

Paris Olympics: Canada's soccer drone scandal highlights the need for ethics education

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The Canadian women's soccer team has become the center of controversy after reports from the 2024 Paris Olympics revealed [the team used a drone to observe the New Zealand soccer team's training sessions](#). That has led to New Zealand's team lodging a [formal complaint with the International Olympic Committee](#).

Canada's Olympic committee has since apologized for the incident and removed the head coach of the women's soccer team, [Bev Priestman](#), from the Canadian Olympic team. Two other team staffers have also been sent home and [one has received a suspended prison sentence](#).

This is not the first time in history that an incident like this has occurred. Further reports indicate this incident is part of a broader pattern, suggesting that [Canada's national soccer teams have a history of using drones and other spying techniques to observe opponents' training sessions](#). Canada Soccer CEO Kevin Blue recently revealed that the men's team [also attempted to use drones](#) to spy on other teams at the recent Copa América championship in the United States.

This practice highlights the urgent need for comprehensive ethical education and stricter regulations to prevent such breaches in sports.

Unethical behavior in sport

The "win at all costs" mentality pervasive in sports competitions has [driven several organizations to commit similar infractions](#).

In the 2019 "[Spygate scandal in English football](#)", Leeds United's then-manager Marcelo Bielsa admitted to sending a staff member to spy on Derby County's training sessions.

During the 2007 Women's World Cup in Wuhan, China, Denmark officials requested FIFA investigate after [discovering men with cameras](#)

[at a closed training session](#). Despite the Danish team's complaints, FIFA chose not to take further action.

That same year, [the New England Patriots' "Spygate" scandal](#) involved the organization videotaping the New York Jets defensive signals during a game, resulting in significant fines and the loss of draft picks.

Similarly, the [Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal from 2017–2018](#) involved the use of a camera system to record and steal signs from opposing teams, leading to heavy penalties and the firing of key personnel. Additionally, in 2018, [Barcelona Football Club faced accusations](#) of hiring a company to create fake social media accounts to criticize players and opponents.

These ethical breaches, driven by the intense pressure to succeed in [professional sports](#), are just the tip of the iceberg. What sets the Canadian soccer scandal apart is that it occurred on the world stage, causing reputational damage, not only to women's soccer and soccer overall, but also to the Canadian Olympic team.

This incident raises questions about Canada's commitment to [ethical standards](#) in sports, potentially impacting the nation's international reputation and trust in Canadian athletes.

These kinds of incidents can damage a country's image and credibility. Recall the outrage when [Russian figure skating judges rigged the results during the 2002](#) Winter Olympics.

Lack of ethical sensitivity

Unless foundational changes are made, these infractions will continue to persist.

What is often lacking in competitive sports is ethical sensitivity among its participants. This includes the inability to interpret a particular situation as an ethical issue and a lack of awareness of the possible actions and their effects on the concerned parties.

The prevailing approach to unethical behavior in sports often involves investigating, fines and firing personnel. That is quickly followed by forgetting about the incident. However, this pattern of actions fails to address or rectify the underlying causes of unethical conduct in sports.

There are several reasons why sports infractions continue despite the significant consequences. [Business management](#) and [psychology experts](#) have explained how the ability to recognize and correctly evaluate ethical dilemmas is essential for making good ethical decisions.

They identify that the degree of moral intensity—how personally invested one feels—as well as organizational barriers and cultural norms, determines the likelihood of recognizing unethical behavior.

Comprehensive ethics education

Several factors in professional sports culture numb our moral intensity. In competitive sports, the pressure to succeed and the culture surrounding it [can often cloud a person's ethical judgment](#), leading to decisions that prioritize winning over ethical considerations. The drive to win overshadows the ethical implications of certain behaviors.

There are also [cultural norms](#) embedded in sports organizations [that can make certain competitive behaviors seem acceptable](#), even if they border on unethical.

In addition, athletes and coaches might believe their actions are unlikely to cause harm. That is particularly so if the immediate reward, such as

winning a game, diminishes the perceived ethical implications. Additionally, in sports, the focus on team success can create a sense of distance from those who may be harmed by unethical actions.

There is a crucial need for [comprehensive ethics education](#). This education should empower sports professionals to navigate ethical quandaries, enhance their decision-making skills and understand the incentives and organizational pressures that can impair their judgment.

With [national pride](#), coaching careers and athletes' futures on the line, it is crucial we truly embrace and teach the values that embody good sportsmanship.

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