



## Role of Sports in Promoting Holistic Development of Students and Community Engagement in Educational Institutions of Punjab

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### Abstract

This study investigates how university athletes understand and perceive deviant behavior through the theoretical framework of social control. A survey of 101 athletes assessed the influence of educational programs, peer dynamics, disciplinary equity, and institutional resources on ethical behavior in sports. Results demonstrated substantial endorsement for organized interventions including workshops; expert-led sessions, digital courses, and mentoring that promote principles of honesty. Participants highlighted the necessity of clear and impartial disciplinary processes, uniform consequences for all athletes, and shared responsibility between teammates and officials. Additionally, supportive resources such as psychological services, guidance from alumni, and confidential reporting methods were recognized as important tools for preventing misconduct. In summary, the research advocates for a comprehensive strategy that integrates ethical training, responsible governance, consistent enforcement, and structural support to mitigate deviance in collegiate sports. The findings highlight the essential role of social connectedness and organizational structures in cultivating an environment of ethical behavior and sportsmanship among athletes.

**Key Words:** Deviance, Social Control Theory, University Athletes, Sports Ethics, Accountability, Discipline, Integrity, Fair Play

### Introduction

The unique social environment of university athletics, characterized by intense in-group solidarity, performance pressures, and a distinct status hierarchy, creates a complex landscape for understanding deviant behavior. From a social control perspective, the very bonds that ostensibly deter deviance attachment to the team, commitment to athletic success, and belief in institutional rules can paradoxically be reconfigured to facilitate and justify actions considered deviant by the



broader university community (Sellers, 2020; Tapp & Hodge, 2021). This phenomenon suggests that the high levels of social control within athletic programs may not always strengthen conventional societal bonds as theorized by Hirschi (2009), but can instead foster a separate moral code where deviance is defined by its impact on the team rather than by formal sanctions. Consequently, research indicates that university athletes' perceptions of deviance, particularly concerning academic integrity, substance use, and hazing rituals, are often mediated through a primary lens of athletic identity and the perceived expectations of coaches and peers, effectively creating a system of "differential social control" (Martin & Rocca, 2017, p. 112). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the nuanced understanding and perceptions of deviance among university athletes through the theoretical framework of social control, positing that the strength of athletic social bonds is a primary predictor of whether these bonds act as an insulating or a risk factor for non-normative conduct.

## Literature Review

Recent empirical research consistently demonstrates that the social world of university athletics operates with a distinct normative system that critically shapes participants' understanding of deviance. Studies applying a social control lens reveal that the intense attachment to the team and commitment to athletic goals can create a form of "negative social capital" where conformity to group norms supersedes adherence to broader institutional policies (Sellers, 2020, p. 258). For instance, research on academic misconduct finds that athletes may perceive collaboration on forbidden assignments as prosocial behavior a means of supporting a teammate rather than as cheating, thereby redefining the deviant act through the priority of athletic social bonds (Tapp & Hodge, 2021). Furthermore, investigations into hazing rituals show that the involvement of authority figures like coaches, even if passive, strengthens the belief in the legitimacy of these practices, effectively weakening the element of "belief" in the university's moral code (Martin & Rocca, 2017). This body of literature culminates in the finding that the very strengths of the athletic social bond the high levels of attachment, commitment, and involvement are the primary mechanisms that facilitate the neutralization of societal norms and the construction of a permissive environment for certain deviant acts, provided they are perceived to serve the group's interests.

## Research Method

To investigate the perceptions of deviance through a social control lens, this study will employ a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, a robust approach endorsed for exploring complex social phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase will utilize a cross-sectional survey administered to a stratified random sample of 300 university athletes from various sports across three institutions; the survey will incorporate validated scales measuring the four elements of social bonds attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief based on Hirschi's framework (1969) as modernized by Sellers (2020), alongside a scenario-based scale measuring perceptions of deviance. Following the quantitative analysis, a qualitative phase will involve in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sub-sample of 15 athletes representing high and low scores on the social bond scales to explore the nuanced

reasoning behind their perceptions, a technique effective for capturing rich, contextual data (Patton, 2015). All survey data will be analyzed using SPSS (Version 28) for descriptive statistics and multiple regression to identify predictive relationships, while interview transcripts will undergo thematic analysis using NVivo software to identify patterns and themes related to how athletic social controls shape definitions of deviant behavior.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study will be conducted in two sequential phases corresponding to its mixed-methods design. The quantitative data from the survey will first be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) will summarize the sample characteristics and key variables. To test the core hypothesis that social bonds predict perceptions of deviance, a multiple regression analysis will be performed, with the four elements of social control (attachment, commitment, involvement, belief) as independent variables and the composite score of deviance perception as the dependent variable, ensuring assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity are met (Field, 2017). Subsequently, the qualitative data from interviews will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. This process will involve iterative coding to develop themes that explicate how athletes rationalize and perceive deviant acts within their unique social context. Finally, a joint display table will be utilized to integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings, allowing for a meta-inference that explains how the statistical relationships manifest in the lived experiences of the athletes, a best practice for mixed-methods integration (Guetterman et al., 2015).

**Table 1:**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. Deliberately breaking rules to gain an advantage is considered cheating.	24.270	100	.000	3.6535	3.355	3.952
2. Faking an injury to waste time is a form of deviant behavior.	24.611	100	.000	3.4356	3.159	3.713
3. Using illegal equipment (e.g., tampered gear) is unacceptable in sports.	28.074	100	.000	3.9010	3.625	4.177
4. Pretending to be fouled (diving) is a harmless strategy to win. (Reverse-coded)	27.056	100	.000	3.6436	3.376	3.911
5. Bribing officials to influence a game is a serious ethical violation.	29.446	100	.000	3.7723	3.518	4.026
6. Intentionally injuring an opponent is always wrong, even in competitive sports.	24.635	100	.000	3.6040	3.314	3.894

7. Verbal abuse (e.g., trash-talking, insults) is just part of the game and not deviant. (Reverse-coded)	20.548	100	.000	2.8812	2.603	3.159
8. Physical aggression (e.g., pushing, hitting) outside the rules is unacceptable.	28.916	100	.000	3.6832	3.430	3.936
9. Retaliating against an opponent's foul is justified. (Reverse-coded)	26.417	100	.000	3.3861	3.132	3.640
10. Referees should punish aggressive behavior more strictly to maintain fairness.	28.527	100	.000	3.6634	3.409	3.918
11. Using performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) is a form of cheating.	24.365	100	.000	3.5545	3.265	3.844
12. Taking painkillers to play while injured is acceptable and not deviant. (Reverse-coded)	25.462	100	.000	3.4851	3.214	3.757
13. Recreational drug use by athletes violates sports ethics.	26.666	100	.000	3.4257	3.171	3.681
14. Doping undermines the integrity of competitive sports.	27.913	100	.000	3.5050	3.256	3.754
15. Athletes who use banned substances should face lifetime bans.	26.635	100	.000	3.6139	3.345	3.883
16. Tactical fouls (e.g., stopping a counterattack) are a smart strategy, not cheating. (Reverse-coded)	28.070	100	.000	3.5446	3.294	3.795
17. Respecting opponents and officials is essential for true sportsmanship.	33.073	100	.000	3.8911	3.658	4.125
18. Deceiving referees (e.g., pretending innocence) is part of competitive play. (Reverse-coded)	27.078	100	.000	3.3861	3.138	3.634
19. Shaking hands with opponents after a match shows good sportsmanship.	31.213	100	.000	3.9208	3.672	4.170
20. Winning by any means necessary is more important than fair play. (Reverse-coded)	23.504	100	.000	3.2475	2.973	3.522

### Interpretation

The results of the one-sample t-test revealed a strong and consistent ethical stance among participants, who overwhelmingly condemned deviant behaviors in sports. Actions such as bribing officials, using illegal equipment, and doping were met with significant disapproval, as were aggressive behaviors like intentionally injuring opponents, with participants strongly endorsing strict punishment for such violations. Conversely, respondents firmly rejected rationalizations that justify deviance, such as the notion that "winning by any means" is acceptable. Instead, the findings demonstrated a powerful consensus in favor of sportsmanship, with the highest levels of agreement reserved for values like respecting opponents and officials and shaking hands after a match, underscoring a collective commitment to fairness, integrity, and mutual respect as the foundational principles of athletic competition.

**Table 2:**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. Winning is more important than following the rules in competitive sports.	19.858	100	.000	2.9901	2.691	3.289
2. Breaking minor rules is acceptable if it helps the team win.	21.853	100	.000	2.8020	2.548	3.056
3. Fair play is a fundamental value that should always be upheld in sports.	29.649	100	.000	3.6832	3.437	3.930
4. Players who cheat undermine the spirit of the game.	25.598	100	.000	3.3762	3.115	3.638
5. Officials often overlook minor rule violations, so they don't matter much.	26.624	100	.000	3.2079	2.969	3.447
6. Physical aggression (e.g., pushing, shoving) is a normal part of competitive sports.	21.754	100	.000	2.7822	2.528	3.036
7. Verbal abuse (e.g., trash-talking, insults) is just part of the game.	20.975	100	.000	2.8218	2.555	3.089
8. Intentionally injuring an opponent is never justified, even to win.	24.407	100	.000	3.2475	2.984	3.512
9. Referees should penalize aggressive behavior more strictly.	30.171	100	.000	3.6238	3.385	3.862
10. Players who act aggressively are just being competitive.	26.269	100	.000	3.2574	3.011	3.503
11. Faking an injury to gain an advantage is sometimes necessary.	23.835	100	.000	3.0000	2.750	3.250
12. Pretending to follow the rules while secretly breaking them is smart play.	24.462	100	.000	2.9703	2.729	3.211
13. Tactical fouls (e.g., stopping a counterattack) are part of the game.	28.258	100	.000	3.2871	3.056	3.518
14. Players should never deceive referees, even if it benefits their team.	29.740	100	.000	3.4653	3.234	3.697
15. Bending the rules is different from cheating and is acceptable.	27.619	100	.000	3.3564	3.115	3.598
16. Teammates encourage each other to break rules if it helps win.	23.390	100	.000	2.9802	2.727	3.233
17. Coaches sometimes indirectly support rule-breaking to secure victories.	24.977	100	.000	3.0693	2.826	3.313
18. Peer pressure from teammates leads to unethical behavior in games.	29.037	100	.000	3.3960	3.164	3.628



19. A coach's attitude toward fair play influences players' behavior.	31.653	100	.000	3.6931	3.462	3.925
20. Players who refuse to engage in deviant behavior are seen as weak.	28.960	100	.000	3.3465	3.117	3.576
21. Players who cheat should face severe penalties (e.g., suspensions).	28.269	100	.000	3.6040	3.351	3.857
22. The benefits of winning outweigh the risks of getting caught cheating.	28.604	100	.000	3.2673	3.041	3.494
23. Deviant behavior harms the reputation of university sports.	30.623	100	.000	3.5644	3.333	3.795
24. Players who engage in unethical acts feel guilty afterward.	28.167	100	.000	3.4158	3.175	3.656
25. The sports community should take a stronger stand against rule-breaking.	27.644	100	.000	3.5347	3.281	3.788

**Interpretation**

Based on the second dataset, participants demonstrated a strong yet nuanced ethical stance, valuing fair play and safety while acknowledging the contextual tensions within competitive sports. Although there was some recognition that winning can create pressure to bend minor rules, respondents overwhelmingly upheld the principle of fair play and expressed strong disapproval of aggression, verbal abuse, and intentional harm. Cheating and deception were largely rejected, though participants distinguished between outright cheating and more ambiguous behaviors like tactical fouls, suggesting a graded perception of deviance. The data highlighted the powerful influence of social dynamics, particularly from coaches and teammates, in either encouraging or discouraging unethical behavior, and emphasized the need for accountability, stricter penalties, and collective responsibility to uphold integrity. Overall, the results reflect a complex ethical landscape where a commitment to sportsmanship persists despite the perceived competitive pressures that can sometimes undermine it.

**Table 3:**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. I am fully aware of my university's official code of conduct for athletes.	24.563	100	.000	3.1089	2.858	3.360
2. I understand the penalties for violating sports-related disciplinary policies.	30.493	100	.000	3.4752	3.249	3.701
3. The university clearly communicates rules regarding academic eligibility for athletes.	33.037	100	.000	3.4653	3.257	3.673



4. I know where to find written policies on athlete behavior (e.g., handbook, website).	30.896	100	.000	3.4950	3.271	3.719
5. My coaches regularly review institutional rules with the team.	28.467	100	.000	3.2871	3.058	3.516
6. Teammates hold each other accountable for following institutional rules.	28.445	100	.000	3.4554	3.214	3.696
7. Peer pressure discourages behaviors that violate team/school policies.	33.320	100	.000	3.6040	3.389	3.819
8. Senior athletes mentor newcomers about expected conduct.	35.315	100	.000	3.6832	3.476	3.890
9. Breaking rules would damage my reputation among teammates.	30.155	100	.000	3.6931	3.450	3.936
10. Our team culture emphasizes respect for institutional policies.	33.286	100	.000	3.6238	3.408	3.840
11. Penalties for misconduct (e.g., suspension, scholarship loss) are severe enough to deter violations.	26.994	100	.000	3.2079	2.972	3.444
12. The university consistently enforces disciplinary actions for rule-breaking.	31.749	100	.000	3.4455	3.230	3.661
13. Athletes receive fair warnings before facing serious consequences.	35.336	100	.000	3.6634	3.458	3.869
14. Sanctions for academic misconduct (e.g., cheating) are clearly defined.	32.540	100	.000	3.5842	3.366	3.803
15. The disciplinary process is transparent and well-explained to athletes.	28.821	100	.000	3.4257	3.190	3.662
16. Coaches clearly explain the consequences of breaking team/university rules.	28.712	100	.000	3.4653	3.226	3.705
17. Athletic department staff reinforce the importance of compliance.	35.972	100	.000	3.6139	3.415	3.813
18. Coaches set a good example by adhering to institutional policies themselves.	33.286	100	.000	3.6238	3.408	3.840
19. I would report a teammate's violation to a coach or administrator.	30.116	100	.000	3.5347	3.302	3.768
20. Coaches treat all players equally when enforcing discipline.	29.850	100	.000	3.5050	3.272	3.738
21. I consciously avoid actions that could violate university/team policies.	30.289	100	.000	3.5050	3.275	3.735
22. Following institutional rules is a matter of personal integrity.	37.560	100	.000	3.7525	3.554	3.951
23. I feel morally obligated to report serious misconduct, even if it's a teammate.	30.814	100	.000	3.6040	3.372	3.836

24. The university's rules align with my own ethical standards.	36.298	100	.000	3.7228	3.519	3.926
25. I am confident in my ability to navigate disciplinary procedures if accused of a violation.	34.102	100	.000	3.7030	3.488	3.918

**Interpretation**

The third dataset indicates a robust and well-integrated ethical framework within the athletic program, characterized by high awareness and internalization of institutional codes of conduct among athletes. Respondents demonstrated clear familiarity with policies and penalties, strongly affirming that coaches actively reinforce rules and model appropriate behavior, while peers foster a culture of mutual accountability and mentorship. This environment is further strengthened by a shared belief in the fairness and transparency of disciplinary procedures and a deep personal conviction that adhering to rules is a matter of integrity. Overall, the results depict a climate where institutional norms are consistently upheld through effective leadership, peer influence, and a strong alignment between personal ethics and organizational expectations, creating a culture where compliance is viewed as both a social responsibility and a moral imperative.

**Table 4:**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. The university clearly explains the rules and expectations for athletes.	25.092	100	.000	3.3861	3.118	3.654
2. I fully understand the consequences of violating team/university policies.	32.363	100	.000	3.6139	3.392	3.835
3. The code of conduct for athletes is easily accessible (e.g., handbook, online).	32.828	100	.000	3.4752	3.265	3.685
4. Coaches and administrators regularly review policies with athletes.	35.819	100	.000	3.6733	3.470	3.877
5. The language used in policy documents is clear and easy to understand.	31.630	100	.000	3.6733	3.443	3.904
6. Disciplinary actions are applied equally to all athletes, regardless of their status.	30.849	100	.000	3.5644	3.335	3.794
7. The penalties for rule violations are fair and proportionate.	35.469	100	.000	3.7129	3.505	3.921
8. Athletes are given a chance to explain their side before punishments are issued.	39.347	100	.000	3.8515	3.657	4.046
9. The enforcement of rules is consistent across different sports teams.	34.689	100	.000	3.6832	3.473	3.894
10. Favoritism does not influence disciplinary decisions.	29.765	100	.000	3.5644	3.327	3.802



11. The current penalties effectively discourage rule-breaking among athletes.	27.548	100	.000	3.3762	3.133	3.619
12. Suspensions and sanctions are strong enough to deter misconduct.	31.183	100	.000	3.5743	3.347	3.802
13. The disciplinary process helps athletes learn from their mistakes.	32.895	100	.000	3.7129	3.489	3.937
14. The university's policies successfully promote ethical behavior in sports.	33.954	100	.000	3.6931	3.477	3.909
15. Repeat offenders face appropriately escalating consequences.	33.077	100	.000	3.7426	3.518	3.967
16. Coaches actively enforce university policies during games and practices.	26.666	100	.000	3.4257	3.171	3.681
17. Athletic administrators take rule violations seriously.	33.259	100	.000	3.6832	3.463	3.903
18. Coaches set a good example by following the same rules they enforce.	30.702	100	.000	3.6139	3.380	3.847
19. Athletes trust the fairness of decisions made by coaches and administrators.	34.102	100	.000	3.6634	3.450	3.876
20. There is open communication between athletes and staff about policy concerns.	30.861	100	.000	3.6832	3.446	3.920
21. Overall, I am satisfied with how rules are enforced in my university's sports programs.	32.861	100	.000	3.5644	3.349	3.780
22. The current policies create a positive and respectful team environment.	31.653	100	.000	3.6931	3.462	3.925
23. I feel comfortable reporting misconduct without fear of retaliation.	31.396	100	.000	3.5941	3.367	3.821
24. The university values athlete input when updating policies.	31.527	100	.000	3.5842	3.359	3.810
25. Changes to policies are needed to improve fairness and effectiveness.	28.920	100	.000	3.6337	3.384	3.883

### Interpretation

The fourth dataset reveals a strong consensus among athletes that institutional rules and disciplinary processes are clear, fair, and effectively communicated and enforced. Respondents affirmed that policies are highly accessible and well-explained, with coaches and administrators actively modeling and reinforcing compliance, thereby fostering a culture of accountability and trust. The perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary actions applied equally without favoritism and seen as both proportionate and educational further reinforce confidence in the system. Additionally, athletes reported satisfaction with the respectful and transparent environment these policies create, though they also acknowledged the value of ongoing input and adaptation to ensure continued fairness and effectiveness. Overall, the findings depict a robust

ethical infrastructure where institutional enforcement aligns with educational goals and athlete engagement.

**Table 5**

**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. Regular workshops on sports ethics would help athletes better understand acceptable behavior.	29.375	100	.000	3.6238	3.379	3.869
2. Guest speakers (e.g., former athletes, ethicists) could effectively promote integrity in sports.	33.259	100	.000	3.6832	3.463	3.903
3. Online training modules on fair play should be mandatory for all athletes.	34.907	100	.000	3.6337	3.427	3.840
4. Team discussions about ethical dilemmas would improve decision-making.	35.819	100	.000	3.6733	3.470	3.877
5. The university should provide clear examples of ethical vs. unethical behavior in sports.	33.259	100	.000	3.6832	3.463	3.903
6. The university should simplify its code of conduct to make it easier to understand.	27.668	100	.000	3.3960	3.153	3.640
7. Athletes should receive a handbook summarizing key rules and consequences.	31.881	100	.000	3.5941	3.370	3.818
8. Coaches should hold quarterly meetings to review disciplinary policies.	35.803	100	.000	3.7327	3.526	3.940
9. An anonymous hotline for reporting misconduct would encourage accountability.	34.989	100	.000	3.7921	3.577	4.007
10. Policies should be publicly posted in locker rooms and training facilities.	35.195	100	.000	3.7525	3.541	3.964
11. Team captains should set an example by consistently following ethical guidelines.	29.171	100	.000	3.6040	3.359	3.849
12. Peer mentorship programs would help newcomers adapt to team culture responsibly.	32.754	100	.000	3.7030	3.479	3.927
13. Teams should establish a council to address ethical concerns among athletes.	37.735	100	.000	3.8317	3.630	4.033
14. Teammates should call out unethical behavior instead of ignoring it.	35.352	100	.000	3.8119	3.598	4.026
15. Group discussions on sportsmanship would strengthen team values.	34.765	100	.000	3.8119	3.594	4.029

16. Penalties for misconduct should be the same for all players, regardless of skill level.	33.592	100	.000	3.8515	3.624	4.079
17. Athletes should have a voice in determining fair consequences for rule violations.	37.783	100	.000	3.8812	3.677	4.085
18. Coaches should avoid favoritism when enforcing discipline.	36.287	100	.000	3.9703	3.753	4.187
19. Disciplinary decisions should be explained clearly to those involved.	38.028	100	.000	3.9208	3.716	4.125
20. A committee (including athletes) should review controversial disciplinary cases.	33.489	100	.000	3.7525	3.530	3.975
21. The university should reward teams with outstanding ethical conduct.	28.920	100	.000	3.6337	3.384	3.883
22. More resources (e.g., sports psychologists) should be available to address behavioral issues.	28.876	100	.000	3.6634	3.412	3.915
23. Alumni athletes could help promote a culture of integrity.	34.474	100	.000	3.7624	3.546	3.979
24. Team-building activities should include ethics-focused exercises.	34.537	100	.000	3.6931	3.481	3.905
25. The athletic department should regularly survey athletes for policy feedback.	29.932	100	.000	3.7228	3.476	3.970

### Interpretation

Based on the results, participants overwhelmingly endorsed a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to reducing deviance, strongly supporting all 25 proposed institutional and team-level interventions. Key themes included the critical role of structured educational initiatives such as regular workshops and online training to enhance ethical awareness, alongside a pronounced emphasis on peer accountability through mentorship and captains modeling exemplary conduct. Respondents also highlighted the necessity of transparent, consistently applied disciplinary policies free from favoritism, alongside greater access to support resources like sports psychologists and anonymous reporting systems. Collectively, these findings advocate for a strategy that integrates education, social influence, equitable enforcement, and supportive infrastructure to strengthen ethical norms and effectively mitigate deviant behavior in university sports.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of social control mechanisms in shaping university athletes' understanding and perceptions of deviance, revealing that strong institutional policies, ethical coaching leadership, and positive peer cultures collectively foster an environment where normative standards are internalized and deviant behavior is actively discouraged. The findings affirm that when athletes perceive rules as clear, fair, and consistently

enforced, and when they are embedded in a culture that prioritizes integrity, mutual accountability, and educational support, their commitment to ethical conduct is significantly strengthened. These insights not only align with social control theory by highlighting the importance of bonds—such as attachment to the team, commitment to institutional values, and belief in the legitimacy of norms—but also offer practical pathways for universities to cultivate responsible athletic programs that prioritize holistic development alongside competitive excellence.

## Findings

1. University sports rules and codes of conduct are clearly explained, accessible, and easy to understand.
2. Disciplinary measures are applied fairly, proportionately, and consistently across teams.
3. Athletes trust the fairness and seriousness of coaches and administrators in enforcing rules.

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