running clean programs based on developing players with strong character. Though the skill

levels of his student-athletes varied as Hawkins went from high school to NAIA to NCAA Division I, his approach to discipline has been consistent.

"You have to set guidelines and standards for what you expect in every area, including conduct," says Hawkins. "You also have to build a philosophical foundation that helps players meet those expectations. For me, that means creating an environment that fosters excellence and a level of success at a global level—the student-athlete experience needs to be enriching on the academic, athletic, and personal level.

"When that ball gets rolling and players buy in, it perpetuates better behavior and decision making," Hawkins adds. "You have to lay your foundation for success and let those principles guide and bring players along."

Developing an over-riding culture is key, because Hawkins feels that simply giving athletes a set of rules and ordering them not to screw up doesn't work. "Just enforcing rules like 'Johnny Hardguy' might work at first," says Hawkins. "But once the fear factor wears off, it usually won't be very successful if the right culture isn't in place."

For that reason, Hawkins also has little use for signed codes of conduct. "Part of their message is okay to some degree," he says. "But to me contracts just ask guys to adhere to minimum expectations. I'm not into minimums.

"Plus, you can't legislate morality," Hawkins adds. "There are a lot of laws in our country, but there's no law about being nice, or being courteous, or being generous. Those types of things are important, but they're impossible to address in a conduct or behavior code."

Hawkins instead prefers that coaches model the behavior they expect. "Players have to see that behavior over and over in different situations until it becomes something they understand and believe in," Hawkins says. "Most of what we do involves hiring people who exude the values we're looking for in our players." For all the talk of policies and procedures, Hawkins says the key to helping players keep out of trouble is straightforward, though not always easy. "I don't care if you're in the NFL or junior high, coaching is about developing trust, love, understanding, and a true belief in one another," says Hawkins. "When there is discipline involved, it doesn't mean that you don't care about them, because you do. But sometimes you have to do some hard things because you know the long-term lessons that accompany that discipline are extremely important."

#### Dash of Life

Coming off a depressing 3-8 season in 2007, which culminated in the dismissal of the Head Coach and the Athletic Director tendering his resignation, Florida A&M University was at a crossroads. The school was looking for someone with the coaching skill and integrity to return the once-proud program back to respectability. With a reputation for running a tight ship that recruits and develops well-behaved student-athletes, Joe Taylor was heralded as a natural fit when Florida A&M asked him to fill its vacant Head Coach position this winter.

During his distinguished coaching career, including 16 years as Head Coach at Hampton University, Taylor developed his own blueprint for developing high-character student-athletes. His plan for restoring Florida A&M to glory is heavily dependent on getting his players to buy into that blueprint, including his beliefs and philosophies for behaving on and off the field.

"There's a direct correlation between discipline on the field and discipline off the field," says Taylor. "To call yourself a teammate, you have to be accountable in everything you do."

To drive home his message, Taylor implemented regularly scheduled meetings that focus on character development. Every Wednesday evening for about an hour, Taylor stands in front of his players and shares lessons from current events and tells parables he's picked up along the way. Among those lessons is a homespun acronym he constantly references as a reminder to work hard and make good decisions.

"Every person starts with four numbers: the year they are born. And those are numbers they have no control over," says Taylor. "Then there are four more numbers that symbolize when a person expires, which they have only some control over. In between those two sets of numbers there's a dash—the symbol between the date of birth and date of death—and we want our players to learn how to control what happens during that dash."

For Taylor, the letters in the word dash all have significant meaning:

D is for discipline

A is for attitude  
S is for sacrifice  
H is for habits.

"We use the term 'Control your DASH' as a tool to help create better decision-makers," says Taylor. "D is for discipline and it's a simple reminder for them to do the right thing. We have signs throughout the football facilities telling athletes, 'Do the Right Thing!'"

For attitude, Taylor tells his players that they aren't measured by what happens to them, but how they respond to an incident or situation. And for Taylor, sacrifice means that people we were put on Earth to serve, not to be served.

To spell out the importance of good habits, Taylor tells players that man does not decide his future. Instead, man decides his habits and his habits decide his future. "Let's say someone tells me he wants to be a doctor," Taylor says. "If I hear they're out drinking every night, their habits tell me they want to be an alcoholic, not a doctor.

"We tell our players there is no magic dust I can sprinkle around or magic pill to become successful," Taylor says. "But if they follow our blueprint, they will become men—very successful men."

## SIDEBAR

### RECRUITING CHARACTER

When Dan Hawkins, Head Coach at the University of Colorado, hits the recruiting trail, he looks for student-athletes who bring as much to the table morally as they do athletically. Hawkins, who was brought in to clean up the Buffaloes after a string of high profile off-the-field scandals, knows he has very little margin for error and he can't take chances on those with questionable character.

"I'm huge on character, in fact that's the first thing on the list," says Hawkins. "If we feel a player has too many issues, we're quick to move on."

To make sure players are a good fit for his program, Hawkins probes recruits and their parents to gauge their values. "We spend a lot of time trying to recruit parents and players who have certain beliefs and philosophies about what's important in life so that we're all on the same page when they get here," says Hawkins. "I'm very much into personal excellence and developing kids. If that's not important to the student-athlete or their parents, then they're probably not a good fit for us.

Dogged by incidents during the summer of 2007, University of Texas Head Coach Mack Brown faced hard questions about his approach to recruiting. Critics wondered if in the interest of bringing in the best players to Austin, Brown and the Longhorns had become more willing to overlook an elite athlete's off-field character issues.

Though he disagrees with the assessment that his standards dropped, Brown says he and his staff have taken a harder line on bringing in high-character recruits—especially during the last recruiting cycle. "We wanted to make sure we got the highest level of character we could," says. "This year's class probably has the best academics of any class we've ever signed. We also felt like we turned down some really good players who didn't meet the character criteria we set."

Brown says recruits' academic abilities are great indicators of their character and that Texas takes a hard look at each player's class rank and core GPA. "Standardized test scores can be all over the place with kids," says Brown, "but if they've been competitive in their environment with the core curriculum, it's a sign of discipline."

Brown also looks for players who come from successful high school programs. "Guys who have won at that level usually have been held more accountable," says Brown. "And they have more confidence, which is a trait we've been concentrating on a lot lately. If a guy is insecure or shy, this place may eat him up." "Lastly, we want players who are happy and smile," Brown continues. "We need to like them as people because if we don't like them, they're probably not going to like us."