

WHY WE **NEED** AN INTEGRITY PROGRAM

*From the time officials first put on a uniform, they take an oath that is not to be taken lightly. They pledge to conduct themselves so the avocation will be held in high esteem. But actions by some officials off the court or field in the recent past have cast a negative light on their peers. How do we restore our officiating oath? How do we go about renewing the **trust and credibility** we once had in the eyes of the public? A former high-profile official thinks it's time to adopt an integrity program and offers his blueprint for one.*





For many sports fans, the Nov. 15, 2007 indictment of Barry Bonds for perjury and obstruction of justice put an exclamation mark on a sordid series of events. Only two months earlier, the NFL announced it had fined New England Patriots Coach Bill Belichick \$500,000 for videotaping signals by New York Jets coaches during the season opener. Barely eight weeks before that incident, the NBA revealed it had been cooperating with the FBI during the bureau's probe of referee Tim Donaghy for allegedly gambling on games he officiated.

We recently endured a period in which scandals were swirling over all three major sports in America. Unhappily, hardly anyone is surprised at that exceptional turn of events. Barely a week goes by, it seems, without the media chronicling the onfield and after-hours antics of some professional or amateur athlete, or a well-known college team, player or coach. Given the immense hold sports exercise over our imaginations, an exposé in one sport is quickly linked with a previous scandal involving another athlete, and thus a transgression by one figure tends to besmirch reputations across the entire field.

By themselves, sports organizations and officials cannot put an end to all roguish behavior in sports. But a well-structured, formal integrity program for sports officials would be a huge first step in making it clear that ethical behavior is expected and will be enforced. "Glass, china and reputation are easily crack'd and never well mended," wrote Benjamin Franklin. An integrity program would help safeguard what is probably most valuable to referees — their reputation — and make it easier for concerned individuals to blow the whistle on miscreants. As a colleague observed, "Sports officiating: A cottage industry no more!"

Integrity or compliance programs are rapidly becoming the norm across private and public sectors. Many large corporations and the federal government adopted compliance programs in the wake of scandals that made Pentagon purchases of \$600 hammers the butt of late-night comedy, and front-page news of companies like Enron and Arthur Andersen.

Purpose of a Sports Officials Integrity Program

The purpose of a sports officials integrity program (SOIP) would be to prevent, detect and correct wrongdoing. A formal integrity program would enable issues of any nature — conflicts of interest, harassment, nepotism, fraudulent practices, illegal behaviors — to be identified and addressed through established channels

and handled appropriately, before outside organizations and agencies step in or broadcast to the world.

To be effective, an integrity program must clearly communicate that honest and legal behavior is expected, along with establishing policies and procedures for reporting suspected transgressions. An integrity program should be seen as the foundation for nurturing or building a culture that promotes integrity and ethical behavior.

Elements of an Effective Integrity Program

Written standards of conduct, and policies and procedures promoting ethical behavior. Each organization, industry and trade has its own list of dos and don'ts. Sports officials are well aware of the peculiar temptations and vulnerabilities they and their colleagues face, from playing blackjack at casinos to betting through bookmakers to worse offenses. An integrity program for sports officials would spell out behaviors the organization would not tolerate and adopt steps that are likely to reduce inappropriate behavior.

An illustrative example are the steps NBA Commissioner David Stern specified in the wake of the Donaghy situation. The steps include more extensive, ongoing background checks of referees, announcing referee assignments on game day, disclosing mistakes by referees and using the NBA's vast statistical base of referee calls to evaluate performance and detect suspicious activity. Perhaps there is some merit, too, in former baseball commissioner Fay Vincent's proposal that Major League Baseball and other leagues should institute an award for the best performance during the season by an official, perhaps a Most Valuable Official Award.

An appropriate organizational structure and oversight by high-level personnel. Experts who have studied and implemented integrity programs recommend the organizations appoint a chief compliance officer, reporting directly to the top leaders. To be effective, compliance officers should have a reputation for being trustworthy and should be selected from among respected senior managers in the organization.

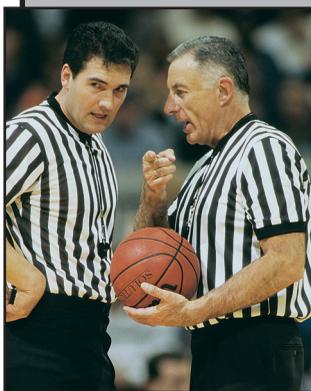
Proper education and training. Such instruction should include sessions detailing the organization's compliance program, education about ongoing areas of emphasis and how to report suspected irregularities, among other topics. Every member of the organization should be familiar with the integrity program.

A formal process to receive tips and complaints. The process would preferably be through an outsourced hotline and would include procedures to protect confidentiality of callers. Organizations that establish hotlines for reporting irregularities typically make the telephone number widely available throughout the organization. Individuals are more likely to report suspect behavior if they can do so anonymously and confidentially.

Once a Referee ...

David Dodge is president and CEO of PHT Services, Ltd. The company, based in Columbia, S.C., provides the state's health care industry with products and services in the areas of property and casualty insurance, risk management, employee benefits, education and information, consulting services, information technology and security services.

Dodge officiated NCAA Division I men's basketball in the Atlantic Coast and Southeastern conferences for almost 30 years. The link between officiating and his job is symbolized by his choice of a Fox 40 whistle as the company icon. PHT believes because the Fox 40 symbolizes safety and security for those who use it in drawing attention in an emergency, it can provide that kind of assurance to its clients. PHT even offers its clients the opportunity to buy bulk quantities of the Fox 40 customized with its organization's logo.



David Dodge (right), and Doug Shows



TOM EWART

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Issues that are reported should be documented and investigated and proper action taken. Top management should receive periodic reports. Experts emphasize it is essential that individuals should know to whom they can turn and report suspected inappropriate behavior without fear of reprisal.

Disciplinary action against violators. A sports integrity program should specify the consequences of violating the organization's standards of conduct and policies and procedures. The written standards of conduct should also spell out procedures for handling disciplinary problems and who will be responsible for taking appropriate action. Many observers recommend publicizing disciplinary actions as that can have a deterrent effect.

Periodic checks and monitoring. Sports organizations that adopt an integrity program should take reasonable steps to determine the program is being followed and to make adjustments as appropriate.

Prompt response to allegations and corrective action. Individuals should have confidence their concerns will be addressed and not swept under the rug.

Developing a Model Sports Officials Integrity Program

An effective way to introduce the concept of integrity or compliance programs for sports officials might be through a joint venture of officials organizations. Perhaps a simple first step would be to establish an oversight committee, charged with developing a code of conduct and policies and procedures. In order to ensure that the model program is credible and effective, the sponsoring organizations should make use of expert assistance.

A formal SOIP is a novel idea. It would take a pioneering mindset and commitment of resources to develop appropriate education and training programs, and mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing compliance. But the gains will likely be substantial, given the tarnished image of sports. More than one in five fans has less interest in sports because of scandals including gambling, steroid use, cheating and dog fighting, according to a poll conducted by Seton Hall University and the Sharkey Institute.

"Whether it's steroids or dog fighting, significant numbers of people are turned off by it," Rick Gentile, the poll's director, told the Associated Press. A well-considered and publicized sports integrity program could improve the sinking image of a multibillion-dollar industry.

David Dodge served as a Division I men's college basketball official for 30 years. He is president and CEO of a risk management firm in Columbia, S.C. He gratefully acknowledges assistance from Moby Salahuddin, a freelance writer and editor. □

Program Aims for 'Culture' of Integrity

Doing the right thing.

That is not only what is expected of employees at Tuomey Medical Center in Sumter, S.C., it's required. In fact, that is the title of the Tuomey code of conduct. It drew the attention of David Dodge, since Tuomey is a longtime customer of his company, PHT Services, Ltd. In fact, Tuomey's chief executive officer serves on PHT's board of directors.

Anyone who doesn't comply with the code will soon be introduced to George Rikard, the corporate integrity officer for Tuomey. A former South Carolina State Trooper, Rikard investigates alleged violations of the code of conduct.



George Rikard

In 1999, the federal government instituted a set of regulations for the health care industry. The adoption of an integrity program was among the requirements mandated by the government. For the last 10 years, Rikard has overseen the program at Tuomey.

"We're trying to develop a culture of doing the right thing," Rikard said.

The six-page code of conduct spells out what is expected and what is not allowed. Conflicts of interest, failure to abide by privacy practices, mishandling of infectious or other hazardous waste and careless actions that have a negative or dangerous effect on others are among the prohibited acts.

"I don't handle human resources issues," he noted.

Although Tuomey employees may report problems anonymously via a telephone hotline or in person to supervisors, department managers or others, Rikard says his reputation for discretion is such that many employees come directly to him.

"I've got a name in the community for having integrity," Rikard said. "People have to respect you and they have to trust you. When they come in and report something, they've got to know it's not going any further than necessary. Sometimes you can't keep it completely confidential. You have to tell them up front, 'We'll have to talk to certain people to get this worked out.'" Sexual harassment would fall under the latter category.

When a complaint is registered through the hotline, Rikard responds within five business days. A code number is assigned to callers who wish to remain anonymous and they are allowed to call periodically to check on the progress of the investigation or resultant findings. Whether anonymous or not, the complainant is protected by a no-retaliation policy; if a subordinate complains about a superior, for instance, the superior may not punish the complainant.

Rikard sends copies of all complaints to the hospital's chief executive officer and the board of directors. The number of complaints varies, he said. "Some (months) you might not get any, some you might get three, four, maybe five."

If a complaint involves a violation of a federal, state or local law, the matter is turned over to the proper authorities. Violations of hospital policy are handled internally. Those who are disciplined may appear before a grievance committee to appeal.

Prospective employees must submit to a background check and a drug test. Any past criminal offense raises a "red flag," although most charges are considered on a case-by-case basis. "The biggest red flag you look for in health care, of course, is charges of sexual abuse. People who have anything to do with handling money are held to a much higher standard," Rikard says.

Mandatory random drug tests, although not required by the government, are also administered after employment.