

AUGUST 2010

**SPORTSPEOPLE
AS ROLE
MODELS**

DAVID BOWDEN



DEBATING MATTERS
**TOPIC
GUIDES**

www.debatingmatters.com

MOTION:

**“SPORTSPEOPLE
SHOULD ACT AS
ROLE MODELS”**

CONTENTS

Introduction

Key terms

The role models debate in context

Essential reading

Backgrounders

Organisations

In the news

INTRODUCTION

1 of 6

NOTES

1
1
2
4
5
5
6

The match-fixing accusations engulfing the Pakistani cricket team on tour in England are the latest in a rapid succession of scandals that have dragged sport onto the front pages of the news [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Thierry Henry's use of his hand to help score a goal at a World Cup qualifying match in November 2009 - thereby eliminating Ireland at the expense of France - for many typified the bad example sports stars set young people [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The prominence of blatant acts of cheating in professional football, rugby union and Formula 1 motor racing led many to dub 2009 'the year of the cheat' [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Meanwhile, off-pitch scandals involving the private lives of golf superstar Tiger Woods and England football captain John Terry seemingly reinforced the attitude that professional sportspeople have been corrupted by the wealth and celebrity which comes with excelling at high-profile sports.

Despite such scandals, it is regularly argued that sportspeople, due to the adulation and public profile they are afforded, can and should act as role models in society; for example by encouraging children to eat healthily and take exercise or to become good citizens and learn the importance of fair play [ref: [Daily Mirror](#)]. Yet others argue that sportspeople should be judged by their sporting success alone, that they have no responsibility to act as role models and that unhelpful and extraneous expectations are being foisted onto sport by politicians and moralising do-gooders. The debate has been heightened since the football World Cup in South Africa, where several noted acts of bad sportsmanship and England's disappointing performance appeared to strengthen perceptions that sporting behaviour reflects declining standards in public life [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. When it comes to sport, are excellence, entertainment and winning all that matters or should we demand that sportspeople demonstrate high standards of behaviour on and off the pitch?

KEY TERMS

[Bloodgate](#)

[Crashgate](#)

[Match-fixing](#)

[Olympic ideal](#)

[Role model](#)

[Sportsmanship](#)



Status confers responsibility?

While many are concerned with the example set by stars in the sporting arena, there is possibly more attention afforded to their off-pitch behaviour. For some, the rewards sportspeople gain by excelling at sport – including the wealth and prestige – come with a responsibility to set a good example in their private lives [Ref: [Herald](#)]. Therefore it is argued that when they transgress society's moral boundaries in their private lives they should be held responsible; such as Terry being stripped of the England captaincy or Woods losing his claim to sporting greatness [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. Young people are seen as being especially prone to the influence of the stars they admire and, therefore, we cannot turn a blind eye to bad behaviour however talented the sports personality involved. For others, however, much of the criticism levelled at stars' private lives smacks of snobbery and jealousy at their being 'overpaid and spoilt', particularly since those most heavily criticised tend to be from less well-to-do backgrounds. They maintain that what matters is their sporting achievement and sports stars – along with others in the public eye - have a right to a (sometimes messy) private life regardless of the rewards they get [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Furthermore, the idea that young people will simply mimic the behaviour of their sporting heroes is regarded as patronising and without foundation [Ref: [Science Daily](#)].

The importance of respect and fair play

From the athletes of Ancient Greece to the modern Olympic Games, high-level sport has long been associated with reflecting and instilling a moral ethos into wider society [Ref: [Western Mail](#)]. Indeed, the founder of the modern Olympiad, Baron

Pierre de Coubertin, adopted the slogan “the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part” to reflect the attitude that sport was as much about striving for excellence and playing fairly than it was being crowned a victor. For many commentators today, the wealth and fame associated with professional sport mean that this ethos has been eroded, leading many young people to view cheating and breaking the rules as perfectly acceptable behaviour in life [Ref: [Daily Telegraph](#)]. In response to concerns about deteriorating behaviour the FA launched its Respect campaign in 2008 to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour both on and off the pitch [Ref: [The FA](#)], whilst the Cricket Foundation and the MCC teamed up to launch the Spirit of Cricket campaign the following year to promote the importance of fair play to school children [Ref: [Lords](#)]. Commenting on German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer's failure to alert the referee to Frank Lampard's goal at England's World Cup match, the ethicist Peter Singer criticised him for missing the opportunity to 'do something noble in front of millions of people' [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

Winning is the name of the game

For others, the current emphasis on fair play, behaviour and role models is all too much handwringing which misses the main point: to win! From this perspective winning is essential to achieving excellence in sport and a more competitive spirit is what should be encouraged. Mayor of London Boris Johnson argued after the World Cup that there should be more emphasis on competition in British schools to breed winners rather than 'good losers' [Ref: [Daily Telegraph](#)]. It is even observed that part of the appeal of competitive sport is the unbridled passion to

THE SPORTSPEOPLE AS ROLE MODELS DEBATE IN CONTEXT

3 of 6

NOTES

win [Ref: [Independent](#)] which comes with the recognition that winners do not always play by the rules and that for some a degree of cheating cannot easily be separated from the drama and intrigue of sport [Ref: [Oxonian Review](#)]. Others point out that we are thrilled by sporting geniuses regardless of their downfalls, whether alcohol, drugs or worse, and that a focus on the former is far more inspiring for any youngster than another campaign for respect [Ref: [Independent](#)]. Reflecting on the beauty of Ben Johnson's 'shatteringly brilliant' 100 metres win at the 1988 Seoul Olympics despite his failing a dope test a few days later, Simon Barnes, the chief sportswriter for the Times, wrote: 'Sport is not a safe and cosy world ...it is there to tell us tales of the wonders and fallibilities of men and women' [Ref: [The Times](#)]. So why the modern day concerns? One account, reflecting on the enormous significance attached by the media to England's exit from the World Cup and, even more strikingly, President Sarkozy launching a national inquiry into the failure of the French team; is that the importance of football has been inflated 'to fill the space where our national public and political life ought to be' [Ref: [spiked](#)]. On the other hand, when so much significance is attached to sport, surely it is right to try to harness this enthusiasm for wider social gain and invite sports stars to step up to the mark?



ESSENTIAL READING

Football stars 'are poor role models'

Yakub Qureshi *Manchester Evening News* 31 March 2010

England star Jermaine Defoe says footballers are role models and should behave

Paula Kerr *Daily Mirror* 28 February 2010

The year of...cheating: jaw-dropping moments tinged with comedy

Barney Ronay *Guardian* 30 December 2009

Faster, higher, stronger: five marvellous moments that captured the Olympic spirit

Simon Barnes *The Times* 25 August 2008

FOR

Why is cheating OK in football?

Peter Singer *Guardian* 29 June 2010

Aristotle knew sports stars are role models

Dr Carwyn Jones *Western Mail* 3 March 2010

Why it's time to blow the whistle on arrogant John Terry's foul play

Janet Street-Porter *Daily Mail* 5 February 2010

Tiger Woods deserves your scrutiny

Dave Zirin *Nation* 14 December 2009

AGAINST

The parable of John Terry

Libby Brooks *Guardian* 11 February 2010

Forget moralising golf nuts. Silence is Tiger's most exciting statement yet

Marina Hyde *Guardian* 11 December 2009

'Fair play' is overrated

Duleep Allirajah *spiked* 23 April 2009

Don't expect sportsmen to become 'role models

Brian Viner *Independent* 3 May 2005

IN DEPTH

England loses game – and all sense of perspective

Mick Hume *spiked* 29 June 2010

Here's why England came a cropper

Boris Johnson *Daily Telegraph* 28 June 2010

If the perception of footballers is so poor, why are players expected to be role models?

Fraser Wishart *Herald* 11 February 2010

Sportsmanship: good losers make the game worth the candle

Max Davidson *Daily Telegraph* 13 July 2009

Winners don't play by the rules

Terence Blacker *Independent* 11 April 2008

4 of 6

NOTES



BACKGROUNDEERS

5 of 6

NOTES

Top Ten: Scandals in sport

Harry Smith *Sport.co.uk* 20 February 2010

Tiger in the Rough

Buzz Bissinger *Vanity Fair* February 2010

Henry's handball sparks media storm against 'Les Bleus'

France24 20 November 2009

Crashgate – Complete Story

BBC 27 September 2009

You win some, you lose some

Emma John *Observer* 16 November 2008

Is Britain a nation of sporting losers?

Richard Beard *Battles in Print* 2 October 2007

A Manifesto for Competitive Sport

Dan Travis *Manifesto Club* 2007

The Top 50 sporting scandals

Patrick Kidd *The Times* 27 August 2007

ORGANISATIONS

Federation Internationale de l'Automobile

FIFA

International Cricket Council

International Olympic Committee

Rugby Football Union

Sport England

The Football Association



IN THE NEWS

9k for shaming World Cup! FIFA fine Holland paltry sum after 'anti-football'

Daily Mail 4 August 2010

Overpaid England stars measure their success by paypackets not performances

Daily Record 1 July 2010

Mueller blames England 'alpha males'

BBC News 30 June 2010

Sarko puts French football crisis before world poverty

First Post 24 June 2010

French bare soul over World Cup own goal

Financial Times 23 June 2010

Prince William warning to football cheats

Daily Telegraph 15 May 2010

Child sports players are 'happy to cheat to win'

Metro 26 April 2010

Sports stars are no role models, say UK scientists

Science Daily 24 April 2010

Premiership stars are 'poor men' of sport

Daily Telegraph 28 March 2010

Capello blames money for player problems

BBC News 3 March 2010

Fabio Capello warns England players to keep private lives under control

Guardian 2 March 2010

John Terry stripped of England captaincy

BBC News 5 February 2010

Irish 'cheated' by Henry handball

BBC News 19 November 2009

Thierry Henry handball prompts Irish justice minister to demand replay

Guardian 19 November 2009

Crash-gate briefing: F1 in crisis again

Metro 17 September 2009

Piquet: Briatore ordered me to crash

Independent 11 September 2009

Rob Andrew blames professional era for rugby's ills

Guardian 1 September 2009

How 'bloodgate' saga unfolded

Daily Telegraph 18 August 2009

Football leagues ban for under-8s

BBC News 27 June 2008

6 of 6

NOTES



ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas & Pfizer Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

DEBATING MATTERS
**TOPIC
GUIDES**

www.debatingmatters.com

FIND OUT MORE

Debating Matters engages a wide range of individuals, from the students who take part in the debates, the diverse group of professionals who judge for us, the teachers who train and support their debaters, and the young people who go on to become Debating Matters Alumni after school and help us to continue to expand and develop the competition. If you enjoyed using this Topic Guide, and are interested in finding out more about Debating Matters and how you can be involved, please complete this form and return it to us at the address below.

Debating Matters Competition
Academy of Ideas Ltd
Signet House
49-51 Farringdon Road
London
EC1M 3JP

- Yes, I'd like to know more. Please send me further information about the Debating Matters Competition:
- I am a teacher and would like further details about events in my area and how to enter a team
- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

First name

Surname

School/company/
organisation

Professional role
(if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“TEENAGE CITIZENS
THINKING DEEPLY
ABOUT...SOCIAL
ISSUES”**

IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA

