The Code of Sports Ethics
Beyond the rules of the game

A Code that continues to develop

The Code of Sports Ethics is one of the Council of Europe's strategic documents. It promotes healthy sporting practices and is recognised throughout the world. It was first adopted in 1992 and revised in 2001. But as sport faces the pressures of modern society and new challenges, the Code must continue to evolve. To that end, the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) is working on a further revision.

The challenge

The Code of Sports Ethics promotes fair play among children and young persons via educational and preventive measures to strengthen sports ethics. It encourages the dissemination of good practices to promote diversity in sport and combat all forms of discrimination. Every child and young person has the right to practice sport and to gain satisfaction from the experience. Institutions and adults must be the guarantors of these rights. The Code of Sports Ethics applies to all levels of skills and commitment, recreational activities as well as competitive sport.

Sports ethics – physical and psychological aspects

Fair play means more than just abiding by the rules. It covers such notions as friendship, respect for others and the sporting spirit. Sports ethics signify not just a certain form of behaviour but also a particular way of thinking. It involves the elimination of cheating, bending the rules, doping, abuse of food additives, physical and verbal violence, the harassment and sexual abuse of young people and women, trafficking in young sportsmen and women, discrimination, exploitation, unequal opportunities, excessive commercialisation and corruption.

Equity and sporting excellence

Equity in sport, which should be an expression of human excellence, has two dimensions:

- institutional: discrimination based on criteria other than performance must be rejected, rules must be applied uniformly and there must be no resort to arbitrary decisions;
- personal: there is a moral obligation to abide by the rules, in accordance with the principles of fair play.

Sporting excellence must be an expression of human excellence. Performances and results should emerge from the deserved and meritorious development of individual talent.

Fairness in sport, a social obligation

Sport can enrich society and foster friendship between nations, so long as it is practised fairly. It enables individuals to discover each other, express themselves, secure achievements and self-fulfilment and acquire skills and self-knowledge that demonstrate their personal capacities. Sport provides an opportunity for social interaction. It is a source of pleasure, as well as of health and well-being. Its vast range of clubs and
volunteers allows people to become involved and take on responsibilities in societies. A responsible commitment to a sporting activity can also help to foster greater awareness of the environment.

Together in the field of ethics

The Code of Sports Ethics urges all those who, directly or indirectly, influence and encourage children and young persons to take part in sport to give absolute priority to sports ethics.

Parents, teachers, trainers, referees, managers, administrators, journalists, doctors and pharmacists, top level sportsmen and women who serve as models and even spectators should set a positive example to children and young persons by refusing to reward, close their eyes to or themselves adopt unfair behaviour and by imposing appropriate sanctions when it occurs. They should ensure that levels of training and qualifications are adapted to children's needs, bearing in mind their particular stage of involvement in a sport.

The health, safety and well-being of children and young athletes are the number one priority. Children must not be treated as young adults and all those concerned must be fully aware of the physical and psychological changes that accompany their development and how these influence sporting performance.

They should also show the same concern for those who are less gifted and promote and reward not just success in competition but also personal progress and the acquisition of life skills.

Young children should be encouraged to develop their own games and rules and decide for themselves how to encourage fair and penalise unfair competition, and to assume responsibility for their actions.

Sports associations and other bodies linked to sport, particularly sports federations and governing bodies, physical education associations, training bodies and institutes and the medical, pharmaceutical and media professions, are invited to co-operate with government and other authorities, for example in stamping out corruption. The business world, including firms involved in the production, sale and marketing of sports products, is also expected to accept its responsibilities by helping to promote sports ethics and fair play.

Competition and tournament organisers should take account of the specific needs of young persons and children who are still growing, so that they can participate at different levels, from the purely recreational to the highly competitive.

Sports associations must protect children, young people and women against sexual harassment and abuse and exploitation, especially children showing early signs of exceptional talent. They must ensure that all the members or associates of organisations with responsibilities to children and young persons have the necessary qualifications for their guidance, training and coaching. Account must be taken of the physical and psychological changes that accompany children's maturing process and how they function as human beings, from the emotional and relationship standpoints.

Governments should accept the following responsibilities:

- promoting demanding ethical standards wherever sport is practised, to improve oversight of the integrity and ethics of sports financing based on income from betting;
encouraging and supporting organisations and individuals that apply healthy ethical principles in their sport-related activities;

co-operating in promoting the Code of Sports Ethics and monitoring its application;

encouraging physical education teachers to give a central role to sports ethics in school sports syllabuses and to emphasise sport's positive contribution to humanity and society;

committing themselves to maintaining the integrity of sport, which faces such major threats as match fixing, bribery, trafficking in young sportsmen and women and illegal betting;

supporting any initiatives to promote sports ethics, particularly among young people, and encouraging relevant institutions to make this a priority;

continuing to promote and monitor Recommendation Rec(2001)6 on the prevention of racism, xenophobia and racial intolerance in sport, in co-operation with the sports movement and the Standing Committee of the Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches;

encouraging national and international research to gain a better understanding of the complex problems surrounding the practice of sport by young persons, establish the scale of undesirable behaviour and identify the opportunities for promoting sports ethics;

ensuring recognition that physical and psychological health are highly complementary;

developing research on, and disseminating knowledge of, psychological health and how to manage emotions associated with the practice of sport;

combating the use of genetic engineering for purposes that are incompatible with sports ethics.

Sports ethics in two words

Respect and education are key to any successful attempt to promote sport and sporting commitment in an ethical context.