

Study examines coaches' gamesmanship

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A new study by an NDSU faculty member gives important insight into the ethics of high school coaches in North Dakota.

The study, "Gamesmanship Beliefs of High School Coaches," by Brad Strand, professor of health, nutrition and exercise sciences, recently was published in the *International Journal of Research in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*.

Strand surveyed 256 coaches from across the state on 25 different scenarios dealing with gamesmanship, which is defined as the art or practice of winning games by questionable means without actually breaking the rules.

On one end of the scale, fewer than 1 percent of coaches feel it is acceptable to use profanity to motivate a player; for bench players to boo, taunt or jeer opponents; for a player to do a showboat dance after scoring; or to attack a pre-existing injury of the other team's top player.

"Coaches in North Dakota are well prepared and are very ethical. They are trying to do the right thing for the boys and girls they work with. There's an example here and there of someone who crosses the line, but the results suggest this does not happen much," Strand said. "Having watched high school coaches in North Dakota, you don't see a lot of unethical gamesmanship action. The results support what I thought of our coaches."

Some questionable situations had some support among coaches. For

instance, 23.3 percent said it is acceptable for a hockey coach to send in a player to intimidate opponents and protect his teammates. A total of 14.5 percent said it is acceptable to have a groundskeeper soak the field in an effort to slow down an opposing [football team](#).

Scenarios dealing with decisions of [referees](#) or umpires are more challenging. Nearly half, 48.8 percent, said it was acceptable in volleyball to take the winning point even though a player touched the ball before it went out and the referee missed the call.

"There is conundrum of what we believe we should be doing and what actually happens when we get in the heat of battle. But, I think North Dakota coaches are above board in most of their actions," Strand said, noting the pressure to win can be a factor. "On paper, they can say a certain action is unacceptable, but it can be different when the game is on the line."

An earlier study by Strand looked at gamesmanship attitudes of [high school](#) athletes. "There was a statistically significant difference to almost every one of the questions. The athletes believe many of the actions dealing with gamesmanship were much more acceptable than the coaches do," he said.

Strand suggests those differences show the significance of education and appropriate training for coaches.

"It's important that we teach young coaches how to build character in their athletes. We need to help prepare boys and girls for a lifetime of good character," Strand said. "The results of this study support that belief."

Provided by North Dakota State University

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