Project “Ethics in sport” – where do we stand and where is the journey taking us?

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Abstracts
A sport that uncompromisingly places the well-being of people in sport at its heart is based on three strong pillars: well-coordinated prevention, mindful support structures and an independent reporting system. Swiss Sport Integrity is the reporting and investigative body for ethical violations and abuse in sport. Swiss Olympic and its members, the Federal Office of Sport FOSPO and the Swiss cantons ensure optimal support structures and implement targeted...
prevention measures.

**Zusammenfassung**

Ein Sport, der das Wohlbefinden der Menschen im Sport kompromisslos ins Zentrum setzt, basiert auf drei starken Pfeilern: eine gut koordinierte Prävention, achtsame Förderstrukturen und ein unabhängiges Melde- und Untersuchungsstelle bei Ethikverstössen und Missbräuchen im Sport. Swiss Olympic und seine Mitglieder, das Bundesamt für Sport BASPO sowie die Kantone sorgen für optimale Förderstrukturen und setzen gezielte Präventionsmassnahmen um.

Schlüsselwörter: Ethik, Safeguarding, Nähe, Orientierung, Schutz

**Introduction**

Acting ethically in sport means prioritising the dignity of people, or their mental, physical and social well-being. To preserve the dignity of people in sport, there needs to be an exchange on attitudes to power, ideals, proximity and pressure. Ethical action requires joint reflection on the right balance: both “too much” power, ideals, proximity or pressure and “too little” can violate dignity. In doing so, the pursuit of performance is not restricted, but a limit to what cannot be exceeded is set. Training for and aiming to achieve competitive success never legitimize actions that violate ethics. Degrading insults, psychological or physical violence or the threat of group punishment in training: Swiss sport does not tolerate such practices. A culture of collaboration and self-determination should be established in Swiss sport. The Ethics Charter sets out the guiding principles, which can be sanctioned according to the Ethics Statutes, and which provide concrete guidance for all stakeholders in sport through the principles of action and the Ethics Compass.

**How Swiss sport protects people in sport**

Sport is fun, offers children and young people an suitable and protected learning environment and provides added value for society as a whole in terms of health and integration. For sport to enable this, the Swiss sports system is based on three building blocks:

1. „careful preventative commitment from all those involved so that people in sport have the necessary competencies to act ethically,
2. „support structures that encourage and promote this behavior, and
3. „an intervention system that consistently detects and punishes violations.

In this system, the organizations and stakeholders in sport have different roles, tasks and foundations. Coaches, for example, act in an exemplary manner in terms of prevention, keep a close eye on things, protect others and report risk situation. It is then the task of the independent foundation Swiss Sport Integrity (SSI) that investigates the reports objectively and
submits their assessment to the Disciplinary Chambers. The legal basis for Swiss Sport Integrity is the Ethics Charter, which the Swiss sports federations and sports associations must abide by. It is not always obvious how to assess a situation and which courses of action are appropriate. This is where the Swiss Olympic Ethics Compass, which will be available to everyone in sport from 2024, can help. The irritating situation can be classified into one of the four colours (green, grey, orange, red) using descriptive terms and specific examples of situations and the necessary measures, which can be derived from this.

**What happened in the first phase of the project**

To maintain the added value of sport for individuals and society as a whole, ethics must become an integral part of the Swiss sports system. This resembles a cultural change process. Ethics encompasses not only topics relating to the treatment of people and the environment, but also topics relating to the good (ethical) governance of sports organizations. In an initial project phase, a common understanding was created in the form of principles of action and ethics was anchored in sport with the Ethics Statutes and the Federal Act on the Promotion of Sport and Exercise (SpoPA). On this basis, Swiss Sport Integrity (SSI), was introduced as an independent reporting and investigative agency for ethical violations and abuse in sport.

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**Graph: Roles, tasks and basic guidelines for Swiss Sport**
What is being implemented in the second phase

In the second phase of the “Ethics in Sport” project, support structures and prevention measures in Swiss sport are implemented. In this phase, a total of 16 working groups and additional support groups consisting of various sport stakeholders develop targeted sustainable measures. In addition, the national sports federations are invited by Swiss Olympic to participate in an analysis to identify their points of departure and define measures. Results of this work will be available towards the end of 2024. Swiss Olympic is taking account of the need for acute support and implementing targeted initial measures on an ongoing basis. For example, with the “Are you OK?” campaign, the multi-part podcast series on ethics, and the Ethics Compass, which is detailed below.

“Are you OK?”- campaign “live” June-July and November 2023 and in a new design from autumn
The Swiss Olympic Ethics Compass as an aid for orientation, a guide to action and a tool to raise awareness

The dignity of all participants should be the top priority of Swiss sport. Athletes, coaches and all people involved deserve healthy, respectful, fair and successful sport. There is no place for ethics breaches or violations. The ethics compass raises awareness, provides orientation, encourages ethical practices, and thus improves quality in sport.

But what does this actually mean? Ethical behaviour requires everyone to reflect on practices. Both too much and too little power, ideals, proximity or pressure can violate dignity. The compass uses descriptive terms and specific examples to show where a particular situation fits. Does a behaviour or practice go in the green or red zone?

The compass offers everyone affected or involved specific tips, support and possible actions. Just looking is not enough – everyone must find the encourage to act.

This is how the Swiss Olympipc Ethics Compass works
The compass is split into the categories of power, ideals, proximity and pressure. It uses the colours green, grey, orange and red with matching colour gradients and corresponding terms. Each term comes with an example and the compass shows what should specifically be done in this situation.

**Everything revolves around the four central themes**

How to reflect and share **power**?
Power can bring about positive changes. Unfortunately, power can be abused, which violates dignity. Careful use of power requires everyone – individuals, groups, clubs and federations – to share power. Power operates across all relationships and structures within the sports system.

How to identify and scrutinise **ideals**?
Ideals play a major role in sport. Some promote team spirit and healthy development. Others, such as “thin to win” or “no pain no gain” can prompt extreme attitudes and obsessive behaviors such as dieting or training despite pain, injuries or illness. This can result in violations of dignity that are not recognised and scrutinised. It is therefore important to find a good balance and encourage critical thinking.

How to shape and limit **proximity**?
Relationships with each other are important in sport – whether within a team, between athletes and coaches, club and association officials, or with legal guardians. All relationships require a reasonable level of physical and emotional proximity, but protective distance is important. Everyone has the right to privacy and personal space. Personal boundaries should not be crossed as this violates dignity. This also applies to relationships of power and dependence, such as between adults and children.

How to justify and limit pressure?
Sport is competitive and often involves pressure. A reasonable level of pressure is beneficial, but too much can create stress. Pressure affects not only athletes but also coaches, legal guardians, clubs and associations – and sometimes they exert it as well. Sporting activities also exert pressure on our environment. Pressure has many faces. The question is, how much pressure is too much? Whether pain or poor sleep, if we ignore the body's signals this can violate dignity. The same goes if autonomy and welfare are disregarded.

The meaning of the four colours

Green – empowering people
Green means that everything is as it should be: dignity is ensured, sport is valuable and dignified – which can also be communicated as appreciative feedback.

Grey – discuss the situation
Grey means that something is irritating, odd and high-risk. Risks are a part of everyday life in sport, but must be discussed promptly and constructed in a prudent, considered way.

Orange – report dangers
Orange shows where breaches of the ethical statutes begin. Everyone in sport is entitled not to have to cross this orange line.

Red – possibly includes criminal offenses and abuse that may be prohibited by criminal law. Criminal proceedings are required for the specific assessment and criminal assessment of the facts.
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Reference
Literature available from the author.

Scan here and learn more:
swissolympic.ch/ethics-compass