



Idaho State
University

Building Character through Sport: Role Models, Environment & Education

Elaine Foster, PhD
Co-Director for The Center for Sport Studies

ROAR



Idaho State
University

“Sports Build Character”

How have sports influenced your character?

What characteristics have you learned, developed, refined?

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Moral vs. Social Values

- Moral Value: values that stand alone
 - If we violate them, we violate another person(s) directly
- Non-moral value: Worth or importance of an extrinsic object or behavior
- Principle: An affirmation of one's values. Always written in the negative... says what you will do based on what you morally value
- Immoral: Knows right, chooses to do wrong for own benefit...

Moral Values

You and your interactions
with others/society

Social Values

Extrinsic things that give
you value

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Common Moral Values

- Justice
 - “...we treat others equally in the sense that they have the proportionally same contribution to the goodness of their lives, in a moral sense” (p. 28).
 - Principle: Do not be unfair
- Honesty
 - “...the condition or capacity of being truthful or trustworthy in dealing with others, including competitors” (p. 29).
 - Principle: Do not lie, cheat or steal
- Responsibility
 - “...accounting for your actions” (p. 29).
 - Principle: Do not be irresponsible
- Beneficence
 - “...is the condition of (1) not doing harm, (2) preventing harm, (3) removing harm, (4) doing good” (p. 29).
 - Principle: Do not be uncivil

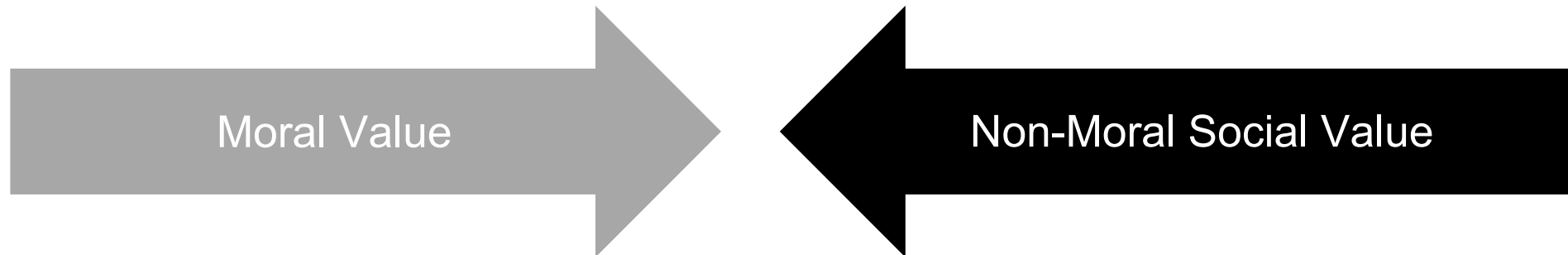
ROAR



Idaho State
University

Non-Moral Values Often Drive Decisions

- Should Anne tell the referee?
 - If you were asked, would you say yes?
 - Which values are clashing?



ROAR



Idaho State
University

Moral Reasoning in Athlete Populations- a 30 Year Review

We have been studying moral reasoning and moral education intervention programs in athletic populations for 30 years, with a data base of approximately 90,000 individuals. Below find what we know about the process of moral reasoning and its effect on moral development.

- 1. Athlete populations score significantly lower on moral reasoning inventories than do non-athlete populations.**
- 2. Male revenue producing sport athletes score significantly lower than non-revenue producing sport athletes do.**
- 3. Females score significantly higher than males, either revenue producing or non-revenue producing.**
- 4. Females scores are dropping and we predict they will converge with men's scores in 5 years.**
- 5. Longitudinal studies of discrete competitive populations drop over a four-year period whether high school or college.**
- 6. Moral reasoning scores of non-intervened athletic populations are decreasing at significant rates.**
- 7. The longer one is in athletics, the more affected is one's moral reasoning.**
- 8. Intervention programs can have a positive effect on moral reasoning.**
- 9. Effective intervention programs have a long-term effect on moral reasoning.**
- 10. Moral reasoning is one facet of a highly complex process of moral development.**

ROAR

Center for Ethics* at University of Idaho



Idaho State
University

The Effects of Athletic Competition on Character Development in College Student Athletes

- “...the longer one participates in high-level competition, the more one’s moral reasoning is negatively affected...”
- “...the type of competition that is typically practiced in the United States has a negative effect on moral growth...”
- “In short, sport as we practice it, does not build character...”

(Stoll, 2012)

ROAR



Idaho State
University

All is not lost!

The Case of Jamie Tartt

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=BjyFzS89PtQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjyFzS89PtQ)

ROAR



Role Models

Genetic Predisposition

Environment

Character Education



Idaho State
University

The Sporting Environment

- What is the first question asked of an athlete after the game?
- What are the first thoughts coaches have about the game once it ends?

“The problem with their moral development is the game itself—how it is played, how it is learned, how it is supported by fans, coaches, and society” (Stoll, 2021, p. 4).

ROAR



Idaho State
University

The Sporting Environment

“...perhaps the greatest influence on character development is the environment of competition, especially the aspects of strategy, deception, and pressure to win” (Stoll, 2012, p. 3).

What Can Coaches Do?

1. Build a Moral Community
2. Keep Winning in Perspective
3. Make it About Learning

ROAR



Idaho State
University

The Sporting Environment

1. Build a Moral Community

Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller (2003)

Social Values

"...loyalty, commitment, dedication, sacrifice, hard work, determination, cooperation, and friendship..."

Moral Values

Honesty, Justice,
Responsibility,
Beneficence

Lickona (1991)

Three conditions for creating a moral community (Lickona, 1991):

- Students know each other
- Students respect, affirm, and care about each other, and
- Students feel membership in, and responsibility to, the group

Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh (1983)

Five strategies geared toward creating such a climate:

- Physical arrangement of the classroom
- Grouping of the students (pairs or small groups)
- Teacher models acceptance of opinions
- Good listening and communication skills, and
- Encouraging student-to-student interaction

ROAR



Idaho State
University

The Sporting Environment

2. Keep Winning in Perspective

- “The primary purpose of sport is not to win the match... but to derive pleasure from the attempt to do so and to afford pleasure to one’s fellow participants in the process” (Keating, 1964, p. 146)
- “It doesn’t really matter who wins the game, although it does matter that the festivity occurs” (Feezell, 1987, p. 154)
- “Any attempt to disregard or circumvent these rules must be viewed as a deliberate attempt to deprive the contest of its meaning” (Keating, 1964, p. 146)
- True Competition:

ROAR



Idaho State
University

The Sporting Environment

3. Make it About Learning

- “...a nearly consequence-free atmosphere in which to grow and make mistakes without the fear of punishment, rejection, or ostracization” (Kohler & Strand, 2021, para 6)

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Role Models

“Some of the most powerful role models for athletes are their coaches” (Stoll, 2012, p. 1).



ROAR



Idaho State
University

Role Models

What Can Coaches Do?

1. Know Your Why
2. Check Yourself
3. Engage in Professional Development

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Role Models

1. Know Your Why

“I lost sight of what it means to be coached. I lost sight of the mysterious and important relationships that occur during the act of coaching. The corruption led me away from the more important social and moral skills that needed to be developed with my athletes. Yes, motor skills are important – but my athletes’ moral skills were as important or more important. But I didn’t know it at the time. I thought the true measure of a coach was in the successes and the wins – and that took motor skills.” (Stoll, 2021, para 11)

- [Developing a Successful Coaching Philosophy: A Step-by-Step Approach](#) (Van Mullem, 2013)

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Role Models

2. Check Yourself

- ***What Values Are You Actively Teaching/Modeling?***
 - “...sport should be guided by moral values like justice, responsibility, honesty, and respect, applied to all parties involved, including competitors” (Foster, 2025, para 9)
- ***Are You Inadvertently Reinforcing Unethical Attitudes and/or Behaviors?***
 - “...a coach does not have to break rules or bribe officials to be *too focused* on winning. Overemphasizing winning may result from how a coach reacts in the heat of play, responds to a loss, or handles a mistake” (Foster, 2025, para 13).

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Role Models

3. Engage in Professional Development

“As all philosophers would agree, it is not enough to concede that something is acceptable just because it is the case; the important question is whether it ought to be the case” (Kretchmar et al., 2017, p. 240).

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

“Research has found that a very specific teaching methodology, based on a morally reasoned approach, can significantly affect moral reasoning and moral development” (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2003).



ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

What Can Coaches Do?

1. Have a Clear Mission and Values
2. Intentionally Teach Moral Values

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

1. Have a Clear Mission & Values

- Your Purpose/Why?
 - Why are you coaching? Why are the athletes here?
 - [Developing a Successful Coaching Philosophy: A Step-by-Step Approach](#) (Van Mullem, 2013)
- Reiterate the values throughout the season

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

2. Intentionally Teach Moral Values

- Learning about morality is a cognitive process of growth
- “Just like callouses on our hands prevent us from feeling what we touch with much sensitivity, moral callouses that form around our hearts keep us from feeling issues of ethical right and wrong. To remove such callouses, we must be aware of how they formed and how they affect the way we think, perceive, and behave” (Kretchmar, 1994, p. 239).

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

2. Intentionally Teach Moral Values

- “Ethics education for the team starts during preseason, when Bowen assigns [articles](#) for the players to read. Most of the stories are unrelated to sport. Then he invites the teenagers to talk about what they learned, first in smaller groups and then as a whole team; the smaller groups allow for more emotional risk-taking...”
[\(Flanagan, 2026\)](#)
- I will not lie, cheat, nor steal unless...
 - Can we make an exception for Anne’s behavior?
 - “Cheating is violating a promise. Is the common practice of getting an edge cheating? Should we practice getting an edge” (Lumpkin et al, 2003, p. 35)?

ROAR



Idaho State
University

Character Education

2. Intentionally Teach Moral Values

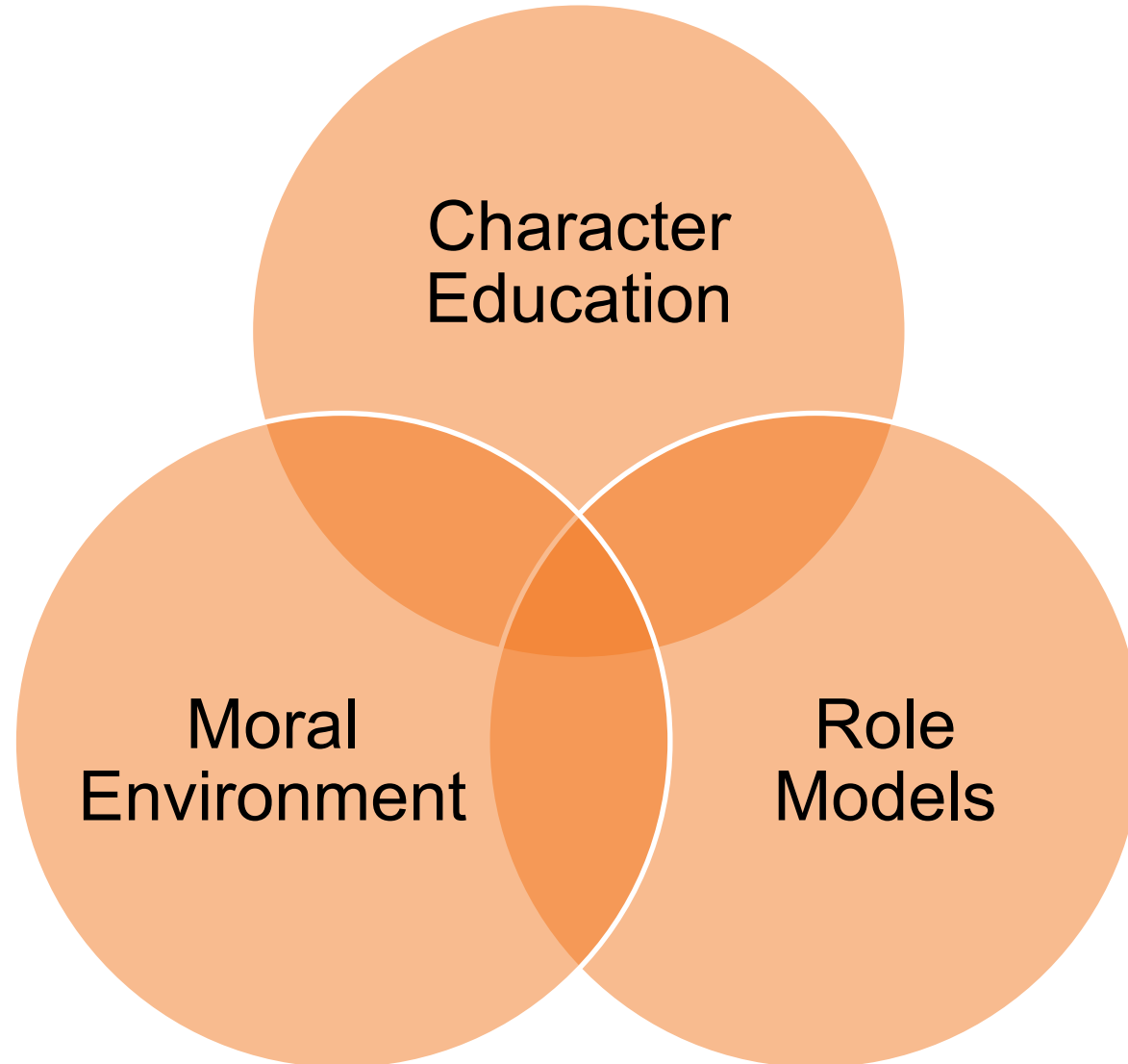
- [True Competition: A Guide to Pursuing Excellence in Sport and Society](#)
- [Positive Coaching Alliance Resources](#)
- [The Coach's Dilemma: What will you do to win?](#)

ROAR



Idaho State
University

What will you teach?



ROAR