



CONDUCT FOUL INITIATIVE PROGRAM SUMMARY

The conduct foul program tracks what have been coined “conduct fouls.” Conduct fouls are any penalty or infraction in a course of an athletic contest that is specifically deemed unsporting or unethical by a sports playing rules. The program has been used by Empire 8 Athletic Conference (Division III) for three years with great success in reducing the frequency of unsporting behavior and improving the atmosphere of its athletic contests. In fall of 2003 the program was implemented throughout Division III with great achievement. The Conduct Foul Program has been featured in *USA Today*, *The NCAA News*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Referee Magazine*, *Coaching Management Magazine* and many other news and trade publications. The program has also been adopted by NCAA Division III as part of its Strategic plan and is currently being introduced to Division I and II institutions and conferences as the leading program to impart change in the sporting culture.

GOALS OF THE INITIATIVE

This program is unique and innovative in that it provides tangible data relative to sporting behavior as opposed to most research and studies that are surveys of players and coaches perceptions. More importantly it is a great educational tool for athletes and coaches. Its goals are as follows:

1. Raise the level of awareness regarding unsporting behavior. Athletic Director’s and Commissioner’s are often unaware of exactly how frequently such behavior may be occurring. By having a reporting mechanism, it assures that all parties involved will be fully aware of the frequency of such behavior. AD’s and commissioners simply cannot attend every home and away contest for all of their sports. A member cannot fix a problem they are unaware of. This process will allow an institution to determine if they have a problem and permit them to take steps to address it accordingly.
2. Action. Once the stakeholders are aware of the frequency it should prompt them to become more proactive in educating its staff and athletes regarding sporting behavior. Such education is critical for the growth and maturity of our student-athletes and an integral component of athletics and its role in higher education.
3. The ultimate end result is curbing the unsporting behavior. It may be reduced by the simple fact that athletes and coaches know it is being tracked. It could also be reduced based on the response of institutions/conferences.

C O N F E R E N C E H E A D Q U A R T E R S

It is not the goal of the program to completely eliminate conduct fouls. That is an unreasonable expectation. However, it will put in place a natural educational trigger when an offense has occurred. This program will prompt coaches to engage in more discussion with its players about being accountable for their actions, learning from their mistakes, building character and making healthy choices in adverse situations.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

The program can be used in many different ways at member institutions, the conference level or nation-wide within divisions.

INSTITUTIONAL/CONFERENCE TRACKING METHOD

Real-Time Tracking vs End of Season Reporting

There is value to the program regardless of when the data is submitted by participants but real-time reporting (reporting infractions to the conference office as they occur) has been proven to make the greatest impact and is the recommended mode of reporting. Here is a comparison of the two different methods.

End of Season Reporting. If an institution simply reports their data once, at the end of the season, the athletic director and commissioner may not be aware of a problem until it is too late to effect change – educational opportunities are lost. However, there is still value in the data collection because the institution and conference have established a baseline to compare itself to in the future. This process will also likely prompt members to be more proactive in the following year.

Real-Time Tracking. This involves personal interaction between the coach and their AD and the AD and the conference office (as applicable). Members report infractions as they occur or within a prescribed period of time of the offense. This keeps all stakeholders involved extremely aware of the frequency and severity of such infractions. It allows the coach, AD and Commissioner to look for patterns of behavior as well. Perhaps an athlete has displayed a pattern of overly aggressive play or abusive language which indicates more educational intervention is needed. If there are particularly egregious incidents, the institution or conference office may wish to discipline the offender. This allows all stakeholders to maximize the program and take advantage of educational moments. I employed this process in my conference and the result of this system was very positive. We reduced our soccer cards by 20%; eliminated ejections in soccer; reduced technical fouls in men's basketball by 35% (50% over a two-year span), reduced technical fouls in women's basketball by 50% and completely eliminated ejections in men's and women's basketball.

Be advised real-time tracking must involve a reporting process within the institution and form the institution to the conference as applicable. If the conference office is simply pulling the data from Stat Crew packages or officials assignors then the institution itself is not engaged in the process and are not fully aware of the issues at hand. This prevents them from being proactive. The interpersonal mechanism is critical.

SUMMARY

The potential for this program is much greater than simply collecting data. While the data has tremendous value, perhaps the more beneficial component of the program is what members do after receiving the statistics. It should prompt members to be more proactive and educational with staff and athletes. It also serves as a starting point for more comprehensive and broad-based educational programs aimed at the value of sportsmanship and ethical conduct. For Empire 8, it has greatly enhanced the atmosphere of our athletic contests and led to many other educational initiatives by the conference office, member institutions, coaches and student-athletes. All groups have displayed an interest in building upon the foundation that was set by the conduct foul program. It is also a helpful coaching tool in identifying athletes who are more prone to these infractions and provides constructive feedback for officials and national rules committees.

FOR PROGRAM FORMS OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This is a very basic explanation of the process. For forms for each sport, suggested methods of institutional and conference reporting please contact Chuck Mitrano, Empire 8 Commissioner (cmitrano@Empire8.com or (585) 581-0834) with any questions. For more on other Empire 8 Sportsmanship programs visit www.empire8.com and click on the “Sportsmanship” link at the top.