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# PROMOTING QUALITY EDUCATION BY ADDRESSING ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL AT CIRCUIT LEVEL IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

## ABSTRACT

*The sport of football, also commonly referred to as soccer in South Africa, has become a socio-cultural phenomenon and its popularity manifests itself in school football. The study aimed to identify ethical challenges in high school football at circuit level in Durban, South Africa, in order to promote quality education. A phenomenological paradigm, drawing on a qualitative research approach, was used. A purposive sample of 16 high school football coaches and administrators from a particular region, or circuit, were selected to participate in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis, and an inductive approach was used to identify patterns in the collected data by employing thematic analysis. Age cheating and identity document fraud were perceived as the leading ways unethical leadership in the circuit facilitates cheating. The study also found that the environment in which school football operates in the circuit is not conducive to promoting ethical leadership. This study highlighted that governmental structures should focus on ethics and leadership in school football, thereby ensuring quality education. This study has shown that ethical leadership is a key contributor to the holistic development and socialisation of learners.*

Keywords: *quality education; ethical leadership; high school; football*

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Internationally it is acknowledged that sport prepares a school-going child with life skills in a way that is unparalleled to any other. In particular, school sport has a valuable contribution to make to the development and transformation of sport; it has the ability to maximise the sport potential of pupils and to become the foundation for the development of sport in a country. De Coning (2014) found that schools with physical education and a focus on sport tend to have improved grades. However, for this to be

fully realised, the appropriate leadership by school sports coaches and administrators needs to be consistently demonstrated.

Ethical school sport leaders personify intrinsic qualities that direct them to making ethical decisions for the benefit of the wider school sports programme; especially since, as Kalinowski (1985) noted, a sport leader's influence should extend beyond athletic performance to the holistic development of learners. Sport, and in particular school sport, provides an environment in which to learn positive social and personal values and conduct, contributing to good citizenship, good character and ethical leadership. It is thus critical to adopt a systemic perspective when focusing on the concept of quality education. This entails not only focusing on academic matters, but also on the critical role that sports can play in the holistic development of the learner – a focus on the whole child and 'life after school'.

It thus becomes clear that everyone who is responsible for motivating learners to achieve their full potential has to be held accountable for their behaviour – this includes educators and principals, as well as those who are tasked with leading sports. This aligns with the systems thinking perspective and leadership styles, which are discussed later. Individuals who are in positions of power and have influence are therefore considered to be leaders, with the learners, in a sense, being the followers. Considering that sports leaders are role models, and that learners observe their attitudes and behaviour, ethical leadership becomes paramount, so that learners are able to interact with positive role models. As learners develop and slowly reach adulthood, it becomes paramount that they are exposed to moral and ethical behaviour, so that they can one day become responsible citizens.

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, n.d.). It is also highlighted that the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED), which includes peace and human rights education, as well as intercultural education and education for international understanding (UNESCO, n.d.).

A holistic view of education is therefore important, as learners will be learning how to behave, particularly with respect to 'soft skills'. Through playing sport, learners will observe their leaders (sport leaders, etc.) to determine what it takes to win, and how to interact with others – this could have implications for how an individual will view ethical and unethical behaviour, and the necessary actions to achieve success. If unethical behaviour is part of the schooling system, then the learner may later transfer this to other aspects of life. Sports leaders need to illustrate a firm commitment to striving for ethical behaviour, as they set the ethical tone (Daft, 2018). Ethical leadership includes showing humility, respect and honesty; serving others; being accountable; having concern for the greater good; demonstrating courage to accept responsibility; not being a conformist; and opposing unethical behaviour (Daft, 2018).

Unethical practices in their different forms infiltrate sports systems, distorting fair play, integrity and confidence in the game (Ionescu, 2015). Unethical practices in sport include any type of competitive advantage generated by any kind of undertaking viewed as prohibited by law and viewed as unjust or dishonest, based on shared global rules and restrictions (Nica & Potcovaru, 2014).

In South Africa, the sport of football, also commonly referred to as soccer in South Africa, has become a socio-cultural phenomenon and its popularity manifests itself in school football. School football is highly competitive, with various inter-school competitions, beginning at circuit level, with winning teams progressing to district, provincial and national championship level. The South African model for school football is primarily focused on competition, with an emphasis on elite teams, and aligns with a performance discourse instead of a participation discourse. A performance discourse can lead to a culture of cheating, which can exacerbate unethical behaviour in school football. A win-at-all-costs mentality is harmful (Orlick, 1978) and could lead to inappropriate, unethical and/or illegal behaviour (Rechner & Smart, 2012). Previous research examined issues pertaining to power interests, ethics, moral conduct and truth in sports (Sage, 1990; Nicolaidis & Surujlal, 2011; Van Wyk, Steyn & Goslin, 2007; Butler, 2000; Bredemeier & Shields, 1984). Ethical behaviour is directly related to leadership (sport coaches and administrators) in high school football (Sačnak, 2010). Duda, Olson and Templin (1991:79) found that a 'low task orientation and high ego orientation corresponded to an endorsement of unsportsmanlike play/cheating'.

Since school sport coaches and administrators wield influence, sport coaching and sport administration are roles that require leadership, which is the primary reason why effective leadership is a necessary trait in these role players (Kellett, 1999; Davids, 2015). Sport leaders must be ethical leaders if they want to be good coaches and administrators. This ultimately influences the quality of education in schools.

The aim of the study was to identify the ethical challenges in high school football in a circuit in Durban in order to promote quality education. The study also examined the factors perpetuating unethical behaviour exhibited by football coaches and administrators at circuit level. In South Africa, an education circuit is part of an education district which is demarcated for administrative purposes by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of the provincial legislature responsible for the provincial Department of Education. A circuit is a second-level sub-division and, depending on the context, the term 'circuit' is used to describe either a geographical area or the administrative unit (Department of Basic Education, n.d.; Mafuwane & Pitsoe, 2014; van der Woort & Wood, 2016).

Unethical behaviour has been a subject of debate for many years, as highlighted by Eber (2011:142), who suggests that 'from the age of the first rock-throwing contest, each generation of competitors tends to do whatever is necessary to win'. Unfortunately, these unethical practices have permeated the entire range of sports. There are various forms of unethical practices that are common in sport (Brooks, Aleem, & Button, 2013), many of which emerged in this study and are outlined below.

Sponsoring of major sporting contests and the competitive nature of winning may lead to unethical practices (Ionescu, 2015). Cooper and Frank (1991), as cited in Boes (2015), identify the following factors as influencing unethical behaviour: one's personal moral values and standards; family and friends who provide support and insight in relation to resolving ethical issues; leaders who pressurise employees to compromise ethical standards; an environment/culture that controls the pressure to compromise ethical values to achieve organisational goals; and an organisational leadership philosophy that emphasises ethics within operations. However, O'Fallon and Butterfield (2012) found that peer influence plays a major role in influencing ethical decision-making. The more individuals observe their peers engaging in unethical behaviour, the more likely they are to engage in the same or similar activities. Boes (2015) states that if an individual believes that others are behaving unethically,

then that individual will feel more inclined to behave unethically (like inverse peer pressure). Thus, there is a strong relationship between one's behaviour and one's expectation of others. Furthermore, rivalry and unethical behaviour appear to be linked (Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo & Reade, 2016).

The theoretical framework that underpins the study is systems thinking and leadership. Daft (2018) described systems thinking as the ability to see the synergy of the whole rather than the separate elements of a system, and to learn to reinforce or change whole system patterns. This, therefore, means that what sport leaders do in the circuit is not independent of, but rather interdependent with, follower actions and organisational processes. Leadership in the circuit high school football programme is thus related to a complex system that contains various subsystems, including members' personalities; intergroup processes; tasks; work processes and practices; accountability systems; policies and administrative structures. These subsystems need to fit together within the overall system in order for leadership to be effective.

Daft (2018) highlighted that it is the relationship between parts that forms the whole system. In the context of this study, primary school football is a part (subsystem), high school football is a part (subsystem), club football is a part (subsystem), age group football is a part (subsystem) and professional football is also a part (subsystem); and collectively they form the South African football system, with the pinnacle being our senior national team. It is therefore important for leaders in the circuit to see football development as a system that requires them to operate within the school football subsystem, which in turn requires them to focus on the big picture, which is the national development agenda. Daft (2018) suggested that leaders need to develop 'peripheral vision', which is the ability to view the organisation and subsystem through a wide angle lens, so that they perceive how their decisions and actions affect the whole system. This is also aligned to responsible leadership and the awareness of the impact of the influence that a leader has.

High school football requires a re-evaluation of leadership education, not only in the circuit but in school football in general. It is important to have a strong emphasis on ethical leadership. Sport leaders should learn that socialisation takes place through participation in high school football. Sports leaders need to understand that, although learners may be told to engage in prosocial behaviour, they will more likely follow an example set for them (Daft, 2018). It is critical that all educators and volunteers involved in high school football appreciate a systems thinking perspective, and how they should accordingly mould their way of thinking when dealing with issues of school football, learner development and football development in general.

In view of the current demand for more ethical, learner-centred leadership in the school football programme in the circuit, servant leadership may very well be what the high school football needs. These are the sport leaders who combine their motivation to lead with a need to serve beyond their self-interests (Daft, 2018). If there is to be a change in the culture of high school football in the circuit, then transformational leadership should also be exhibited by sport leaders. Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that facilitates change in the organisation and followers (Daft, 2018; Avolio & Bass, 2002).

Frontiera (2009) found that, despite there being an extensive collection of literature examining organisational culture in business, no empirical literature could be located that explores organisational culture in sport. This is despite the fact that there is an increasing appreciation of the contextual influences of ethical leadership in sport, as the prevalent culture

plays a leading role in bringing about and condoning various forms of behaviour, including ethical and moral behaviour.

According to Säfström and Månsson (2004), the creation of the social being is a process commonly referred to as socialisation. Parke and Buriel (2006) describe socialisation as a dynamic and reciprocal process whereby individuals learn and endorse the values, norms and behaviours appropriate to their social environment. Säfström and Månsson (2004) further described socialisation as an institutional process that affects a person from the moment they enter a society such as a school, until the day they leave it.

Leaders are often viewed as role models, given their formal status, position of power and referent power (Yukl, 2010), which result in followers imitating the behaviour of their leaders. Sosik and Godshalk (2002) found that follower-modelling of leader behaviour may also be prevalent because leaders often serve as mentors to their followers, while protégés often learn by imitating the behaviour of their mentors. Followers are especially inclined to model leader behaviour when they perceive the leader as possessing desirable qualities and being successful.

School sport, through the coach-player relations that are created, is key to the socialisation of learners. Sullivan, Paquette, Holt and Bloom (2012) suggested that coaches can apply a powerful influence on children's experiences in youth sport. This is especially the case in school sport, where the players as learners look up to, and generally admire, their coaches, not only as educators and parent figures, but as adults who they can learn from and model their behaviour around. Seungbum and Keunsu (2012) cited research conducted by Bandura (1977), who indicated that most human behaviour is learned through modelling certain behaviour, particularly when that behaviour is perceived to be effective and/or successful. They referred to this as 'observational learning' in the Social Learning Theory.

Rechner and Smart (2012) indicated that ethical/unethical behaviour that may have been developed and/or fostered as a function of active sport involvement could well have an influence on the subsequent development of individual ethical judgements within other contexts, such as in the school academic setting and even in business later on in life. Role-modelling behaviour is supported by the Social Learning Theory (de Wolde, Groenendaal, Helsloot & Schmidt, 2014), which also suggests that individuals learn to pay attention to the attitude, behaviour and values of role models, as well as to reproduce these types of behaviour (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Based on this theory, Brown and Trevino (2006) suggested that individuals need others for ethical guidance. Weaver, Trevino and Agle (2005) argued that most followers are strongly influenced by those individuals who are closest to them, while Kaptein, Huberts, Avelino and Lasthuizen (2005) commented that followers who are led by an ethical leader are most inclined to imitate the behaviour of their leader by showing ethical behaviour themselves.

Perceived ideals and standards can be fully or partially shaped by learners' early sporting experiences as they grow up as part of the educational system. Schwebel (1996) cited Piaget (1965) in his revolutionary book on moral judgement, when he said that youth obtain from their elders most of the moral rules that they respect. Besides community elders, Schwebel (1996) suggested that the most significant adults in a youth's social learning processes include educators, especially educators who are coaches in school sport. How these educators teach/coach and what they value are powerful influences on the future behaviour of the learners. Schwebel added that the values of school sport coaches influence the social and moral quality of learners' behaviour. For his part, Kjeldsen (1992) highlights

that coaches engage the learners they coach, not only as educators but also as role models, because they should strive to inform, persuade, stimulate and inspire. This means that they need to be coaches as well as ethical leaders, and in order to carry out this mandatory added leadership function, they need to present a high standard of personal ethical behaviour as a model to be imitated. The coach not only has a fundamental responsibility to enhance learning, but as Cemalcilar (2010) suggested, as educators they play various roles that are additional to providing academic guidance. The influence they enjoy in setting the broad social climate in their academic institution through their association with the learners is key to the effective socialisation of the learners.

Ethical leadership and the organisational culture in school sport is important, according to Molina (2012), who indicated that the education system has the duty to create the consensus necessary to maintain social order. Molina (2012) referred to Durkheim (1956), who suggested that education is vital to the process of adopting norms and values, as it plays a leading role in attempting to solve social ills. However, Durkheim (1956), as cited by Molina (2012), also reminded us that education synthetically reproduces society, so much so that it is unable to completely solve social ills.

According to Levermore (2011), the primary beneficiaries of sport are the youth, as sport is regarded as a particularly potent vehicle for this age group. Prominent amongst these benefits are sport's ability to contribute to the education process and the building of social, physical and community infrastructures, as these are viewed by Levermore (2008) as essential factors for development to succeed. Schooling an individual on how she or he is expected to act and why, makes education not just a social, but also a normative, act that connects morality to the social sphere (Säfström & Månsson, 2004). Schools are therefore thought of as environments where individuals are socialised into identified values and norms, through which their life prospects can be correctly founded and their personal lives not only fulfilled, but also made ethically significant.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research drew on the phenomenological paradigm, which examines the ways in which individuals make sense of the world around them. Phenomenologists maintain that human action is meaningful and that people therefore ascribe meaning to their own and other people's actions (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). The fundamental difference in approach is that, in the phenomenological paradigm, the task of the researcher is to interpret and gain an understanding of human actions and then describe them from the point of view of the person or people being studied (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The phenomenological paradigm is more aligned to the qualitative research methodology where qualitative methods refer to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The qualitative research approach was thus used to collect data. Qualitative research methods refer to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The qualitative research method was considered suitable for this research and aligned to addressing the study objectives. This was an exploratory case study. Therefore, the qualitative research method allowed for engagement with sport leaders in the circuit who were intricately

involved in high school football, and the collection of data that was ultimately informed by their experiences and knowledge.

This study was set in quintile three and four schools in a semi-urban area in Durban, South Africa. All South African public schools are categorised into five groups known as quintiles, largely for the allocation of financial resources. Schools in quintiles one, two and three are 'no-fee schools', while schools in quintiles four and five are fee-paying schools (Ally & McLaren, 2016). Schools in quintiles one to three are under-resourced.

The particular circuit selected has 79 high schools, of which 45 participate competitively in high school football. A purposive sample of 20 high school sports leaders were selected to participate in this study as these schools compete in at least two of the three major school football competitions, annually. A sample of 16 school sports leaders volunteered to participate in this study.

The Provincial Department of Education granted permission to conduct this study. Ethical clearance was obtained thereafter. Meetings were set up to discuss the study with the school sports leaders. All participants completed informed consent forms prior to data collection. Respondents were assured that data would be treated confidentially and that their identities would not be revealed in the write-up of the research.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with sports leaders (Dearnley, 2005; Hand, 2003). All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Participants were encouraged to share relevant stories, as a means of 'painting a rich picture' of the phenomenon under research.

Data were analysed using thematic coding, a process of data reduction by means of identifying themes (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). In analysing the data, the researcher allowed the codes to emerge from analysing the interview transcripts. The researcher continually read through the transcripts, finding dominant patterns, working inductively with emerging categories and frequently comparing them.

Since the study involved interactions with individuals, extreme caution was taken to avoid harming them and to ensure that their right to privacy was respected. The researcher informed the respondents that their participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was sought prior to data collection. The respondents were also informed that they could decline to participate, or could withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse consequences. There was no monetary benefit for those who participated in this study.

As data were collected during face-to-face interviews, all interviews were conducted in either a classroom or an office, where only the interviewer and the respondent were allowed in the room, to ensure privacy. All interviews were recorded using an audio device. No one individual was informed as to who else was part of the sample and the contents of other interviews were not divulged to anyone. When analysing the data, the researcher ensured that no personal details of respondents were given; nor was any information included that could reveal who the respondents were. The same principle was applied for all individuals and schools who were mentioned during the data collection process, and the findings are presented in terms of general narratives.

The researcher is a practitioner in the sport industry with vast experience in school sport; this facilitated an understanding of the industry and subjects. The researcher was, however,

careful to avoid researcher bias, by ensuring that the responses of the participants were presented and that he remained neutral. As a means to ensure the credibility of the study findings, the researcher also spent time in the field to enhance his understanding and gain insights into each sport leader's environment at school and within the circuit, and their subsequent perceptions of, and experiences within, the circuit. The researcher ensured that the research findings were authentic by paying careful attention to the procedures that were used for data collection and analysis. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, which enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The same questions were asked of all the interviewees and the responses were compared on the same level.

### 3. FINDINGS

Based on the data analysis from the responses of the 16 school sports leaders, the following themes emerged: existing unethical practices; perceived unethical leadership by sport leaders; and factors perpetuating and promoting unethical practices.

#### 3.1 Existing unethical practices

Respondents identified the fielding of ineligible players as a leading unethical practice in high school circuit football. The respondents argued that the fielding of players who are non-learners, learners from other schools, and/or over-age, is being practised by some schools. Coaches sometimes concurrently coach community clubs – fielding non-learners from their clubs and presenting them as learners. These sports leaders occasionally condone the fielding of ineligible players by allowing the falsification of player identification, and age cheating within their schools.

*"We need to stop age cheating because it is killing our football." (R9).*

*"Some learners have said that their coaches have encouraged them not to take identity documents as that will get them caught." (R14).*

#### 3.2 Perceived unethical leadership by sport leaders

Respondents believed that there is a problem with refereeing. There was the impression that the appointment of referees for games is largely manipulated, with more appointments of unqualified, biased referees. It was argued by some that referees were being bribed to influence the outcome of games, ensuring that selected schools win crucial games.

Some respondents indicated that they had observed sports leaders manipulate the system for personal gain. For example, ad hoc games are organised to escape classroom teaching duties. Moreover, a few respondents stated that they had observed some educators leaving their school whenever the school team was competing, under the pretence of accompanying the team. However, the educator would not attend the game, thus leaving learners unattended, and without a coach; or with a coach or volunteer coach who was not an educator at that particular school.

Another unethical practice that was highlighted was the conduct of sports leaders at tournaments. Some respondents pointed to the use of foul language by some learners and sports leaders; substance abuse, including alcohol consumption and smoking by the learners; and unruly behaviour as unacceptable and damaging to the reputation of school football.



Several respondents also believed that the mismanagement of school finances is rife among sport leaders, through the theft and maladministration of school funds. This includes fraudulent practices such as inflating the prices of goods and services to be purchased and soliciting a kickback from the service provider. One respondent even argued that there is no transparency in the use of funds at multiple levels. Sports leaders, especially educators, were unsure how much money was being used to run the tournaments that are regularly held at circuit and district level.

A few respondents believed that, too often, coaches would engage in the unethical practice of playing (fielding) their best players repeatedly – even when a player was nursing an injury. These players should have been recovering, so as to not aggravate their injuries. However, they are forced to play by their coaches.

*“Coaches can use sport as a means to promote good behaviour and good academics amongst learners.” (R7).*

### 3.3 Factors perpetuating and promoting unethical practices

#### 3.3.1 Win-at-all-costs mentality

The leading factor promoting unethical practices in the school football circuit, according to respondents, is the prevalent ‘win-at-all-costs’ mentality among many sports leaders. It was suggested that the deep desire of sports leaders to win has created this mentality. This has pushed sports leaders to seek glory at any cost. Coaches want their schools to represent the circuit at the district championships; the district at the provincial championships; and even the province at national championships. Coaches see other schools winning frequently, sometimes by employing unethical practices. This promotes a negative mentality where sports leaders are willing to sacrifice their ethics and values to ensure victory.

*“There is one particular educator in our circuit that does not want to be beaten at all.” (R1).*

*“If coaches were doing their job, there would be no need to cheat.” (R8).*

*“Ethical leadership is like a hidden curriculum.” (R2).*

#### 3.3.2 Monetary winnings

Half of the respondents stated that the monetary prizes at tournaments were also perpetuating unethical practices, with all schools aiming to win money. Winnings also included resources such as sporting attire and general sports equipment.

#### 3.3.3 Incompetent administrators, coaches and technical officials

It was highlighted that a few sport leaders, as educators, are not performing the tasks they have volunteered for, as they do not engage in proper player and team development. There are no structured football programmes in their schools, with regular and consistent training sessions for school teams.

Some respondents stated that the poor quality of refereeing in circuit school football was a primary factor contributing to unethical practices. Unqualified officials are seen as incompetent and biased, and do not allow games to be played fairly, leading to some sports leaders resorting to unethical behaviour to try to win games. A few respondents claimed that this lack of capacity

is not restricted to refereeing. Some sports leaders, both educators and volunteers, also lack experience and the formal coaching and technical qualifications essential to the sport.

*“... maybe we need to suspend, or even ban, coaches and administrators that are unethical, but that is harsh and an extreme measure.” (R7).*

### 3.3.4 Attaining personal glory

Respondents argued that recognition as good football coaches or administrators is highly sought after. Sports leaders have personal ambitions, wanting to present themselves favourably to their colleagues and peers, within and outside their schools. Such individuals want to be perceived as being responsible for developing good players and teams. These personal ambitions could, however, lead to unethical behaviour, especially in instances where a sports leader does not put in the necessary groundwork to ensure success, or to gather the required resources for him/her to achieve his/her goal.

*“... before a tournament he even tells us that he is going to win this tournament ....” (R2).*

### 3.3.5 Lack of understanding of the role of school sport

Some respondents believed that the unethical behaviour of some sports leaders is directly linked to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the role of school sport in general, and school football in particular. These respondents indicated this as the reason why some schools do not have learner-centred football programmes. Programmes are centred on the personal desires and ambitions of the sports leaders – thus promoting unethical leadership.

*“Learners in high school are still young so they still need guidance.” (R13).*

*“It is not only about the school and its reputation, but it is also about the child and his/her future.” (R10).*

*“Some of us do not realise that the school is a development platform for the learners.” (R8).*

### 3.3.6 Involvement of volunteers

Several respondents argued that sports leaders who are non-educators, namely volunteers, may be lacking in capacity and could possibly exacerbate unethical behaviour in the circuit. These individuals are often not part of the school and education setting, but are coaches from local clubs in the community who are willing to coach at the schools. A problem arises, however, when these volunteer coaches see the need to include ineligible players. The respondents indicated that having outside coaches coaching school teams is not an abnormal practice in the circuit, and some schools even pay them to coach. The challenge is that, in order for these coaches to retain their jobs, they have to produce results for the school. If they do not have learners of quality football-playing ability in the school, they resort to unethical behaviour to win and keep their jobs.

*“Some teachers will do the bare minimum because they say they do not get paid for all the additional sport work they are doing.” (R8).*

*“People want to be praised ... they sell the farce that they are successful coaches.” (R7).*

### 3.3.7 Unhealthy school rivalries

It was highlighted that there are unnecessary politics and rivalries between schools and individuals in the circuit school football programmes, thus exacerbating unethical practices. These respondents argued that schools and people want to prove a point at the cost of ethics and values.

### 3.3.8 Football as a career prospect

It was indicated that schools have many learners who are not academically inclined. It was thus suggested that some sports leaders see no academic future for these learners: these individuals have little chance to successfully complete high school. Therefore, coaches tend to use football as a path to success in the lives of these learners. As a result, coaches may justify engaging in practices such as age cheating and the falsification of documents.

*“... it is up to you as a leader to not buckle under pressure and do the right thing...” (R7).*

## 4. DISCUSSION

The study findings revealed that respondents believe that there is a culture of cheating in the high school circuit football environment. Green (2004) indicated that cheating is a practice people hear about and discuss frequently. Cheating in school football may be a norm that is silently accepted, and often desired. This culture frequently seems to be endorsed and perpetuated by educators, external coaches and sometimes even school management – threatening the values of school sport. Cheating appears to be a given in sport and manifests itself in different forms (Mewett, 2002).

Boone, Steele and Harmon (2004) suggested that cheating is acceptable as long as one is not caught: this view has been supported by the current study, where some high school football sports leaders could either be amoral or morally myopic. Being amoral is ‘unthinking relative to either ethical processes or harmful outcomes’, and being morally myopic implies being ‘focused so much on outcomes/results that one fails to see, or one accepts as inevitable, the costly consequences of the programme’ (Kjeldsen, 1992:100). The reason for this could be that individuals immersed in high school football may have become accustomed to accepting certain activities and behaviour as being part of the culture of high school football. The risk with this is that undesirable values can become so deeply rooted in a culture, that members of an organisation/group may not be consciously aware of them (Daft, 2018). As Shogan and Ford (2000) stated, ethical misconduct emanates from both rule-breaking and cultural complicity. Previous research has also examined the link between ego-orientation and moral growth of athletes (Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001).

Boone *et al.* (2004) suggested that cheating is not relative, meaning that its perception does not change, irrespective of the context within which it is demonstrated. According to these researchers, cheating is personal and professional misconduct. This is consistent with McCallister, Blinde and Weiss (2000), who noted inconsistencies between coaches’ philosophies and their behaviour. This suggests that coaches normally understand the importance of fostering socially desirable values through sport participation. However, in this study, coaches may fail to modify their environment in order to facilitate the learning of these values. This could lead to the authentication of unethical leadership and behaviour in the day-to-day running of sport programmes. Melzer, Elbe and Brand (2010), citing Bredemeier and

Shields (1984), further stated that sport in general does not turn people into moral beings. On the contrary, unethical behaviour seems to be more accepted in sport than in daily life.

The study also revealed that the culture of rule-breaking is linked to cheating in high school football. This is as a result of the implementation model of high school football. According to Stowe and Gilpatric (2010), undesirable but output-enhancing activities such as cheating may occur in tournaments. This view confirms that rank-order tournaments are an environment in which the incentive to cheat may be particularly strong, especially as actions are difficult to monitor in tournaments. Stowe and Gilpatric (2010) found that a small increase in a contestant's output could dramatically change his payoff if it increases his ranking. When participating in these rank-order tournaments, every high school aspires to win. Therefore, ethical considerations are often neglected because they are seen as a barrier to success (Melzer *et al.*, 2010).

The study highlighted that a major challenge is the fielding of ineligible players. Such players often change their age fraudulently to enable them to play in certain age group tournaments for which they do not qualify. Fraudulent documentation misrepresenting the learner is submitted, and/or schools field players who are not learners at their school. This practice of cheating is referred to as age-fraud. Age-fraud is a term for the fabrication or the use of false documentation to gain an advantage over opponents for personal or team benefit (Mhlana, 2008; Cryer, 2014). Furthermore, Mhlana (2008) indicated that the greatest challenge is that approximately 20% of children in rural and impoverished communities do not have birth certificates or valid identity documents. This creates an even greater opportunity for unethical conduct.

Sports leaders should advocate and promote learner-centred football programmes by ensuring that age-appropriate learners consistently participate and compete in appropriate tournaments. Gradidge, Coopoo and Constantinou (2010) highlighted that sport can evolve into a win-at-all-costs phenomenon, where doing whatever it takes to excel in competitions may become routine practice.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to identify the ethical challenges in high school football in a circuit in Durban in order to promote quality education. The study also sought to identify factors perpetuating unethical behaviour exhibited by football coaches and administrators at circuit level.

The study has shown that sport leaders generally agree and acknowledge that sport has a major role to play in the development of learners through the socialisation process; but not all of them appreciate that, in order for it to be fully effective and its benefits to be fully realised, sport leaders in the circuit need to be ethical in their leadership. This is consistent with the reviewed literature and previous studies, which highlight that sport at school is part of the educational journey that learners embark upon, and the lessons they learn from winning and losing are an extension of the classroom, and a window into understanding the challenges of life. The study has thus emphasised how critical this is to ensuring that learners become responsible citizens, with the school environment contributing to quality education by striving for respect, fairness, integrity, honesty and a holistic understanding of learning, which acknowledges the implications of such traits on the future of the learner. Sport leaders, in particular, play a critical role in being positive role models to learners, through being in a position of authority and having the ability to be influential.

The study has highlighted that the Department of Basic Education needs to play an active role in emphasising the impact of ethics and leadership on school football. The Department of Basic Education needs to incorporate ethical leadership in all school sport conversations, training and performance management at the different levels of implementation. The study has shown that ethical leadership is key to contributing to the socialisation and positive holistic development of learners. Hence, the Department of Basic Education needs to ensure that all educators and volunteers engaged in high school football receive the relevant training to enable them to appreciate the value and benefits of ethical leadership. The findings of the study also highlight that the Department of Basic Education needs to review the implementation model of high school football at a circuit level, which could include reviewing the time allocation to school sport and the budget allocation to school sport at a school and circuit level.

The study found that the standard of ethical leadership in the high school football programme in the circuit is less than acceptable. Graf (2005) highlights that unethical behaviour may benefit a programme temporarily, but that the success cannot be sustained. The status quo, where there is a culture and an environment that allows for unethical leadership, and which are contrary to the ethos of the greater school sports programme and school football programme, in particular, needs to change.

The change in culture in the circuit needs to start at the school level and manifest itself outwards. Ultimately, the ideal goal for sports leaders is to establish a culture where the followers are challenged and encouraged to create an environment that promotes commitment to excellence, where educators can become great educators, and where learners feel motivated to perform at their highest possible level (Herrington, 2013). Changing the culture will require a process whereby new ways of thinking, and a change in the mental attitude of the sports leaders, are enforced. However, before there can be a change in culture when new ways of thinking can be learnt and mental attitudes changed, deliberate effort should be applied to unlearn the existing culture and practices. This could be achieved through inclusive strategic planning, workshops, seminars and training and development, in order to stress and reinforce the importance of ethical leadership in school football; and the subsequent benefits.

The first step to changing the culture in school football in the circuit will be to engage in a process whereby new ways of thinking, and a change in the mental attitude of sport leaders, are enforced. This is especially true in the circuit, where the findings suggest that there is blurring of the lines by leaders. When the environment and culture supports and encourages unethical behaviour, maintaining ethical standards in such an environment is a challenge that sport leaders in the high school football programme face. If sport leaders in high school football in the circuit are to achieve the goal of creating and sustaining lifelong learners, then they must continually ask themselves what the learners see, hear and experience at school.

As a means to eliminate egocentric behaviour exhibited by sports leaders, the governing bodies of school football should aim to create a climate that focuses on development and growth rather than ranking, and coaches should encourage their athletes to improve their personal bests rather than over-emphasising competition with others. The recommendation, therefore, is that government should also incorporate ethical leadership in all school sports training and performance management at the various levels of implementation. The Department of Basic Education should ensure that all educators and volunteers engaged in high school football receive the relevant training to enable them to appreciate the value and benefits of ethical leadership. A compulsory leadership development programme should

be introduced for all high school football leaders which they should successfully complete before they can participate in high school football. Such a programme should place a strong emphasis on leadership that is rooted in ethical behaviour, by providing critical and deep experiential learning for school football leaders, involving personal reflection and positive practical outcomes for all participants who engage in this programme. This can be achieved by incorporating modules related to ethics and moral knowing, socialisation and systems thinking (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995).

It is recommended that there be a conscious effort by all sports leaders and key stakeholders to actively promote and advocate for a learner-centred high school football programme by striving for a systemic perspective underpinned by servant leadership and transformational leadership styles. When the circuit can get to a point where the programme is about the beneficiaries and not certain individuals, schools, egos and attempts at selfish gains, ethical leadership would most likely improve drastically. If the football fraternity of the circuit values school sport and professional values, is willing to make those values known, and helps learners and sport leaders understand that life and sports are defined by the choices we make, then very likely they will have the courage not to engage in unethical practices (Boone *et al.*, 2004).

As in any study, limitations are noted. Firstly, the study sample in this study was relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic status, and thus the findings on the state of ethical leadership in high school football in this particular circuit cannot be generalised to other circuits in the district, province, or nation – as their social contexts differ vastly. It is therefore important to highlight that the study findings are not necessarily a reflection of the state of ethical leadership in high school football in other circuits, and not even in primary school football in the circuit in question. Generalisability is restricted by the context in which this study was conducted, particularly considering that the study only drew on the personal perspectives of a few high school sports leaders in one circuit. The study also only drew on the qualitative research approach with one stakeholder group.

Future studies could investigate the effect on commitment and ethical leadership when educators are remunerated for participating in school sport as an extra-mural activity. It is suggested that future studies draw on the mixed methods approach and involve diverse stakeholder groups who are critical in ensuring that ethical standards be maintained in school football. These stakeholder groups could include principals, parents and officials from the Department of Education.

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