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AND MAY THE BEST CHEATER WIN

Talking Points

1. Is honesty always the best policy? Do you agree with Thomas Jefferson that "honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom"?
2. What is the most appropriate way for an educational institution to deal with plagiarism?
3. Is cheating acceptable in your peer group? If so, what rules apply? View a film such as *TV Sale* (NFB, Media and Society, I).

Every youth knows he can get into deep trouble by stealing cameras, peddling dope, mugging winos, forging cheques, or copying someone else's answers during an exam. Those are examples of not playing by the rules. Cheating. But every youth also knows that in organized sports across North America, cheating is not only perfectly okay, it's *recommended*. "The structure of sport . . . actually promotes deviance," says U.S. sport sociologist D.S. Eitzen.

The downy-cheeked hockey player who refuses to play dirty may find himself fired off the team. The boy soccer player who refuses to rough up a superior striker to "throw him off his game" may find himself writhing under a coach's tongue-lashing. The basketball player who refuses to foul a goal-bound enemy star in the last seconds of a close game may find himself riding the bench next week. Thus, we have that cynical paradox, "the good foul," a phrase that makes about as much sense as "a beneficial outbreak of bubonic plague."

If organized sports offer benefits to youngsters, they also offer a massive program of moral corruption. The recruiting of college athletes in the United States, and the use of academic fraud to maintain their "eligibility," stunk so powerfully in 1980 that *Newsweek* decided "cheating has become the name of the game," and spoke of the fear on U.S. campuses of "an epidemic of corruption." But the epidemic had already arrived, and what really worried *Newsweek* was national acceptance of corruption as normal: "Many kids are admitting that they have tried to take the bribes and inducements on the sleazy terms with which they are offered. Their complaints are not so much that illegalities exist, but that they aren't getting their share of the goodies."

Fans, alumni, coaches, college administrators, players, and their parents all believed nothing could ever be more important than winning (or more disgraceful than losing), and that cheating in victory's cause was therefore commendable.

"Candidates for big-time sport's Hall of Shame have seemed suddenly to break out all over like an ugly rash," William Oscar Johnson wrote last year in *Sports Illustrated*. He constructed a dismal catalogue of assaults on cops, drunken brawls, adventures in the cocaine trade, credit-card frauds, and other sordid activities by rich professional athletes who, in more naïve times, might have earned the adulation of small boys. Jim Finks, then Chicago Bears general manager, speculated that the trouble with the younger lawbreakers was that they had "been looked after all the way from junior high school. Some of them have had doctored grades. This plus the affluence [astronomical salaries] means there has never been any pressing need for them to work things out for themselves. They have no idea how to face reality."

No one in all their lives had taught them about fair play. "In the early days of playground and high-school leagues, one of the key issues was moral regulation," says Alan Ingham, a teacher at the University of Washington. "You got sports, and you got Judeo-Christian principles thrown in, too." Now, however, "the majority of things taught in sports are performance things." John Pooley of the School of Recreation, Physical and Health Education at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, asked Calvin Hill, a former Dallas Cowboy, what percentage of all the football rookies he'd ever met had said that, as college players, they'd encountered no cheating. Hill's reply was short: "None."

So here we have the most powerful nation in the world, and it blithely corrupts children so they'll mature as athletic machines without an ounce of the moral sense that might prevent their sniffing cocaine or complicate their lust for victory. Pray for nuclear disarmament, fans.

Still, Canadians are little better. We all know who invented the game that inspired Paul Newman to star in *Slap Shot*, a black and bloody comedy about butchery on ice. We can't argue that it's only American coaches who teach peewees to draw tripping penalties rather than let an enemy player continue a breakaway on your goal. Moreover, I happen to live in Halifax, where only last winter St. Mary's University was disgraced for allowing a ringer from Florida to play varsity basketball. The coach of a rival but inferior team ferreted out the truth about the player's ineligibility. In doing so, he imported one of the fine old traditions of amateur sports in the States: if you can't beat them, hire a private dick. Oh well, that's what universities are supposed to be all about: the pursuit of truth.

Pursuing another truth, Pooley of Dalhousie surveyed recent graduates of

three down-east universities. The grads were both men and women, and they had all played intercollegiate field hockey, ice hockey, soccer or basketball. "With one exception [a woman field hockey player], all felt there was immense pressure to win," Pooley said. Typical responses: "Winning is everything in university sport. . . . The measure of success was not how well you played but the win-loss record. . . . There is incredible pressure to perform because there are always two or three guys on the bench ready to take your place."

Half said their coaches had urged "winning at any cost." One grad revealed, "Some coaches send their players 'out to get' a good player on the other team." Another described "goon coaches who stressed intimidation and rough play." Coaches had not only condoned tactical fouls, but had actually taught the arts of fouling during practice. A player who had competed against British and Bermudian teams said they played "intensely but fairly" while the Maritimers "sometimes used dirty tactics" or "blatantly tried to stop a player."

Pooley wondered if the grads, after years in intercollegiate sport, felt it had promoted fair play. Only the field-hockey players said yes. Answers from the others were shockers: "Everyone cheats and the best cheater wins. . . . Fair play and sportsmanship are *not* promoted. This is a joke. . . . You did whatever you could to win. . . . You are taught to gain an advantage, whatever it takes." Such cynicism, from people so young they've barely doffed their mortarboards, confirms the sad opinion of one Kalevi Heinila, who told a world scientific congress in 1980 that fair play was "ripe to be dumped in the waste basket of sport history."

The irony in all this—and it's both ludicrous and nauseating—is that universities defend their expensive programs for intercollegiate sports with lip service to the notion that keen teamwork in clean competition nurtures good citizens. Fair play in sports, don't you know, spawns fair players for the world of politics, the professions, and business.

That's a crock. What intercollegiate sport really teaches is how to get away with murder, how to be crooked within the law. Just listen to one of the fresh-faced grads in Pooley's survey as he sets out to make his way in the world, his eyes shining with idealism: "University sport teaches you to play as close to the limits as possible; and this is the attitude that will get you ahead in the business world." Another acknowledged that his "concept of fair play decreased"; but, on the other hand, he had learned to "stretch the rules to my advantage." A young woman confided, "University sport has made me tough, less sensitive to other people's feelings." Still others stressed that college sport had prepared them for "the real world," for "real life," in which winning was all.

Cheating in amateur sport, Pooley says, "gives it a hollow feeling. Many

coaches do not have integrity. I'm still sickened by that. It upsets me, at all levels." A tall, talkative, forceful man with a bony face and a thick brush of steely hair, Pooley has coached soccer in six countries, once played for professional teams in Britain, and now, at 53, cavorts on a team for men over 35. "I'm still playing league soccer," he wrote in a paper for the 1984 Olympic Scientific Congress in Eugene, Oregon, "because: a) I helped to organize and plan my own youth soccer experiences; b) coming second or being beaten was okay; c) I was always much more interested in playing well than playing to win; d) I never minded playing less well than I'd earlier played; and e) I always felt successful at the level played."

Those are highly un-American reasons for playing any sport, but Pooley is originally from northern England, the nation that invented "fair play" and knew that certain things just weren't cricket. That was in a time long before Americans institutionalized cheating even in soap box derbies, before athletes gobbled steroids, before universities invented courses in weight lifting and racketball so quarterbacks could qualify as "students." Moreover, Pooley believes that the few adults who stick with team sports until middle age do so because, as youngsters, "They preferred the feel of the ball, the pass well made, the sweetness of the stroke or the power in the shot, rather than whether they won or lost the game." Such people don't need to cheat.

Some scholars believe that the sleaziness of organized sports simply reflects the sleaziness of our entire culture. Pooley points out, for instance, that one sociologist offers two reasons why cheating in sports shouldn't be "disproportionately reprimanded." The first is that it's "endemic in society," and the second is that even more cheating probably occurs in other fields. Pooley disagrees. He says this argument is like saying you should not disproportionately reprimand the clergy for being dishonest. Poor Pooley. He has such quaint ideas about sports. He actually believes they should not be immoral, and should be fun.