

1 Sport Advocacy: Challenge, Controversy, Ethics & Action

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9 **Abstract - Professional**

10 Sport psychologists should consider advocating for athletes' rights and responsible  
11 organizational practices. There is demonstrated need, solid science, and clear direction through  
12 the American Psychological Association's ethical principles. Yet the voice of psychology is  
13 conspicuously absent in the public discourse in sport on issues such as hazing, bullying, gender  
14 equity, sexual violence, doping, and athlete safety, perhaps because speaking out is often fraught  
15 with challenge and controversy. The author shares a number of his experiences encountering and  
16 addressing advocacy and offers lessons learned. The sample issues include: unrecognized and  
17 unfilled training needs for professionals; potentially misapplied rules; inadequately defined and  
18 applied safeguards for training and competition; helping institutions and athletes both achieve  
19 important goals that might seem to conflict; and even a situation where all the psychologist's  
20 expertise was unable to bring a wholesome resolution. Not all interventions succeed, and this  
21 last receives the most extensive analysis of all. It provides the opportunity to review some of the  
22 dilemmas facing would-be advocates in sport. In addition to discussing his own advocacy, the  
23 author reviews relevant studies and reports—not all from sport.

24 *Keywords:* advocacy, sport, hazing, institutional betrayal, ethics

25 **Abstract – Popular/Media**

1 Sport is a juggernaut of a social institution putting a spotlight on societal issues and modeling a  
2 standard of behavior. As goes sport, so goes society. It is said that sport builds character. Yet,  
3 there are so many contrary examples. Rather, sport is like a ship that goes where it is steered,  
4 whether that be to the moral high ground or the rocky shoals of tragedy. When sport stays on  
5 course, society benefits. Hence, the critical role of advocacy. This paper is an implicit plea for  
6 the sport-minded psychologist to embrace the role of advocate. If sport in society is to be the best  
7 it can be, it will require sentinels alert to transgressions, willing to act on behalf of athletes'  
8 rights and responsible organizational practices, and prepared to subject issues to reasoned public  
9 discourse. The paper provides a broad view of the landscape of advocacy through personal  
10 anecdotes as well as contemporary and historic events, examines hazing in detail, presents a case  
11 study and encourages action by psychologists.

## 12 **Introduction**

13 *In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends*

14 Martin Luther King

15 The goal of this paper is to make the readers more sensitive to advocacy related matters  
16 and more willing to act on behalf of athletes' rights and responsible organizational practices. As  
17 such, it is more of a call to action than a scholarly discourse. This paper is composed of four  
18 interrelated essays which collectively function as a primer on advocacy. Part A offers a broad  
19 brush view of the landscape of advocacy in sport through a series of brief personal anecdotes.  
20 The collective lessons learned from these experiences speak to the role of sport as a social  
21 institution and its potency as an arbiter of cultural mores. Part B focuses specifically on hazing,  
22 identifying it as a problem of our time. It serves as an exemplar for any advocacy initiative, in

1 that there are similar underlying psychological dynamics driving behaviors and rendering them  
2 resistant to change. In Part C, a case study presents hazing and other problem behaviors common  
3 in sport. It illuminates the mechanisms by which empowered institutions resist accountability  
4 and the sense of helplessness experienced by those caught in a skewed power dynamic. Part D  
5 follows from the case study, examining advocacy in the public domain, means of last resort  
6 available to the advocate when reasonable measures fail, and the critical role of the coach, as  
7 well as, offering insight into the ethical and practical constraints faced by the psychologist.  
8 Contemporary and historic events are referenced, with the hope that the reader will reexamine  
9 these through the frame of advocacy and in so doing gain a fresh perspective. A deliberate effort  
10 to include personalized anecdote and commentary follows from the belief that when advocacy  
11 has a face, action is more likely to follow.

### 12 **Part A: About Advocacy**

13 In sport, advocacy is about fair play. Advocacy is in the public interest, often in the vein  
14 of social justice. Advocacy on behalf of principles has long been a part of the landscape of sport,  
15 with notable successes in gender equity via Title IX legislation (Anderson, 2012) and in head  
16 injury management (Taylor, 2015). Advocacy on behalf of athletes and other stakeholders may  
17 be prompted by situations deemed inappropriate, where an issue is driven by a skewed power  
18 dynamic, and is outside the ability of the individual to effect change. The behavior in question  
19 may be arguably dangerous (e.g., head injury risk) or outright illegal (e.g., sexual encounters with  
20 children). The course of action is influenced by whether the behavior arises from an individual  
21 (e.g., bullying), a group (e.g., hazing), or an organization (e.g., institutional betrayal), or some  
22 combination of these. Psychologists are uniquely positioned to serve in the role of advocate,  
23 following from the deliberate ethical foundations of practice, expertise in human behavior, a core

1 focus on mental health, and the likelihood that relevant issues will arise in the course of their  
2 work. Yet the voice of psychology is conspicuously absent in the public discourse in sport on  
3 issues such as hazing, bullying, gender equity, sexual violence, doping, and athlete safety.

4 Personal case studies offer a sampling of settings, roles, constraints, lessons learned, and  
5 their meaning within the context of sport as a social institution. A narrative style offers a mix of  
6 fact and feeling, personal and professional, idealism and pragmatism that render such situations  
7 challenging. The case studies reveal the breadth, scope and complexity of advocacy, not only as  
8 an objective application of science but also as an action imperative that is potentially volatile,  
9 uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

10 **Case Study #1: An Anti-Doping Dilemma.** Doping in sport is enigmatic, with practices  
11 that are long standing, deeply entrenched and resistant to remedy. Failure to provide constraints  
12 on doping, not only undermines fair play but also threatens athlete health. As a friend suggested  
13 decades ago – sport makes a rule, and we find a way around it (Athlete A, personal  
14 communication, May, 1976). Home run hero, Mark McGwire’s fall from grace during what is  
15 now referred to as the steroid era of baseball is testament to the profound impact of doping on  
16 sport and society (Leach, 2010). The systematic doping by Russia’s track and field program  
17 demonstrates that this continues as a significant and entrenched problem (Campanile, Bast,  
18 Radutzky, & Keteyian, 2016). That sports heroes’ behavior has a far-reaching impact on society  
19 is poignantly reflected in the steroid-related death of adolescent athlete Taylor Hooten (Taylor  
20 Hooten Foundation, n.d.).

21 **Situation.** Chris had medaled in an Olympic sport national event, and was awaiting doping  
22 testing. In casual conversation, she disclosed missing a plane flight, having had little sleep and

1 consuming large amounts of caffeine to stay awake, apparently unaware of the risk of a positive  
2 drug test for caffeine use.

3 **Role.** Serving as a National Governing Body (NGB) consultant at the event, I was present in an  
4 official capacity in the anti-doping area. I was aware of the World Anti-Doping Agency  
5 (WADA) Guidelines, having reviewed and provided critical comment on the WADA draft  
6 document.

7 **Analysis.** Caffeine guidelines were faulty and unfair, in that they allowed use, but did not  
8 provide clear guidance on safe limits.

9 **Action.** An initial inquiry to clarify guidelines for proper use was met with a vague response. I  
10 transparently and directly encouraged the athlete to delay production of urine to the last moment  
11 and consume fluids copiously. I was advocating action, within allowable guidelines, to  
12 circumvent an unfair practice. The athlete passed the drug screen, and would go on to an  
13 exceptionally successful career.

14 The lesson is that it is important not to lose sight of fair play in the effort to enforce it.  
15 Clearly, anti-doping regulation and enforcement are in the interest of the athlete. However, it is  
16 essential that this be sensibly implemented and fairly applied because of the remarkably adverse  
17 effects of a failed drug screen. Transparent rules and regulations are critical. With the first  
18 publication of the List of Prohibited Substances and Methods, caffeine was no longer prohibited  
19 (World Anti-Doping Agency, 2004).

20 **Case Study #2: Death in the Weight Room.** Sadly, fatal injury occurs in sport with predictable  
21 regularity (National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research, n.d.). Despite the profound  
22 impact of catastrophic and fatal injury on teammates, family and friends, a psychological  
23 intervention protocol for sport-related incidents was absent.

1 **Situation.** A true freshmen football player at the University of Utah, suffered a fatal cardiac  
2 event while weight lifting with teammates, while the remainder of the team was away at a game.  
3 The sport psychologist was summoned to the hospital, where he received the news of the  
4 player's death with the remaining freshmen. There was no specific psychological intervention  
5 provided to help the fellow freshmen or other team mates cope with the loss. Coincidentally, a  
6 stress-injury study was underway with the team.

7 **Role.** As an injury researcher, while reviewing data, a sharp upward trend in injuries was noted  
8 in the week following the player's death.

9 **Analysis.** The psychological impact on the team following the incident was significant,  
10 apparently resulting in increased injury report, perhaps as a means of coping with distress, albeit  
11 an indirect one. That the full team was not informed of the death until after the game, suggests  
12 the injury rates were psychologically driven.

13 **Action.** Keith Henschen and I (1992) conducted a qualitative research study examining the  
14 impact of the death on the freshman teammates during their senior year. Functioning both as a  
15 research study and as a team intervention, it provided a window into the significant and enduring  
16 impact of the event, and offered players the opportunity to express and address their feelings.  
17 Recognizing the void in critical incident response, this study was followed by workshops on  
18 critical incident response at Sport Psychology Conferences, and the development of a guide to  
19 critical incident intervention in sport (Athey & Heil, 2011).

20 **Case Study #3: Love of the Game.** Athletes' right to participate is an enduring theme in sport.  
21 Jackie Robinson's success in breaking the color barrier in professional baseball in 1947 opened  
22 the door to generations of athletes. A new narrative about race emerged, changing not only sport  
23 but also society (Cronin, 2013). This tradition is continued by Title IX whose ongoing evolution

1 supports an expanding gender equity agenda and has brought scrutiny to interpersonal violence  
2 including sexual assault (Anderson, 2012).

3 **Situation.** A competitor at an adult age group national competition in fencing, suffering a  
4 terminal illness alerted the sports medicine staff to her condition. The sports medicine staff  
5 member, personally distressed by the dilemma, was reluctant to allow her to compete, but was  
6 unclear if it were his right to prevent her from doing so. The athlete articulated a clear  
7 understanding of the potentially dire risks of competing and the desire to do so despite the risks.

8 **Role.** As the NGB Sports Medicine & Science Chair, I had a fiduciary relationship, which  
9 assumes a responsibility to protect the welfare of the NGB. As a sport psychology consultant, I  
10 was present to support athlete performance and well-being.

11 **Analysis.** The situation presented the need to simultaneously address athletes' rights, responsible  
12 organizational practices and NGB liability, in a time urgent manner.

13 **Action.** Prior to competing, I prompted the athlete to complete a waiver stating her personal  
14 assumption of risk, which was subsequently reviewed and approved by the NGB attorney. The  
15 athlete competed, doing so without a catastrophic health event.

16 As a possible last chance opportunity to compete, her actions reveal the profound  
17 personal value of sport in her life. The NGB could have chosen a risk-averse path and refused  
18 her this opportunity. In allowing her to compete, the NGB honored its mission to offer the  
19 benefits of sport to a wide range of athletes. This action is consistent with longstanding interest  
20 in providing access to sport for those who suffer medical conditions as is reflected in the  
21 Paralympic movement ("International Paralympic," n.d.) and the Special Olympics ("Special  
22 Olympics," n.d.).

1 **Case Study #4 – Dance with Death.** At the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis, unrealistic fears of  
2 contagion were rampant and a related pervasive social anxiety abounded. A turning point in sport  
3 came as basketball superstar, Magic Johnson, revealed he was HIV positive, leaving the NBA  
4 over what appeared to be fears of transmission during competition (Aldridge, 2011).

5 **Situation.** Phillip Sweatman was a professional ballet dancer, who had left his company due to  
6 HIV-related declining health. Returning to his home community, he was to be a guest artist  
7 performing with a local developmental dance company, but was then excluded, creating a  
8 controversy.

9 **Role.** As a member of the local health care community, I was in a position to bring a reasoned  
10 look at the situation.

11 **Analysis.** Whether Phillip was excluded from performing due to an unrealistic fear of HIV  
12 transmission or because his declining health rendered him unable to perform effectively appeared  
13 to be a question without a clear answer. Nonetheless, Phillip was explicit in his gratitude for the  
14 opportunity to speak out, regaining a sense of purpose, as his physical prowess declined.

15 **Action.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Phillip and the dance company director,  
16 providing each the opportunity to tell their story, which was presented at the Association for  
17 Applied Sport Psychology Conference to generate dialogue about HIV and athletes' rights. (Heil  
18 & Lanahan, 1992).

19 The experience of Magic Johnson in the national spotlight initially paralleled that of  
20 Phillip Sweatman locally. However, Johnson's status as a well-respected athlete combined with  
21 his ability to bring a popular face and a positive attitude to the disease, coinciding with advances  
22 in treatment, created a sense of hope and acceptance. He later reprised his career as an Olympian,



1 illuminating the role of sport as a social institution, which provides a lens through which a  
2 culture can examine itself and drive social change.

3 **Case Study #5-Violence on the Playing Field.** Concerns about safety and violence in sport are  
4 longstanding, ranging from injury risk inherent in participation, to spontaneous on-field player  
5 and spectator violence. In 1976, my hometown Flyers were arrested in Canada for on-ice  
6 behaviors during a hockey game (McMurtry, 2013). Where I now live, I witnessed parents  
7 arrested for fighting during a youth sport event. As a check on the inherent dangers of sport, the  
8 rules of play place a burden on the officials to enforce limits on dangerous play, and on  
9 governing bodies to create a system of checks and balances to deter gratuitous violence.

10 **Situation.** I was witness to years of repeated failures of a state-wide sport program to maintain a  
11 safe and respectful playing environment, with behaviors ranging from poor officiating to  
12 coaches' support of violent rule-violating play, to a breakdown in decorum (e.g., criticism of  
13 officials via the game's public address system).

14 **Role.** I attempted to leverage my leadership role in a separate state-wide youth sport organization  
15 and standing as an internationally recognized authority on sport injury (e.g., Heil, 1993).

16 **Analysis.** As a certified sport official, I was aware of weak links in the system of referee training  
17 and oversight, with minimal systematic review of on-field referee performance after initial  
18 classroom training.

19 **Action.** With a group of colleagues, a consensus-styled document was developed and presented  
20 to the Sport Governing Body, offering an in-depth analysis and recommendations for change.  
21 Although led by a well-respected and ethical referee supervisor, we argued that he lacked the  
22 support needed from the Sport Governing Body.

1 **Situation.** After significant delay in even acknowledging the report, no action was taken in  
2 response. Failure of the Sport Governing Body to even start a conversation despite the consensus  
3 report, my status as a recognized authority and familiarity with the leadership, speaks to the  
4 entrenched power of organizations, and the high hurdle to change. In response to similar events,  
5 governing bodies ranging from youth to professional sports are coming under increasing public  
6 criticism regarding failure to advocate for athlete's rights and responsible practices (Strauss,  
7 Haverstick, Johnson & Silver, 2016). In an excoriating critique of the Ray Rice domestic assault  
8 video, *Sports Illustrated* suggests this as not just "a wake-up call to the problem of domestic  
9 violence" but also a reminder that "the NFL faces its moral responsibilities only when it has to"  
10 (Taylor, 2014, p.12).

11 **Role.** Failing at systemic change, I initiated research examining tolerance for violence on the  
12 field of play.

13 **Analysis.** The reluctance to address player safety in the state-wide system, paralleled by events  
14 nationally, raises question of whether there is a different standard for violence in sport than in  
15 other settings. If so, it raises question as to the underlying cultural forces driving this?

16 **Action.** During employment interviews, law enforcement applicants were presented a multi-  
17 tiered scenario which included the following: "During a stop in play, after being penalized for  
18 aggressive play, an athlete strikes another player from behind rendering him unconscious" - with  
19 the question of "arrest or not arrest" posed to each applicant. The results revealed a 62%  
20 response favoring arrest, although this increased to 88% if requested by the parent of the injured  
21 athlete (Heil, Wiita, Johnson & Staples, 2009). That the arrest rate escalates at parent request  
22 reveals the ambivalence of those who would be tasked with this decision.

1           A subsequent study examined the response to an assault on the referee, showing a notably  
2 higher arrest rate, and suggesting a line of unacceptable on-field violent behavior (Heil & Wiita,  
3 2012). Standing in stark contrast to the criticism by some that this was an unrealistic scenario,  
4 soccer referee John Bieniewicz was subsequently killed under circumstances similar to those in  
5 the study (Seidel, 2015).

6           Evidence of tolerance for dangerous rule violating behaviors in sport that would  
7 otherwise be considered criminal suggests that there is a different standard in sport. To the extent  
8 this is true, our games move away from the Olympic ideal and toward the gratuitous violence of  
9 the Roman gladiatorial contests (Grout, n.d.). This also raises question as to whether tolerance  
10 for dangerous rule violating behavior in sport contributes to diminished accountability and  
11 disinhibited violence more broadly in society. This theme was examined in the futuristic science  
12 fiction film *Rollerball* (Jewison, 1975) in which escalating violence in sport was enabled to  
13 appeal to the baser instincts of human nature, as a distraction from the economic and political  
14 problems of the time. Although the idea of sport violence as an opiate for the masses seems  
15 implausible, *Rollerball* exists as a cautionary tale.

16 **Case Study #6: Coach v Athlete.** The sport organization potentially holds great sway over the  
17 athlete, with a particularly potent role played by the coach. That the coach has a far reaching and  
18 enduring impact is reflected in the NCAA Quadrennial *Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and*  
19 *Learning of Students in College* (GOALS) Survey (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, Brown & Paskus,  
20 2014). This survey administered to 19,920 student-athletes on 1,321 teams at 609 member  
21 institutions reveals that coaches' influence spans retention and graduation rates, players'  
22 willingness to cheat, and how they coach future generations. The power and influence a coach  
23 wields over the athlete, for good or bad, is without parallel.

1 **Situation.** A professional-prospect quarterback suffered a significant but recoverable injury.  
2 When forced to play hurt, his injury was compounded, resulting in an enduring negative impact  
3 on his athletic ability, undermining his career. The University initially took no corrective action,  
4 prompting the athlete to leave the school and initiate legal proceedings.

5 **Role.** Retained by the plaintiff as an expert witness, I had access to a detailed view of events via  
6 legal depositions.

7 **Analysis.** The legal documents led me to believe the player was forced to compete against his  
8 wishes, being compelled to do so by his coach and the sports medicine staff, under threat of  
9 adverse consequences.

10 **Action.** The case settled out of court. The attorney suggested that the decision to hear the case in  
11 a notably coach-friendly community evoked concern of bias in the jury, and reduced expectation  
12 for a fair and favorable verdict.

13         The iconic status of the coach in contemporary culture is reflected in a comment from the  
14 APA SEPP listserv: “If you took the coach’s behavior and moved it to ANY OTHER  
15 environment – the classroom, the boardroom, your living room – would it be OK? If it’s not OK  
16 in any other environment then why is it OK in sport?” (Psychologist A, personal communication,  
17 April 15, 2015). In the Team USA Newsletter, Gilbert (2015) comments on the tolerance  
18 accorded to coaching icons like baseball’s Billy Martin, football’s Woody Hayes, and  
19 basketball’s Bob Knight. This sentiment is echoed in the Sports Illustrated special report, “Abuse  
20 of Power” which characterizes negative coaching as a flawed method despite its deep roots in  
21 sport culture (Wolff, 2015).

22         Fortunately, there are many, many coaches who have been overwhelmingly positive in  
23 their approach and are much loved by their athletes. Take Jim Valvano, for example, who led

1 North Carolina State University to a NCAA basketball championship against superior teams,  
2 while winning the love and respect of his players, and his opponents. The values that drove  
3 Coach Valvano's life, tragically cut short by cancer, has inspired others to honor his memory in  
4 the fight against cancer . (The V Foundation, n.d.).

### 5 **Advocacy, Sport and Society**

6 Collectively, the case studies illustrate that advocacy happens at the policy level and the  
7 personal level, on the large stage and locally, quietly and in the public eye. These anecdotes  
8 identify the challenge faced by the advocate, given the broad landscape of events, their  
9 emotionally provocative nature, varied paths of entry into the role of advocate, ethical and legal  
10 constraints, unanticipated consequences, and the often uncharted course toward a reasonable  
11 solution.

12 Sport is a powerful social institution, prominent in the public eye, reflecting society,  
13 providing a forum to examine behavior, setting cultural standards and serving as a force for  
14 change. Reflecting on the impact of both grassroots sports and a South African Rugby World  
15 Cup victory in the transition from apartheid, Nelson Mandela suggests:

16 Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than  
17 governments in breaking down barriers. Sport has the power to change the world (Wolff,  
18 2011, p.74).

19 This stands in stark contrast to the failed efforts of the Nazis during the 1936 Berlin Olympics to  
20 use the Games to support a racist agenda (The Nazi Olympics, n.d.). As a potentially potent  
21 influence on society, sport demands our attention, our analysis and our action.

1           Part B focuses specifically on destructive interpersonal and organizational dynamics,  
2 complementing the broad but cursory review of advocacy themes presented in Part A. It models  
3 the detailed analysis that is essential to informed and ethical advocacy.

#### 4                   **Part B: Hazing, Bullying, Harassment & Organizational Response**

5           Hazing, bullying and harassment are intersecting forms of personal aggression,  
6 characterized by a skewed power dynamic, potentially resulting in a hostile environment. The  
7 depth and breadth of these problems society-wide has led to substantial legislation and case law  
8 focused on the role of organizations in oversight and remediation (Cornell & Limber, 2015). This  
9 section examines the psychological dynamics which drive these behaviors in sport and the role of  
10 the organizations in assisting or resisting remediation. Hazing is examined in detail with  
11 attention to its unique place in team sport culture, its elusive definition, its potential confounding  
12 with team building, and the challenge to organizations in prevention and intervention.

#### 13           **Hazing or Team Building**

14           Like bullying and harassment, hazing is difficult to precisely define. For a detailed  
15 review of harassment and bullying, see Cornell and Limber (2015). Hazing is defined as  
16 behaviors linked to group belonging and acceptance which humiliate, degrade, abuse or  
17 endanger, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. Prototypical examples include:  
18 forced alcohol consumption, destruction of property, physical brutality, and exclusion from  
19 social contact. However, hazing includes more subtle practices like systematic social isolation  
20 and exclusion from routine team functions, since ultimately hazing is driven by the desire to  
21 belong (e.g., "Pennsylvania Hazing Law" n.d.). Research by Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder and  
22 Brewer (2007) with sports teams found that activities like swearing an oath and performing skits

1 resulted in group unity while negative practices like isolation and punishment can easily  
2 backfire.

3         Following a string of high-profile incidents concerns about hazing reached a flash point.  
4 The highly publicized hazing turned bullying of College All-American and NFL lineman,  
5 Jonathan Martin by his Miami Dolphin team mates resulted in him leaving the team and  
6 attempting suicide (Victor, 2015). That an athlete with such an imposing physical presence could  
7 be traumatized demonstrated that any and all are vulnerable.

8         At Sayerville High School, football players subjected freshmen to sexual assault,  
9 excusing this as a tradition, which is a common justification of hazing (Petersen, 2014). At  
10 Florida A&M, a long-standing hazing tradition known as “crossing Bus C” resulted in the  
11 beating death of a band member, revealing the risk of unintended consequences (Alvarez, 2014;  
12 Queally, 2014).

13         At Franklin and Marshall College, a women’s team sprayed semen on freshmen while the  
14 team drank alcohol at a party-like gathering (Berman, 2012). Though there was no obvious  
15 physical danger in this stunt, it was traumatizing for some. In any group of female athletes, a  
16 significant percentage likely have experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault, and as  
17 a consequence could find a provocative sexual situation to be re-traumatizing, even absent  
18 physical contact.

19         Hazing is increasingly finding its way into social media, with an estimate of over 50% of  
20 incidents including posting of pictures on a public web space bringing a conspicuously public  
21 view to events (Allan & Madden, 2008). For example, the University of Maryland Baltimore  
22 County Women’s Lacrosse team frustrated with the first-year teammates sent a barrage of text  
23 messages belittling them, even making death threats (Ritter, 2015).

1           The National Study of Student Hazing, conducted by the University of Maine, surveyed  
2 11,482 undergraduate students enrolled at 53 colleges and universities. It revealed that hazing is  
3 widespread and that a gap exists between student experiences of hazing and their willingness to  
4 label it as such. (Allan & Madden, 2008). There is a similar gap between an organization's  
5 acknowledgement of this problem and the will to act on it. For example, a study examining  
6 nationally mandated harassment policies in Canadian Provincial and National Sport  
7 Organizations, revealed that only about 1/3 had policies specific to hazing or bullying, and that  
8 less than 1 in 15 provided such simple and essential contact information for the harassment  
9 officer (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014).

10           The current approach to anti-hazing is based on legislation introduced to Congress in  
11 2012 (Wilson, 2012). Its author suggests "Hazing is not a university problem. It is not a Greek  
12 problem. It is not a student problem. It is an American problem." In response, Colleges have  
13 widely adopted anti-hazing policies. Anti-hazing laws have been established in 44 states, which  
14 define hazing as a crime and specify adverse consequences for institutions who enable it ("States  
15 with anti-hazing laws," 2015). Following the hazing related suicide death of Marine, Harry Lew,  
16 Representative Judy Chu introduced anti-hazing legislation specifically focused on the military  
17 (Chu, 2016). Even the U.S. Navy SEAL program, renowned for the physical hardship of its  
18 training has taken action against hazing (C. Williams, personal communication, August 28,  
19 2015). Yet problems continue, with at least one hazing death on a college campus yearly since  
20 1969 (Nuwer, 2015).

21           Statutes and policies have focused heavily on identifying hazing as a set of specific acts,  
22 perhaps because this is the most simple and straightforward way to do so. In an effort to be clear  
23 and inclusive, hazing guidelines and statutes may be overly inclusive and unintentionally



1 undermine legitimate team building. To understand hazing it is important to look beyond specific  
2 practices to the personal impact on the participants, and to the dynamics driving the behavior.

3         As a Sigma Chi fraternity member in college, I was subjected to actions commonly  
4 described as hazing, but these unfolded in a way that did not humiliate, degrade, abuse or  
5 endanger, an impression that continues to be shared by my fraternity brothers, whose friendships  
6 have endured the passage of decades. It worked well because it was done in the spirit of fun and  
7 never led us to question our sense of belonging or acceptance. The most stressful elements of the  
8 process were also the most thought-provoking and meaningful, in the style of a life lesson. This  
9 stands in stark contrast to the Sayreville High School behavior and other incidents described  
10 above.

11         The question “How do I engage in team building in an era of hazing?” asked by a coach  
12 in a hazing awareness seminar points to the challenge in distinguishing these two concepts  
13 (Coach A, personal communication, March 18, 2015). The answer begins with an appreciation of  
14 sport as a culture, with distinct language, clothing, customs, and practices (e.g., Sands, 2002).  
15 The meaning, intent and impact of group dynamics can be misinterpreted, especially by those  
16 lacking in this particular variant of cultural sensitivity.

17         Those familiar with the culture of competitive sport understand that it is exclusive by  
18 design in its membership, with new players subject to an out-group, in-group transition. When a  
19 team forms, ideally it strives to create a shared mission and purpose, which become its norm.  
20 That said, a sport team will go through a sometimes stormy team building process that typically  
21 includes on-field and off-field activities, some planned and supervised, and others of which may  
22 be inadvertent and spontaneous. From this process, a group dynamic will unfold, hopefully for  
23 the better, in that it is in the team’s interest for this process to be a positive and constructive

1 one. Actions that leverage sport's inherent opportunity for bonding, arising from overcoming  
2 shared adversity, builds better teams. As such, team building is essentially an inclusive endeavor,  
3 an element that is invariably lost in hazing.

4 Under the best of conditions in the hands of professionals, team building it is an  
5 imprecise and imperfect process. A group activity is team building when it is inclusive,  
6 purposeful, unfolds without undue harshness, is experienced as bonding and leads to a passage  
7 from out-group to in-group. Alternately, it is hazing to the extent it is exclusive, without  
8 authentic meaning or purpose, harsh or otherwise destructive, or divisive. Absent a passage from  
9 in-group to out-group, hazing tips into bullying, while hostility directed to members of a  
10 protected class is harassment.

11 Typically, team building unfolds in a social context, where whatever positive  
12 performance effect it may have is indirect. Consider a scavenger hunt, which has been defined as  
13 hazing (StepUp!; Hazing,n.d.), but may also be just plain fun and result in increased cohesion, as  
14 argued by the Roanoke College Dean of Students during a hazing awareness seminar (A. Fetrow,  
15 personal communication, March 18, 2015). There is danger that in being overly restrictive in  
16 policy, the credibility of authority is compromised and those who might provide checks and  
17 balances on team building are excluded from the process. There is some risk in giving leeway to  
18 groups to explore and experiment with the team building process. However, when there is proper  
19 oversight this can be a valuable learning opportunity and provide a take-away lesson for life after  
20 sport.

21 Team building is more likely to have a positive impact when focused directly on  
22 performance. USA Fencing Olympic Team coach, Paul Soter and I led a team building process  
23 that focused on post-event analysis of performance and increased the athlete's share in decision

1 making about team management. It led to a set of team norms, a lexicon to facilitate  
2 communication during competition, and a team authored article in the organization's magazine  
3 and an historically successful outcome (Heil & Soter, 2009).

4           Given the vagaries of definition, the inherent complexities of group dynamics, the  
5 maturity of those directing the process, and the unique culture of sport, it can be difficult to  
6 distinguish hazing from team building. These factors point to a unique role for sport  
7 psychologists in hazing prevention and intervention, given their expertise in behavior, ethical  
8 foundations, and sensitivity to sport culture. It is the underlying dynamics that ultimately  
9 determine whether actions create team chemistry, are a lost opportunity, or at worst, a slide down  
10 the slippery slope to the dark side of human behavior. The critique that follows is focused on  
11 understanding the dynamics of group behavior in the worst of incidents, those that are most  
12 difficult to understand and most important to prevent.

### 13 **Psychological Dynamics**

14           Dynamics driving hazing and/or well-intended but poorly implemented team building  
15 include the essential, the innocent, and the sinister. In the *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*,  
16 Maslow (1971) identifies a hierarchy of needs essential to the human condition, ranging from  
17 survival to self-actualization. Among these needs, he identifies belongingness and esteem as  
18 motives that lead us to form groups, and by extension make us vulnerable to hazing. There is  
19 also innocence at work in hazing, in overlooking unintended consequences and underestimating  
20 risk. *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Ryan, 1973) estimates 1 accidental injury for each 300  
21 unsafe acts, 1 disabling injury for each 29 accidental injuries, and 1 accidental death for every  
22 100 disabling injuries. This calculus of risk captures both the unlikelihood of any given situation  
23 going terribly wrong, and the eventual inevitability that it will. "Crossing Bus C" went on for

1 years without notable problems, likely creating a false sense of safety. Social psychological  
2 research, some quite controversial, has sought to illuminate the dark side of human behavior,  
3 underlying practices ranging from hazing to the holocaust (Ganellen & Robbennolt, 2015).

#### 4 **The Dark Side of Human Behavior**

5 The research that follows examines the misuse of power by in-groups over out-groups,  
6 the readiness to defer to the dictates of authority in opposition to fundamental values, and the  
7 failure to act when witness to injustice. These dynamics can turn a potentially positive group  
8 experiences into a negative, and in the worst case result in a catastrophic outcome.

9 In the Stanford prison experiment led by Zimbardo (1969), college students participated  
10 in a mock prison experiment, with one group assigned as guards and the others as inmates. Under  
11 pressures inherent in the design of the experiment, the guards' behavior became so demeaning  
12 and dangerous that the experiment was abruptly stopped. This study has endured as a cautionary  
13 tale about the potential abuse of power held by one group over another – even among those who  
14 do not seem predisposed to violence. The silver lining in the experiment is the power of one to  
15 take a stand and make a difference. With a clear and unambiguous statement of the obvious, that  
16 what was being done was terrible, psychology consultant Christine Maslach ended the  
17 experiment. Nearly 50 observers, including parents and clergy, had been witness to the same but  
18 had taken no action, all apparently falling into their implicitly scripted roles. In a bizarre twist,  
19 the researchers became so caught up in managing a prison uprising one day, they forgot to collect  
20 data. The power of the in-group over an out-group demonstrated here is a fundamental risk factor  
21 in hazing.

22 Milgram's (1975) obedience studies also drew public attention. In what was presented as  
23 a study of the effect of punishment on learning, subjects were directed to deliver electric shocks

1 to study participants – actually actors, who received no shock. Milgram constructed a series of  
2 experiments identifying one condition where approximately 2/3 of subjects shocked “learners”  
3 into a presumed state of unconsciousness, despite their vehement vocal protests. Factors driving  
4 the behavior included the rationale of a greater good (the advancement of science) and a sense of  
5 legitimate authority (affiliation with a prestigious institution). In contrast, behavior was inhibited  
6 when witnessing another subject refuse to deliver a shock, again reinforcing the power of one to  
7 disrupt the status quo and effect change.

8           Contemporary with the Milgram and Zimbardo studies is the murder of Kitty Genovese,  
9 who over an extended period, was publicly assaulted and ultimately died in an incident that  
10 continues to perplex and fascinate psychologists, the media and the public (Manning, Levine, &  
11 Collins, 2007). The New York Times headline declares: “37 Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call the  
12 Police” (Gansburg, 1964). Although the headline appears to be part fact and part urban legend,  
13 the lesson from this incident and related social psychological research is that when there is a  
14 diffusion of responsibility, inaction may follow (e.g., Darley & Latane, 1968).

### 15 **Barriers to Reporting and to Change**

16           The social and interpersonal dynamics described above drive hazing, making it less likely  
17 to be reported and remedied. Additional barriers include: a positive framing of inappropriate  
18 behaviors, a culture of acceptance, the consent dilemma, and the whistle blower and victim  
19 effects. Institutional response is a wild card, either seeking a solution or compounding the  
20 problem (Smith & Freyd, 2014).

21           Hazing behaviors are typically framed positively in a way that justifies practices,  
22 enabling behaviors that are harmful to be overlooked. Consider the following rationales:  
23 “tradition” (displaced responsibility), “she agreed” (attribution of blame), and “team activity”

1 (diffusion of responsibility) (“StepUp!: Hazing,” n.d.). The prosecuting attorney in the Florida  
2 A&M band hazing murder debunks this thinking claiming “tradition didn’t kill Robert  
3 Champion...you don’t get to break the law because those who came before you did it” (Alvarez,  
4 2014).

5 Allan and Madden’s research (2008) reveals a campus culture of acceptance of hazing.  
6 Of documented incidents, about 25% occurred in a public space, about 25% were witnessed by  
7 coaches and alumni, with over 50% being reported on social media. That 80% say hazing bothers  
8 them, yet only 20% try to stop it suggests diffusion of responsibility is at work. A subject of  
9 hazing is unable to consent as a consequence of a “Catch 22” type dilemma, in which either  
10 choice has an unwanted consequence. Failure to comply with hazing results in the withdrawal of  
11 belonging and acceptance, while acquiescence can result not only in humiliation and abuse but  
12 also drives implicit acceptance of the culture of hazing.

13 The whistleblower who is also the victim experiences a “double bind,” a potential lose-  
14 lose situation, facing both the possibility their efforts will be in vain and the risk of retaliation  
15 (Pope, 2015). This may explain why 95% of the cases identified by students as hazing go  
16 unreported (Allan & Madden, 2008). This whistleblower-victim dilemma offers insight into why  
17 Hall of Fame NFL player Bart Starr remained silent for decades about his college hazing,  
18 covered-up by a lifetime of carefully crafted public statements (Goodman, 2016). His poignant  
19 end-of-life revelation speaks to the power of hazing over its victims, and the need for change.

20 The prototypical whistleblower-victim dilemma is seen in sexual assault. Report the  
21 incident, suffer shame and embarrassment, and the stress of a trial – or remain silent, failing to  
22 see justice done and leaving others at risk from the perpetrator, now emboldened by the absence  
23 of consequences. Lizzy Seeburg reported a sexual assault by a Notre Dame Football player, and

1 shortly after committed suicide. The failure of police to conduct a timely investigation,  
2 threatening texts from the football team and the esteemed status of the institution arguably  
3 contributed to the powerlessness and hopelessness that drives suicidal behavior. All too often,  
4 suicide is an unanticipated consequence of interpersonal violence (e.g., Nuwer, 2015). Sadly, in  
5 silencing the victim, suicide serves the perpetrator.

6         Smith & Freyd (2014) describe this as a secondary victimization, that unfolds as those  
7 who hold status within the organization are shielded from the consequences of their actions,  
8 denying justice and significantly exacerbating the initial offense. In like manner, the women  
9 who reported widespread problems with sexual abuse by members of the football team at Baylor  
10 University were subjected to harsh criticism from throughout the campus community (“Baylor  
11 Regents,” 2016; Watkins, 2015). The courageous and eloquent victim impact statement prepared  
12 by Emily Doe, following her sexual assault by All-American swimmer, Brock Turner has  
13 demonstrated the power of one to make change. With 11 million readings in 4 days, her efforts  
14 have given voice to the many sexual assault victims who succumb to shame and silence for fear  
15 of worse consequences, and encouraged others to come forward. For bringing light to the  
16 crushing impact of sexual assault, the dynamics that undermine reporting and recovery, and for  
17 empowering its victims, she has been recognized as the 2016 “Woman of the Year” by *Glamour*  
18 *Magazine* (Mettler, 2016).

### 19 **Organizational Response**

20         Organizational response is the tipping point in any incident where social justice is in  
21 question. It is critical for both victim and accused that institutions be transparent in inquiry, fair  
22 in adjudication and just in punishment. Not all accused are guilty, as evidenced by the false  
23 accusations of sexual assault directed at the Duke University Men’s Lacrosse team (Zenovich,

1 2016). Undeserved adverse consequences can function as a kind of bullying in itself. Penn State  
2 sport psychologist, Dave Yukelson (personal communication, March 4, 2016) notes the impact of  
3 the Sandusky sexual assaults on players enrolled long after the incident, with criticism directed  
4 from varied sources toward athletes, as if they were complicit. The primary goal of the process is  
5 not punishment per se, but to focus the institution on its mission, and to provide a correction if it  
6 has gone off course.

7 Institutional betrayal happens when a trusted and powerful organization acts in a way that  
8 brings harm to those whose safety and well-being its mission is to protect (Smith & Freyd,  
9 2014). Betrayal may be isolated or systemic, and may be a consequence of direct action, failure  
10 to respond to transgressions, or neglecting to inform constituents of their rights when offended.  
11 The expectation of trust implicit in its mission, in conjunction with a heavily skewed power  
12 dynamic, renders its stakeholders particularly vulnerable. When the organization fails to act, the  
13 victim faces a double bind: leave the organization, or accept institutional betrayal as a condition  
14 of continuing membership, in the process committing to a kind of psychological blindness,  
15 pretending as if all is well (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Reflecting on his experiences in Berlin during  
16 the Holocaust, Lemkin has described the zeitgeist as a twilight between knowing and not  
17 knowing where unethical practices were widely recognized but nonetheless routinely left  
18 unaddressed (Smith & Freyd, 2014)

19 In *Moral Disengagement*, Bandura (2016) details the process of denial, misdirection,  
20 absolution from blame and dehumanizing the victim by which organizations do harm and live  
21 comfortably with themselves. When used collectively and systematically, these behaviors lay the  
22 foundation for institutional betrayal. The power of such strategies are redoubled when a highly



1 esteemed institution uses its prestige to assuage doubt, as is suggested by the Zimbardo (1969)  
2 and Milgram (1975) studies.

3 Denial is a widely used term in psychological and popular literature with nuanced  
4 variations in meaning (Bandura, 2016). In Freudian theory, denial is a defense mechanism, a  
5 coping method that pushes events out of awareness to prevent feeling overwhelmed emotionally.  
6 Denial may follow from cognitive dissonance, a state of psychological tension when  
7 encountering conflicting beliefs and behaviors. When unable to reconcile an offense reported  
8 with the status of the accused, denial may present as a form of moral disbelief that manifests  
9 itself as a psychological blindness to events (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Perhaps this explains what  
10 transpired in the Penn State sex scandals, as those in authority failed to allow themselves to see  
11 the reality of what had happened. When used deliberately and with awareness, denial is  
12 synonymous with lying.

13 Misdirection comes in many forms. Pope (2015) describes the ethics placebo as an  
14 endemic means of misdirection whereby individuals and organizations seek to avoid  
15 accountability. Pope and Vasquez (2001) detail eight tricks of language, twenty two justification  
16 strategies and twenty two logical fallacies, which may be used to spin ethically questionable  
17 options into seemingly acceptable choices. Ethics placebos often work by deconstructing a  
18 situation, examining elements of behavior as if they were unrelated events, and subjecting them  
19 to convenient reinterpretation. Ethics placebos methodically misdirect attention from problems,  
20 and sabotage steps toward a solution. The double bind is a particularly insidious and vexing form  
21 of misdirection poignantly illustrated by R.D. Laing in *Knots*, a blending of poetry, psychology  
22 and social commentary

23 They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game.

1 If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me.

2 I must play their game, or not seeing I see their game. (1972, p.1)

### 3 **Part C: Advocacy in Action**

4 The psychological dynamics of hazing, bullying, harassment and organizational response  
5 identified in Part B are applied in a case study format, illuminating the challenges faced by the  
6 psychologist who takes on the role of advocate. As the scenario unfolds, the Sport Psychologist  
7 (SP) first focuses on helping the athlete cope with the stress of a hostile environment, then  
8 prepares the athlete to act as an advocate on her own behalf, and eventually steps fully into the  
9 role of advocate, acting for the athlete. With each step forward, risk rises and hopes fall on the  
10 institution willingness to be accountable.

11 Season 1: Maureen is a widely-recruited first year basketball player who starts the first  
12 several games. She misses a game for a family religious celebration, which the team loses. At  
13 the next practice, Maureen discovers she has lost her starting position. No one on the team will  
14 speak with her, subjecting her to hazing in the form of social exclusion. Although team mates  
15 eventually resume communication by the next game, she does not play for the next several  
16 games. In a team van accident, multiple players are injured and Maureen suffers a concussion.  
17 With a reduced roster, the coach tries to force Maureen to play against medical advice, but she  
18 refuses. Now recovered medically, she is distressed that she is receiving no playing time at all.  
19 Feeling helpless and fearful of acting on her own behalf, she presents to the SP.

20 Season 2: As the second season unfolds, Maureen re-contacts the SP noting that the  
21 coach has been complaining about her weight, suggesting she could be starting again if she were  
22 lighter and faster, even though she weighs the same as her first year. Maureen continues to be  
23 seen periodically in counseling through the season, typically after slights from the coach. She is

1 increasingly distressed, with which she copes alternately by “comfort” eating and by restricting  
2 food intake. At the conclusion of her second season, Maureen considers transferring. She is  
3 encouraged by the SP to speak with the coach about her lack of playing time and comments  
4 about her weight. The coach minimizes her concerns, assuring her that things will be better next  
5 year, leading her to stay with the College.

6       Season 3: Maureen presents to the SP after becoming ill from laxative use to lose weight,  
7 reporting that criticism of her weight and other negative behaviors from the coach have  
8 escalated. With her permission, the SP registers a detailed complaint with the Dean of Students.  
9 The Dean presents the situation to the college president, who supports her actions and requests  
10 updates, but asks to be left out of any official communications. The report from the Dean back to  
11 the SP does not address the coach’s bullying at all, and offers the results of a superficial  
12 investigation of hazing, apparently limited to an end-of season evaluation for Season 2 (even  
13 though the hazing incident occurred during Season 1). The player is advised by the Dean to meet  
14 with the Athletic Director (AD), who cautions Maureen that her concerns could be pursued  
15 further, but would likely create such an awkward situation that she would no longer be able to  
16 remain on the team. The AD again suggests that she work things out with the coach. The Dean  
17 assures the SP that all are acting in accord with the College’s mission.

### 18 **Analysis**

19       The College’s tactics, which are designed to protect the institution at the expense of the  
20 athlete, include a sham investigation, use of ethics placebos and a double bind, resulting in  
21 institutional betrayal.

22       **Sham Investigation.** A sham investigation is carefully crafted to avoid an adverse  
23 finding. The full set of issues raised in the meeting apparently go uninvestigated and are not

1 addressed in the report. For example, the question of being forced to play against medical advice  
2 is not mentioned, nor are the persistent comments critical of the athlete's weight. The inquiry  
3 into hazing was limited to review of evaluations at the end of Season 2, resulting in a reporting  
4 bias that was obviously to the advantage of the College. By asking only the Season 2 team, the  
5 reporting is both over-inclusive (i.e., including players not present at the time) and under-  
6 inclusive (failing to ask a group that was present), thus dramatically skewing the reported  
7 statistics. Excluding the senior class at the time of the hazing is particularly problematic because  
8 as leaders of the team the hazing could not have happened without their explicit support. There is  
9 no indication of an attempt to define hazing before asking the question, which is important in  
10 light of evidence that many hazing practices are not recognized as such (Allan & Madden, 2008).

11 **Ethics Placebos and the Double Bind.** The College uses ethics placebos to place itself  
12 in the best light possible. This begins with deconstructing the events as if they were unrelated,  
13 thus obscuring the overall pattern of behavior, by which an objective observer could discern the  
14 larger story and garner meaning and intent. Out of context, the events are more easily subjected  
15 to convenient reinterpretation. For example, the sham investigation sets up use of the "appeal to  
16 ignorance" ethics placebo (Pope & Vasquez, 2011) as the College spins its own intentionally  
17 inadequate investigation as indicating the absence of wrongdoing. The College creates a "double  
18 bind" presenting the illusion of choice, while setting up a lose-lose situation. The core of the  
19 double bind is conveyed in the AD's comment to Maureen, that her concerns could be pursued,  
20 but that to do so would likely result in her being unable to remain on the team. The AD locks in  
21 the double bind by suggesting that the player speak to the Coach if there are other concerns.  
22 Directing the victim to seek relief from the person who has created the problems tightens the  
23 knot of the bind.

1           The Dean’s reply to the SP that says little directly, says much implicitly, revealing the  
2 College’s buy-in and leadership role in actions taken. This suggestion also puts the Dean’s (and  
3 President’s) stamp of approval on the actions taken by the Coach and AD. That the Dean denies  
4 in a public written statement what the AD freely acknowledges openly in the meeting with the  
5 player, demonstrates the extent to which the College has fully leveraged the skewed power  
6 dynamic that is the hallmark of institutional betrayal. The Dean’s statement that the program is in  
7 keeping with the college’s institutional values and priorities speaks to the collective confidence  
8 of the Dean, the President, the AD and Coach that they were not at risk for consequences that  
9 might come from reasoned examination – as an ethical higher authority might potentially do.

10           **Institutional Betrayal.** A failed process is reflected in: tolerance of persisting abusive  
11 practices, a sham investigation, and systemic use of ethics placebos and the double bind. As a  
12 result, Maureen is betrayed by the college, while the institution reinforces a culture of  
13 organizational silence, with the veiled threat of additional adverse consequences for those who  
14 speak out. The Dean’s claim of no harm done in her response to the SP reflects the boldness and  
15 false righteousness of those that employ the ethics placebo.

16           At the root of institutional betrayal is a failure of leadership, which is all the more  
17 disturbing in that it is from a would-be esteemed institution. Failures to address issues that are at  
18 the core of the College’s mission by all leadership, including the president, are a “Helm’s” effect  
19 (Heil, 2015). Like the trusted helmsman in Greek mythology who let the ship go adrift, the  
20 leader who allows the institution to veer off its true course is responsible for its wrecking on the  
21 rocky shoals of catastrophe.

22           At the University of Missouri in 2015, President Wolfe ignored building evidence of  
23 racial injustice on campus. Simmering tensions sparked by a graduate student’s hunger strike,

1 culminated in a threatened boycott by the football team, leading to the president's resignation.  
2 This decisive remedy functions like a correction in course. It stands in stark contrast to the case  
3 study presented above, raising the question of what to do when reasonable measures fail.

#### 4 **Part D: Advocacy in Perspective**

5 When the institutions that govern sport fail to provide an adequate resolution, the pursuit  
6 of advocacy may lead the psychologist into unfamiliar territory and entail interaction with an  
7 array of allies and adversaries, including: athletes, coaches and parents, other psychological and  
8 medical professionals, sports organizations and governing bodies, law enforcement and  
9 governmental agencies, and the media. The challenge is compounded when advocacy runs  
10 contrary to deeply entrenched history and tradition, and where a remedy is tantamount to a  
11 cultural change.

#### 12 **Advocacy in the Public Domain**

13 The failure of the institution in the case study to make a reasonable effort to correct the  
14 problem begs the question "What else can be done?" In the ideal situation, there is the  
15 opportunity to appeal to a higher authority. Failing that, one is left with the courts, the court  
16 of public opinion and the media.

17 The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the higher authority with its  
18 member institutions, empowered to investigate and sanction a wide range of athlete, coach and  
19 institutional behaviors. However, in the case study presented, the NCAA can only advise the  
20 college to conduct a self-investigation, the futility of which is apparent. Given the adversarial  
21 stance of the college, there is question whether further action might result in additional adverse  
22 consequences for the athlete, the sport psychologist or both. Lest observers naively think that the  
23 courts are a ready remedy, consider the comments of attorney Slade McLaughlin who

1 represented both the plaintiff in a highly publicized hazing incident at Franklin and Marshall  
2 College (Berman, 2012) and a Jerry Sandusky sexual assault victim (Personal communication,  
3 October 24, 2015). His comments point to the worst case scenario where all the power of the  
4 institution is formally and officially directed against the athlete (or coach or others wronged), as  
5 if the failure of institutional leadership can somehow be righted by a favorable court proceeding.

6 Educational institutions rarely admit wrongdoing, almost never apologize, and fight  
7 claims tooth and nail. Any legal process would necessarily be a long and drawn out one,  
8 and would involve ostracization of the athlete by other students, administrators, etc.

9 There is no easy road to success which invariably turns into a cut-throat, scorch and burn  
10 proceeding.

11 The court of public opinion is a fickle one, with a high risk to reward ratio for those who  
12 take the path of activism. Muhammed Ali's decision to resist induction into the Army as a  
13 conscientious objector, now widely respected, was met with vilification at the time (Muhammad  
14 Ali: Olympic.org, n.d.). The need to capture the attention of a soporific public is why activism  
15 has historically played a critical role in social justice in sport, notably the 1968 Mexico City  
16 Olympics black power salute and the 2015 racial discrimination protests at the University of  
17 Missouri (Edwards, 2016). Alternatively, a simple gesture at just the right time can be a tipping  
18 point. In Jackie Robinson's entry into baseball, a turning point came as he was embraced on the  
19 field by Dodger team captain, Pee Wee Reese, unequivocally communicating to the fans and  
20 players that Robinson was a full member of the team (Cronin, 2013).

21 To enter the court of public opinion, it is critical that psychologists speak effectively to  
22 the media and by extension the public. Ferguson (2015) notes problems with public perception of  
23 psychology emanating from its failure to differentiate science from pop psychology, naïve

1 notions of psychology, and failure to present research in a way that resonates with the public and  
2 with policy makers. In a venue where sensationalism and sound bites often trump substance and  
3 detailed analysis, psychologists are cautioned to craft a clear and compelling message  
4 (Kirshenbaum, 2015).

5         When focused on broad societal issues, advocacy must often overcome “cultural  
6 schema,” defined as embedded patterns of reasoning that are typically simplistic, easily  
7 misapplied, and often operate outside conscious awareness (Davey, 2015). Take mental  
8 toughness, for example, which is universally deemed a virtue in sport. When unchecked, mental  
9 toughness may result in and justify undue harshness and violence, influencing practices ranging  
10 from hazing to negative coaching to violence on the field of play.

11         Memorialized in the naming of the Super Bowl trophy, Vince Lombardi is an icon of  
12 mental toughness and a mythic figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century sport. But the myth does not match the  
13 man. Lombardi, a devout Catholic, prayed for control of his temper and was an ardent gay rights  
14 supporter (Maraniss, 2000). He is widely but incorrectly credited with originating the infamous  
15 quote “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” Lombardi would regret this, later saying  
16 “Winning isn’t the only thing, but wanting to win is” (Overman, 1999). Perhaps, better insight  
17 into his success as a coach are his comments on discipline, suggesting it be done in “the spirit of  
18 teaching...even love, like the discipline one gets from a father and mother“ (Moore, 2014). The  
19 “winning” quote transcended sport as football became a lens through which Americans  
20 interpreted life in the 1960’s and 1970’s, when traditional American values were being  
21 challenged and the mainstream culture was searching for a voice. The penetration of sport-driven  
22 values into mainstream culture is reflected in a chilling foreshadowing of the Watergate scandal



1 as the slogan, “Winning politically is not everything. It’s the only thing” found its way into the  
2 1972 Nixon presidential campaign (Overman, 1999).

3 That hazing and other disruptive practice like negative coaching and on-field violence are  
4 driven by cultural schema, is suggested by their pervasiveness and persistence despite efforts at  
5 change, the transparency of rationalizations justifying behaviors, and their failure to stand to  
6 reasoned scrutiny.

### 7 **Advocacy and the Coach**

8 The power and influence a coach wields over the athlete, for good or bad, is without  
9 parallel. Many coaches are loved. Some are despised. I remain deeply grateful to my high school  
10 and college coaches, Paul Sanborn and John Covert – and to many coaches with whom I have  
11 worked as a sport psychologist. But negative impacts endure as well. A former college football  
12 player and entrepreneur, when approached by his alma mater for a donation offered the shocking  
13 reply, “Not until Coach XX dies” (Athlete b, personal communication, 2013).

14 There is a magic that can unfold when coach and athlete blend into a team. It can  
15 simultaneously create enduring personal resilience, lifelong bonds and outstanding performance.  
16 Take the USA Hockey team whose victory over the Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympics stands as  
17 an iconic moment of team over talent (Coffey, 2005). Yet there are undercurrents in sport which  
18 reveal a dark side of entitlement, interpersonal violence and a failure of intuitional  
19 accountability, which run counter to the esteemed values of sport that are widely espoused.  
20 Given the integral role of the coach within the team, such instances require coach buy-in whether  
21 it is a clear and present awareness or a murky kind of blindness to the obvious.



1 been demonstrated -- but not impossible, as has also been demonstrated. Advocates may also be  
2 adversely affected personally and professionally, falling victim to the skewed power dynamic  
3 that is driving the need for advocacy. Consider the comments of Dr. Bennet Omalu on the NFL  
4 response to his head injury research, "I was bruised and battered... I was ridiculed." (Reiter,  
5 2015, p.31).

6         The risks and responsibilities in advocacy raise difficult ethical questions regarding  
7 professional practice in sport. Myers, Sweeney and Wright (2002) suggested that although  
8 advocacy is essential to professional counseling practice it is often neglected. They point to the  
9 risks associated with taking action as an underlying cause for failure to embrace this essential  
10 responsibility. Much the same can be said for sport psychology. In suggesting that intervention in  
11 sport should strive for the greatest good, Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) identify the importance of  
12 social justice and advocacy. They emphasize the critical role of positive ethics which drives a  
13 proactive focus on doing the greatest good for clients, noting the contrasting and complementary  
14 role of the more typical principle ethics, which are reactive and focused on minimizing harm and  
15 risk management. They also encourage professionals to personally embrace the performance  
16 enhancement ethic that we expect of our clients. Because sport psychology potentially involves  
17 intervention simultaneously with individuals, teams and organizations, it will sometimes entail  
18 acting on behalf of one part of the system that is in conflict another. When the system fails to  
19 address individual rights or enforce responsible organizational practices, the question of social  
20 justice and advocacy arise along with the attendant risks and responsibilities. That sport has a  
21 broad social reach in setting standards of behavior, calls attention to the importance of taking  
22 action when facing apparent injustice.

1           Although focused on rural practitioners, Bradley, Werth and Hastings (2012) offer a look  
2 at advocacy within a community of which the psychologist is an integral part, and as such bears  
3 relevance to sport psychologists and other sport medicine providers. They provide a useful  
4 advocacy matrix as a reference point for planning action and for assessing risks and benefits. The  
5 authors also present a balanced look at ethical constraints and examine the mandate to act when  
6 faced with social injustice.

7           Given the significant professional and personal risks faced in advocacy, it is prudent to  
8 critically and comprehensively examine decisions before acting. This process can be thought of  
9 an advocacy value proposition summarized as: “Advocacy  
10 Value = Benefits – Costs +/- Unintended Consequences” (Heil & Etzel, 2016). The  
11 assessment should consider the positive and negative impacts on the advocate, and those who  
12 would be the benefactors, in addition to others who may be affected. For example, the Olympic  
13 Project for Human Rights signature black power salute at the 1968 Olympics had an extremely  
14 high set of costs associated with it, but the participants went forward believing that the hoped-for  
15 benefits to the many justified the cost to the few. Unintended consequences represent a kind a  
16 wild card as is demonstrated in the enduring negative personal impacts on the Australian  
17 sprinter, Peter Norman, who joined in, and whose story is largely forgotten (Chen, 2016).

18           Recent actions, while falling short of a mandate, nonetheless encourage action by  
19 psychologists. The APA Public Interest Directorate has reinvigorated efforts at advocacy with its  
20 first leadership conference (Keita, 2015). The *NCAA Inter-Association Consensus Document:  
21 Best Practices for Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness (Best  
22 Practices)* clarifies roles and responsibilities for psychological providers and empowers them  
23 with autonomous authority to act on the athletes’ behalf (NCAA Sport Science Institute, 2016).

1 The Graduate Coalition for the Advancement of Graduate and Training in the Practice of Sport  
2 Psychology has included advocacy language in consensus documents on training and  
3 professional practice (e.g, Aoyagi, M., Cohen, A., Appaneal, R., Carr, B., Carter, L., Herzog, T.,  
4 Rhodius, A., & Van Raalte, J., 2014). The value of the psychologist in sport is implicit in other  
5 initiatives across the sport enterprise, such as the Vatican's planned "Sports at the Service of  
6 Humanity" meeting (Ourand, 2016), and as initiatives from the Aspen Institute Sports & Society  
7 (2015) and the Muhammad Ali Institute for Peace and Justice. ("Muhammad Ali Center to  
8 host," 2016).

### 9 **The Challenge**

10 As goes sport, so goes society. Sport is a juggernaut of a social institution putting a  
11 spotlight on societal issues and modeling a standard of behavior. It is said that sport builds  
12 character. Yet, there are so many contrary examples. Sport is like a ship that goes where it is  
13 steered, whether to the moral high ground or the rocky shoals of tragedy. When sport stays on  
14 course society benefits. Hence the critical role of advocacy.

15 Why advocate for sport especially when the potential risks are high and the rewards are  
16 low? The answer lies in the critical role of sport in society and the potency of the athletic ideal.  
17 Sport is a cornerstone of Western Civilization. Ancient Greek culture gave the world the  
18 Olympic Games, a bloodless celebration of warrior skills that is the foundation of modern sport.  
19 In the legend of Pheidippides and his Marathon run, there is a view of heroism that eschews the  
20 power and dominance that is the hall mark of military conquest, for a model built instead on  
21 honor and service in a higher cause (Perseus Digital Library Project, n.d.). With Greek theatre as  
22 a reference point, Aristotle speaks to the transformative power of challenge and trial when

1 played out in a public spectacle. His references to character and catharsis translate well to  
2 contemporary sport (McKeon, 2001).

3 At times of national catastrophe, sport as a shared public ceremony has demonstrated its  
4 capacity to memorialize and heal. Following the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, sport played a  
5 critical role in the recovery process. The first sporting event, a collegiate baseball game 4 days  
6 after the shootings, coincided with placement of baseballs at the victims' memorial. Attended by  
7 about 4,000 spectators, this was characterized as the start of return to normalcy. The opening  
8 football game the following fall, was described as feeling like a shared national memorial. (Heil,  
9 Bennett, Brolinson & Goforth, 2009).

10 The athletic ideal is revealed in the lessons of the 9/11 tragedy and United Flight 93  
11 (Longman, 2002). The names Beamer, Burnett, Bingham and Glick are not familiar, although  
12 they should be. Their actions are a defining moment in contemporary sport and a model to  
13 emulate. These former college athletes teamed up to assault the hijackers of Flight 93, saving  
14 lives while hastening their own deaths. They showcased the skills honed through sport: to  
15 identify a challenge, work as a team, think pragmatically, convert idea to action, and act with  
16 courage and composure. Not all will be champions, but every athlete can grow in this skill set  
17 and in so doing leave the experience enriched and better prepared for life after. These positive  
18 models of the games we play and the skills we build speak to the value of sport.

19 The who, what, when and how of advocacy are complex questions with often elusive  
20 answers. When considering the challenge of advocacy, be reminded of the power of one, as  
21 demonstrated by rape survivor Emily Doe and fasting Missouri graduate student, Jonathan  
22 Butler, as well as, by Christine Maslach in the Stanford Prison experiment, and Jackie Robinson  
23 and Pee Wee Reese on the baseball field. Change begins with a personal decision to take action.

1 Much remains to be done in society and in your town. Next time you see something troubling  
2 and ask "Why doesn't somebody do something about that?" - ask instead "Why not me?"

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