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Nine

Coaching, Gamesmanship, and Intimidation

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Having lived in Ohio all my life and being an avid Ohio sports fan, I know about coaches who use intimidation. I grew up watching Woody Hayes coach Ohio State; Bobby Knight is a local hero who grew up less than an hour away (my high school basketball coach was one of his college teammates). Throughout junior and senior high school I watched basketball games coached by Bill Musselman at Ashland College. Known for creating intimidating, energy-charged pregame warm-up drills and for later coaching the University of Minnesota in college basketball's best known on-the-court fight against Ohio State in 1972, Musselman is quoted as saying, "Losing is worse than death because you have to live with defeat." The list of intimidating coaches from Ohio is extensive—coaches who know how to threaten officials, players, and reporters, who bully anyone else who gets in their way on or off the playing field. And they are praised as coaches who know how to motivate players and win games. This used to be an accepted practice among coaches. While it has waned, it is still overlooked in a coach who wins. Any serious evaluation or moral critique of coaching ethics must include a close inspection of intimidation and bullying by coaches as a means of gamesmanship.

Gamesmanship

Gamesmanship is a method used by coaches or athletes to gain an upper hand in a contest. The concept originates from Stephen Potter's 1947 book, *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship*. In this well-known satirical work Potter calls it "The Art of Winning Games Without Actually Cheating"—that is my personal 'working definition."¹ Leslie Howe characterized it "as an attempt to win one game by playing another . . . [it] is a deliberate strategy of competition . . . designed for winning regardless of athletic excellence."² It is using numerous strategic tactics to better one's position in the game or using dubious methods to secure an unfair victory while remaining within the constitutive rules of the game.³ Although some consider all gamesmanship cheating, it is not cheating narrowly understood as intentionally violating the constitutive rules of a contest. Gamesmanship ruthlessly pursues victory by all means short of apparent rule breaking. Most consider it a legal but not necessarily moral approach to playing games. Howe continues, "Violation of the rules is already [necessarily] prohibited by the rules; attempting to violate the rules is cheating [which nullifies the game], and gamesmanship [I am supposing] is not identical with cheating, though it might have much the same end, namely, winning with less strictly athletic effort."⁴ So while it may not technically violate the written rules of the contest, gamesmanship uses maneuvers that threaten the spirit of the game and attains victory through skulduggery.

There are numerous species in the genus of gamesmanship. These include attempting to gain competitive advantage by (1) manipulating but not actually violating the rules,⁵ (2) withholding information, (3) practicing outright deception, or (4) using intimidation in its various forms.⁶ This chapter will focus on the use of intimidation as it intensifies into bullying, which includes nonphysical plays primarily expressed as verbal intimidation and threats or actual physical violence.

Potter describes the lesser forms of intimidation as attempts to disrupt the opponent's play or "break the flow." This encompasses getting "inside one's opponent's head" by such things as intentionally disrupting an opponent's play; distracting him, getting him to "over think" his moves, or disrupting his concentration.⁷ Potter provides an example of disrupting a rival's concentration by falsely and intentionally accusing him of cheating.⁸ Using trick plays, stealing signs, or bantering with opponents are acceptable forms of psychological subterfuge. Other measures include growing a shadow beard to create a "menacing" appearance or wearing ominous-looking uniforms. These are amusing more than intimidating, though they are motivated by a desire to apply psychological intimidation. More serious intimidation attempts include calling timeouts to "ice" a shooter or kicker, taunting, throwing inside in

baseball, or firing slap shots at a goalie's head or stacking the ice with thugs in hockey.⁹ But if these practices do not actually violate the rules of the game, can they possibly be justified?

Intimidation is always negative and should never be used, but at advanced levels is disputably a part of the regulative nature of the game.¹⁰ Howe argues that "the good of competitive sport is that it is a test of the whole athlete—not just his or her physical skills."¹¹ It is a misconception to think that advanced sports involve only physical participation, when in fact there are strong intellectual dimensions and players participate as whole beings. This is the justification, says Howe, for using intimidating methods: "The opponent who directs a strategy of gamesmanship against a competitor constructs an opportunity for the other to fail, but the decisive move, the failure, belongs to the target. If the gamer's behavior is within the rules, it cannot be unfair, and the competitive failure of the target is not the result of unfair advantage. It is because the target did not pass one of the fundamental aspects of competition: the test of psychological strength and preparedness."¹² This can only be defensible at higher echelons of competition. Can the receiver running a pattern over the middle who is legally popped by a linebacker mentally recover from the linebacker's intimidating hit to repeat the pattern? Does the field goal kicker waiting to attempt the game-winning kick on the last play of the game withstand the pressure of the defensive team calling a time-out to ice him? Can the visiting college free throw shooter weather the intimidating pressure of the screaming hometown crowd? These mental tests are part of the challenge, and to remove this form of gamesmanship could radically alter the contemporary challenges of these sports.

Howe also makes a moral distinction between different forms of gamesmanship and argues that some forms are necessary while others are impermissible: "We have to make a distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' forms of gamesmanship, the former designating the forms of gamesmanship that are compatible with an ideal of sport as a 'mutual challenge to achieve excellence' and the latter marking out those that are not. Actions such as throwing inside, the fast break, hard tens, and withholding line-up and injury information would fall into the weak category; deception with regard to line calls and fouls (simulation), gross acts of intimidation such as physical abuse (especially where this is above the norm expected in that sport), mobbing officials, and disrupting players' preparations would count in the strong category. The criterion we need to apply, then, in attempting to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate forms of gamesmanship is whether the practice improves both participants or not."¹³ Or whether it contributes to the merit of the challenge. Some forms of gamesmanship are valuable and possibly necessary to games if they do not degrade the participants and they contribute to

the success of the challenge. Others are morally suspect, asserts Howe, since they are athletically self-defeating.¹⁴

However, even weak forms of intimidation are unacceptable in recreational games or where the participants are young. These additional mental challenges are a legitimate part of the game only among those who have a sophisticated level of understanding of the sport and are playing at a reasonably competitive level.¹⁵ Forms of weak intimidation are acceptable in higher levels of sports that include psychological testing as part of the regulative aspect of the game. Bullying is always immoral.

Intimidation and Bullying as Gamesmanship

Intimidation is intended to elicit fear; to browbeat or to frighten someone into submission by inducing distress or a sense of inferiority.¹⁶ Consequently intimidation excludes the mild or weak forms of intimidation. Coaches use intimidation as a form of gamesmanship to gain an advantage over their opponents by breaking the will of the officials, the opponents, or their own players so they can improve their positioning in sporting contests. When understood this way, intimidation is nearly synonymous to bullying.

Bullying is "a conscious, willful, deliberate and repeated hostile activity marked by an imbalance of power; intent to harm, and/or a threat to aggression. Severe bullying can lead to a feeling of terror on the part of the person being bullied."¹⁷ Bullying employs deliberate and repeated antagonistic activity that includes swearing and uncontrollable screaming as its most common manifestation, lurid, offensive comments hurled at an athlete including insults and put-downs. There is constant negativity and criticism that is derogatory in nature and includes publicly ridiculing and humiliating players. "The bully-coach's repertoire includes shouting, cursing, personal denigration, and humiliation. So intimidating is the bully-coach that few young people dare to summon the courage to approach him, let alone challenge his technique or pronouncements."¹⁸ Bobby Knight exemplifies this behavior. As one observer reports, Knight had been seen to "get in kids' faces, grab them by the arms, and spray his spit onto cheeks as he ranted at them. We had seen him show disrespect to referees. He used his body, his eyes, facial gestures, and words to intimidate in the hope of affecting performance or decisions. . . . But his public bullying not only damaged his players, it also set a public example that amateur coaches inevitably mimicked."¹⁹ The most dreadful forms of sports bullying include acts of violence, threats of physical violence, or blaming athletes for failure. Knight once said to player Steve Riskey, "The reason we lost the game was you, it was your fault."²⁰

However, Knight is not a rarity. Consider the following example of bullying as public humiliation in a seventh grade gym class by a junior high school football coach, probably similar to what has gone on in gyms or on playing fields everywhere. "We would play some sort of group game where the winners could return to the locker room one by one, leaving the loser for the end. This last would be called the 'Green Weenie' and his name would be placed on a chalkboard for everyone to see. I remember how hard I would try to avoid being last. On one particular day, I tried as hard as I could and actually came in second to last. I wasn't last!!! The coach just looked at me and said, 'You are always the greenie weenie' and wrote my name on the board as he laughed."²¹ Some coaches are just mean. They pump themselves up to feel good and self-important by acting this way. Former NFL star defensive lineman Joe Ehrmann says, "Bullies act tough in order to hide feelings of insecurity and self-loathing. Coach Bully has an incomprehensible need to dominate his players."²² Despotic coaches find pleasure in breaking people down. They make players feel inferior and in the process make themselves feel superior. This coach could be reliving his own glory, whether real or imagined, by destroying others. This has to be stopped, yet we inexcusably look past the indiscretions of these coaches if they generate enough wins.

Clarifications on Bullying

Bullying, first, is an overused term describing anyone who is demanding or expects competence and results. Unfortunately, any negative corrective is now interpreted as bullying. A boss who expects workers to complete a task or a parent who disciplines a child appropriate to the misbehavior is not a bully. We should be careful not to include every authoritarian coach who believes in a vigorous sense of personal discipline and carries this over to the competitive arena as being a bully. Bullying is a very specific type of strong intimidation that is aggressive and antagonistic and uses humiliation from a position of authority. It is selfish and does not consider the ends of the victim, though the bully can deceive himself into thinking it is for the victim's benefit.

Second, we should distinguish intimidation from toughness. Modern sports are complex, arduous, and demanding. They require toughness as part of preparation and performance. Practices for these sports are hard and should be if they are to create excellence. Coaches can be demanding and need to teach both physical and mental toughness without turning to strong forms of intimidation and bullying. Teaching toughness is not equivalent to bullying.

Third, intimidation should not be confused with intensity. A coach can be intense without being a bully. Intensity involves strong depth of feeling and great coaches have exceptional concentration levels. Some coaching personalities are naturally forceful and competition can be intense. A vehement, intense coach may not intend to create fear, but fearful feelings may result and an athlete may feel threatened by this coach's personality. Not all intimidating actions are bullying or necessarily immoral, however. Intense coaches must be acutely self-conscious and aware of how they come across to their athletes, especially young ones. Intensity may be perceived as intimidating, though the intent to intimidate is absent. Coaches like John Wooden, Tom Landry, Tony Dungy, Pat Summitt, Larry Brown, and Phil Jackson are intense, but they never threaten the personhood of their players and are never bullies. A coach must teach that the actions and performances of athletes have consequences but without attacking the person or without being a raging lunatic. I had a high school basketball coach who was intense and very competitive. He had a steely stare and stood 6 foot 5. If he seemed imposing to a 5 foot 7 point guard, it was certainly not his intent to be threatening. We knew he cared about us personally and that his corrective instruction, while it may have seemed harsh at times, was not understood as personal. On the other hand my ninth grade football coach and college JV basketball coach were intimidating and did not seem to care about me. I believe they acted this way because they thought they were supposed to (one had played for Woody Hayes at Ohio State) and felt insecure. Many erroneously believe that creating this atmosphere earns them respect. I did not respect either coach. They both confused fear with respect. Intimidation may elicit fear but never earns respect.

Targets of the Bully Coach

The bully coach uses intimidation to coerce officials not to make calls against his or her team, to remove or diminish the opponent's ability to be an athletic threat,²³ or to motivate and challenge his or her players. Some coaches browbeat officials to gain advantage by causing the official to hesitate when making a marginal call against their team. This coach virtually terrorizes officials through violent bursts of indignation accompanied by yelling, arm waving, and menacing glares. Coaches will even feign anger in order to exert pressure or "work"²⁴ the official to get the next call. Some coaches cultivate a reputation as putting fear in the hearts of adjudicators. Major League Baseball has a long history of managers like Billy Martin, Earl Weaver, Lou Piniella, and Bobby Cox who have excelled in this practice. They wanted officials to ask themselves, *Why inconvenience myself to make this call and take this abuse? I*

won't call it because I don't need him screaming in my face again. Although coaches are not necessarily in a dominant power relationship with officials, some use intimidation as a strong form of gamesmanship for which there is no moral justification. Some coaches teach their athletes to be intimidators and may offer a bounty to harm an opposing player.²⁵ Weak forms include directing a pitcher to throw inside or emphasizing hard contact in full contact sports. Others might call an opponent a name not worth repeating to rile him up or use excessively aggressive players to intimidate opponents or even take out an opponent's best player by causing a malicious intentional injury. Joe Ehrmann tells the following story:

I was 11 years old. It was during a youth league basketball game, and I was in-bounding the ball from under the basket. But the opposing player was all over me and I could not get the ball in. The coach called 2 consecutive timeouts to avoid a 5-second call that would have cost us possession of the ball. The jumping-bean kid guarding the in-bounds pass was too close to me and the he wasn't giving me room. Coach pulled me aside after the 2nd time-out, gripped my arm, and would not let go as the referee's whistle summoned us back on the court. He put his face very close to mine so no one would hear and looked me straight in the eyes without blinking. "Bring the ball back over your head with both hands and smash it into his face," he said. He put his right hand on my left shoulder and squeezed it so tightly that it hurt. "Smash the ball as hard as you can in his face. You will teach him a lesson about who he is playing against." I remember walking to the space below the basket and looking at the kid whose nose I was about to break. I remember knowing I was going to do it even though most of me didn't want to. . . . I looked at my coach as the ref blew the whistle and handed me the ball. The coach kept staring at me without blinking. I gripped the ball, slammed it into my hands as my teammates broke in zigzags, lifted it above my head, and brought it down with all my force right into the kid's face. Blood shot everywhere and the kid's mother came rushing from the stands screaming at me as her son lay crying on the court. The whole gym stared at me. . . . Coach praised me in the locker room, upholding that play as something positive, and "the way the game was to be played!" Shame engulfed me.²⁶

Here is a youth team coach forcing a young boy to direct violence at an athletic adversary. Attempting to win through gamesmanship can include bullying as a means to enhance and motivate performance by using fear rather than pursuing excellence to perform at a higher level. This behavior is

rationalized as a way to toughen up young athletes in order to advance their performance and prepare them for real life. People like Hayes, Knight, and Musselman used these strong types of intimidation and became clichés. Their actions have been self-perpetuating. A multitude of coaches model these harmful methods. Coaches emulate one another, and “bully-coaches in youth and interscholastic sports have plenty of institutionally accepted role models whose fame condones such behavior.”²⁷ They are all around us at every level of sports. Recently I became acquainted with a female college coach who bullied her athletes by depriving them of meals, harshly berating them, and treating them as nonentities.

Bullying is wrong for a variety of reasons. A coach who tries to intimidate officials, team members, and opposing players is attempting to win in ways other than exhibiting the abilities the game was designed to test. The bullying coach, then, is undermining the challenge of the game. Bullying coaches who treat their own players in objectionable ways are violating their moral duty to care for the welfare, health, and safety of their players and to treat them with respect and dignity. (On this point, see Mitten’s discussion of the legal duties of coaches with respect to the health and safety of their athletes in Chapter 13.)

Creating Fear

Bullying creates fear in its victims. There are different kinds of fear and some have utilitarian value. Fear can alert one to real danger or cause one to focus energy and attention where it is needed. A proper fear response can save a life. And there can be appropriate forms of fear in sports coaching. A tough coach may justifiably use a tempered realistic fear of losing, fear of failure, or fear of a loss of playing time in order to get a player’s attention or to inspire a player who is underachieving or lazy. But this should be done while affirming the athlete’s personhood so that the athlete knows the coach is appropriately evaluating her performance and not dismissing her personhood. Coaches who cared about me caused me to be appropriately afraid of losing playing time. This kind of fear is closer to disappointment than to terror and does not threaten the athlete’s personhood or identity. It is not the same as the fear elicited by a bully. Coaches who cannot control their tempers, punish athletes by overpracticing, withholding rewards, screaming in their faces, grabbing them, and throwing objects may deteriorate to the point of irrationality and actually lash out physically.

Bullying generates different responses: outright fear and fearful anxiety; both include fear of humiliation. The philosopher Martin Heidegger sharply distinguishes fear from anxiety. “Fear is always fear of something, and for the

sake of something, for example one fears for one’s life, or one fears about some possibility.”²⁸ Anxiety, on the other hand is more subtle. “Anxiety is precisely anxiety over nothing,”²⁹ because it is not due to a singular event but an atmosphere or mood of despair that is just there.

Outright fear includes an expectation of physical injury. It is a pragmatic response to a frightening entity or experience. An aggressive coach poses a direct threat. The coach may use threatening language expressed in an angry tone, possibly expressing uncontrolled anger where the recipient may even perceive physical danger. Many coaches erroneously equate athletics with the military and with manhood and prowess. Some team-training camps and practices have been modeled on military boot camps emphasizing toughness, discipline, and a rigid chain of command.³⁰ These bullying coaches often make bold analogies between sports, war, and manhood. Like marine drill sergeants, these autocratic coaches find pleasure in breaking people down. I remember a college coach once coming out to a local basketball court where I was playing with some high school friends and bringing with him several large men who enjoyed pounding on younger, smaller high school guys. We had several pickup games with them, and when we finished we were physically beaten and emotionally broken. These were not impressive basketball players but thugs who bullied us into submission on the court that night.

At their most extreme, these coaches use threats of violence to induce a kind of terror. Players then have a choice: fight or flight. Those who fight become more aggressive and may challenge the coach or direct their aggression toward the opponent. They may achieve a higher level of athletic performance, but at what cost? Longtime NFL star defensive lineman Joe Ehrmann, who has coached high school for many years, says, “I realized that anger had driven much of my athletic success. Coaches leveraged it—they fired me up and charged me up by angering me.”³¹ This can become a way of creating cult-like devotion in athletes who would mindlessly run through a wall for the coach. The end, however, cannot justify such degrading means.

The other common response is flight. Many parents refuse to allow their children to quit teams because they fear quitting will become a pattern that carries over into all the difficult challenges in life. But there are behaviors more detrimental than quitting a team. Sometimes it is better to quit than endure abuse. The young athlete flees the sport, realizing that a game is not worth the pain or abuse.

We homeschooled our daughter Tess through eighth grade. Along the way she participated in lots of soccer, softball, and dance. She was ready to enter high school and participate in softball but wanted to take a look at other sports, especially basketball. She spent much of the summer before ninth grade becoming a respectable shooter. We met the new coach of a

weak program that most of the good athletes were avoiding. The coach invited Tess to an open gym. When I picked her up, she was uncharacteristically quiet and only said, "Dad, I'm never going back there." The next day she picked up a tennis racket, and by her junior year she was a starter on varsity tennis, later playing college tennis. She was so upset by one day of basketball that she never went back. Years later she described the verbal mistreatment she experienced from a female coach who intimidated her: Tess fled to maintain her dignity:

The second type of fear is anxiety. It is more covert but possibly more damaging. Here a perpetually negative coach creates a destructive mood. It usually includes critical, degrading remarks but could also include punishing the team through abusive workouts or withholding privilege such as meal money. The coach is self-deceived into thinking he or she knows how to inspire athletic performance when in reality it creates a crushing feeling of anxiety and self-annihilation.

When a coach targets an individual the intimidation begins slowly and the athlete may be oblivious to the effect it is having on her. The coach may speak derisively or make false insinuations, such as "you look like you're gaining weight." "You are not putting forth the effort." "You don't care." This coach knows how to humiliate the athlete and create a sense of anxiety. The athlete feels anguish but may not know precisely why. Her life is not being threatened, but she feels like a nonentity. She feels ashamed but does not know the reason. Athletes in this state will lower their eyes, retreat to solitude, and experience a sense of dejection. But they likely will blame themselves and may be deceived into thinking if they stick with it they will eventually succeed or become better persons.

These menacing coaches thrive on creating an atmosphere of anxiety; their coaching identity is tied to their ability to vex or trouble the athlete. It is part of an unbounded vanity. Bullies get enjoyment from intimidating others. The bully coach calls male athletes "girls," pansies, or worse if they don't measure up and pushes them by demeaning them. Coaches devoid of moral courage become defensive and attack anyone who questions their methods or motives.

Bully coaches create feelings of worry, unease, and dread, like the main character in Dostoevsky's novel *Notes from Underground*, who is overlooked and abused by everyone and feels like "an object of contempt," "like an insect on the wall" and states of his experience, "I sat ignored by everyone, crushed and annihilated."³² Young athletes are particularly vulnerable to anger experiences and the resulting anxiety. The athlete bullied this way is more liable to stick it out, become depressed, and blame herself. A sense of failure too early in life can create a fear of failing, and immature athletes do not know how to

cope with this. They retreat into solitude to survive. "Anxiety leads us to drop the mask of our everyday familiarity with the world. Anxiety makes everything of such little significance that even our own sense of self is lost. Anxiety is the recognition of a certain nothingness, the groundlessness in our existence."³³ The athlete experiences a sense of personal betrayal and alienation though she may not know why. "Anxiety reveals to us a certain homelessness—we are not at home in the world, the world faces us as something weird or 'uncanny'."³⁴ Bullied athletes feel estranged, no longer at home in the game they love. (Indeed as Jeffrey Fry points out Chapter 10, recent research in neuroscience strongly suggests that the behavior of influential individuals can change the brains of young athletes, for the better in the case of good coaches but for the worse in the case of bullying ones.) Coaches unfortunately rationalize these actions by a naive pragmatic argument that it works, but it is destructive and dehumanizing. In the past, some allowed coaches to berate, humiliate, and physically and emotionally punish athletes in order to shape and inspire them, but no longer.

Players never forget their coaches. One coach has stated, "I have coached hundreds of players by now and I am certain of this: 100 percent of them will remember my name, the words I spoke to them, and the emotions generated by our conversations and interactions. Forever! This is part of the awesome power and responsibility of coaching. You give your players memories, for better or for worse that stay with them until the day they die."³⁵ How true this is. Coaches who bully and intimidate seldom understand the ongoing effects they have on young athletes. These coaches naively and irresponsibly think they are helping their players prepare for life when in reality their misbehavior can create a long-lasting fear in the athlete and damage a person more seriously than we imagine. Sports can beat up people and break them down so that they barely recover as adults.³⁶ And coaches seldom realize that they will be remembered for it. "Would these coaches behave differently if they comprehended the long-term effect of their behavior?"³⁷ I wonder what my ninth grade football coach and junior varsity college basketball coach would say if they knew how I remember them. Authority is not intimidation; bullying should not be confused with an intense personality or with teaching toughness. Bullying does not inspire respect, and coaches should bear in mind that they will be remembered long after an athlete's sporting days have ended.

Conclusion

Coaches who use intimidation as a means of gamesmanship have been given a pass for far too long. Of course, many coaches, I hope most, avoid bullying tactics and are important role models for their athletes. Unfortunately the

bullying style has been viewed as normal in some coaching circles, and some coaches credit their aggressive bullying approach as the source of their success. In these cases the means are justified by the results, and few ask whether there is something intrinsically wrong with treating persons as less than persons. If humans do not have intrinsic significance as persons, then it is perfectly fine to treat them as objects to be degraded and abused. But then sports will have no real value and will become nihilistic endeavors of futility. Coaches are never justified in resorting to berating, humiliating, or bullying their athletes. It is wrong regardless of the spin. "While coaches . . . once routinely yelled, cursed, embarrassed, humiliated, and even physically grabbed [their] players, the reality is that those techniques simply do not work if you want to motivate players and help them reach their full athletic potential. Unfortunately, a few loose cannons . . . have fooled fans into thinking that an authoritarian, dictatorship leadership style is a winning style."³⁸ This is a myth of the past.

There is no doubt that "the 'strong' sort of gamesmanship certainly can bring one profit, in terms of victories scored, but it closes off the participant to the other benefits of sport, specifically, those that concern personal growth and development, and conceivably athletic development, as well."³⁹ Though these coaching practices have a long and often successful history in terms of winning success, gamesmanship through strong intimidation has no valuable, useful, or moral role in our contemporary sporting practices, and tolerance for this type of practice among coaches should be eliminated.

First, it fails as a strategy because it disrespects sporting contests and alters the nature of the game's challenge. Instead of asking whether one is a better coach, player, or team it asks who the best intimidator is. The game becomes secondary to the skill of intimidating.

Second, it fails because many successful coaches, like Tony Dungy and Phil Jackson, have proven that it is not needed.

Third, it is absurd to believe that bullying is required to motivate. How strange it would look for a college professor or music instructor to scream in a student's face, grab a student by the shirt collar, or curse a student for not performing adequately. Yet many condone the coach who uses these methods. Good teachers and motivators do not need to be bullies to succeed. As one student asked in class when covering this issue, "Is intimidation covering for their shortcomings as coaches?"⁴⁰

Finally, the inherent worth of humans should have a great effect on coaching philosophy. Sports should be a humanizing activity whereas gamesmanship through intimidation and bullying is dehumanizing. Many coaches use athletes as a means to an end. Sporting contests should be arenas of integrity, and the intimidating, bullying approach to coaching eliminates honor

from what should be an honorable profession. People deserve to be treated with dignity and respect because they have intrinsic value. Good coaches evaluate performances, not persons.

The coaching profession has been in need of redemption, and redemptive coaching must include discussion of the humanizing elements of sport and the dehumanizing elements of gamesmanship. Coaches can implement the teaching of virtue as one of their goals, but it must be planned and modeled.⁴¹

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. How does the author analyze the relationship between gamesmanship and bullying? Explain in some detail.
2. Are there forms of intimidation that are not bullying? If so, when does intimidation cross the line into bullying? Is there an age-appropriate level at which intimidation should never be part of our games? At what age if any should it be acceptable?
3. Do you agree that there are acceptable forms of intimidation at higher levels of our sporting contests which are a part of the moral regulative psychological challenge of the game? Why or why not?
4. How does the use of intimidation and bullying alter the goal of allowing the game to be decided by the participants and their skills?
5. Have you ever been bullied by a coach? Which type of fear did you experience and how did you respond?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Eleven

Competition, Ethics, and Coaching Youth

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Although organized youth sports in the United States date back to the nineteenth century, it was in the last fifty years or so that the experience became prevalent in the life of youths and their families.¹ One indication that youth sport has become a significant phenomenon in society is the widespread use since the 1990s of the term “soccer mom,” which designates those mothers who coordinate the sport schedules of their children. One study indicates that in the year 2000, the number of youths “who played on at least one organized sport team was found to be 54% of kids ages 6 and 17.”² A 2005 study shows that “among a slightly older age group of 10- to 17-year-olds, participation had jumped to 59%.”³ According to Ronald B. Woods, “Participation in youth sport [is] at an all-time high.”⁴ Along these lines, Christina Theokas reported in 2009 that “frequency of engagement in sports is extremely high for children and youth” and that “for the 19th consecutive year (2007–2008), the number of students participating in high school athletics increased.”⁵ Participation in youth sports is so extensive in the United States that Mark Hyman believes the country is obsessed with it.⁶