

The Football Code

Introduction

Football is an aggressive, rugged contact sport. Only the highest standards of sportsmanship and conduct are expected of players, coaches and others associated with the game. There is no place for unfair tactics, unsportsmanlike conduct or manoeuvres deliberately designed to inflict injury.

The British American Football Coaches Association (BAFCA) Code of Ethics states:

1. The Football Code shall be an integral part of this code of ethics and should be carefully read and observed.
2. To gain an advantage by circumvention or disregard for the rules brands a coach or player as unfit to be associated with football.

Through the years, the rules committee has endeavoured by rule and appropriate penalty to prohibit all forms of unnecessary roughness, unfair tactics and unsportsmanlike conduct. But rules alone cannot accomplish this end. Only the continued best efforts of coaches, players, officials and all friends of the game can preserve the high ethical standards that the public has a right to expect in the sport. Therefore, as a guide to players, coaches, officials and others responsible for the welfare of the game, the committee publishes the following code:

Coaching ethics

Deliberately teaching players to violate the rules is indefensible. The coaching of intentional holding, beating the ball, illegal shifting, feigning injury, interference, illegal forward passing or intentional roughing will break down rather than aid in the building of the character of players. Such instruction is not only unfair to one's opponents but is demoralising to the players entrusted to a coach's care and has no place in the game.

The following are unethical practices:

1. Changing numbers during the game to deceive the opponent.
2. Using the football helmet as a weapon. The helmet is for the protection of the player.
3. Targeting and making forcible contact. Players, coaches and officials should emphasise the elimination of targeting and making forcible contact against a defenseless opponent and/or with the crown of the helmet.
4. Using non-therapeutic drugs in the game of football. This is not in keeping with the aims and purposes of amateur athletics and is prohibited.
5. "Beating the ball" by an unfair use of a starting signal. This is nothing less than deliberately stealing an advantage from the opponent. An honest starting signal is needed, but a signal that has for its purpose starting the team a fraction of a second before the ball is put in play, in the hope that it will not be detected by the officials, is illegal. It is the same as if a sprinter in a 100-metre dash had a secret arrangement with the starter to give them a tenth-of-a-second warning before firing the pistol.
6. Shifting in a way that simulates the start of a play or employing any other unfair tactic for the purpose of drawing one's opponent offside. This can be construed only as a deliberate attempt to gain an unmerited advantage.
7. Feigning an injury for any reason is unethical. An injured player must be given full protection under the rules, but feigning injury is dishonest, unsportsmanlike and contrary to the spirit of the rules. Such tactics cannot be tolerated among sportspersons of integrity.

BAFA also believes:

1. In their relationship with players under their care, the coach should always be aware of the tremendous influence they wield, for good or bad. The coach should never place the value of a win above that of instilling the highest desirable ideals and character traits in their players. The safety and welfare of their players should always be uppermost in their mind, and they must never be sacrificed for any personal prestige or selfish glory.
2. In teaching the game of football, the coach must realise that certain rules exist that are designed to protect the player and provide common standards for determining a winner and a loser. Any attempt to beat these rules, to take unfair advantage of an opponent, or to teach deliberate unsportsmanlike conduct, have no place in the game of football, nor has any coach guilty of such teaching any right to call themselves a coach. The coach should set the example for winning without boasting and losing without bitterness. A coach who conducts themselves according to these principles need have no fear of failure, for in the final analysis, the success of a coach can be measured in terms of the respect they have earned from their players and from their opponents.
3. The diagnosis and treatment of injuries is a medical problem and should under no circumstances be considered a province of the coach.
4. Under no circumstances should a coach authorise the use of drugs. Medicines, stimulants, or drugs should be used only when authorised and supervised by a physician. Coaches should be aware that the willful oversight of drug abuse by players under their care may be construed as condoning such action. Coaches should be acquainted with, and remain aware of the current BAFA policy on drugs.

Talking to an opponent

Talking to an opponent in any manner that is demeaning, vulgar, abusive or "trashy" or intended to incite a physical response or verbally put an opponent down is illegal. Coaches are urged to discuss this conduct frequently and support all officials' actions to control it.

Talking to officials

When an official imposes a penalty or makes a decision, they are simply doing their duty as they see fit. They are on the field to uphold the integrity of the game of football, and their decisions are final and conclusive and should be accepted by players and coaches.

The BAFCA Code of Ethics states:

1. On and off the field, criticism of officials to players or to the public shall be considered unethical.
2. A coach must not permit anyone on their team or sideline to address uncomplimentary remarks to any official during the progress of a game, or to indulge in conduct which might incite players or spectators against the officials.

Holding

Illegal use of the hands or arms is unfair play, eliminates skill and does not belong in the game. The object of the game is to advance the ball by strategy, skill and speed without illegally holding your opponent. All coaches and players should thoroughly understand the rules for proper offensive and defensive use of the hands. Holding is a frequently called foul; it is important to emphasise the severity of the penalty.

Sportsmanship

The football player or coach who intentionally violates a rule is guilty of unfair play and unsportsmanlike conduct; and whether or not they escape being penalised they bring discredit to the good name of the game, which is their duty as a player or coach to uphold.

BAFA Rules Committee &
British American Football Coaches Association