



Personal Relationships Between Athletes and Coaches: A Counselor's View by Dr. Tom Guthiel (1994)

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Author

By Alec Wathen

*Thomas G. Guthiel, M.D. is co-Director of the **Program in Psychiatry and the Law, Massachusetts** Mental Health Center, Harvard Medical School and Director, Charles C. Gaughan Fellowship in Forensic and Correctional Psychiatry, Bridgewater State Hospital. He is a Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard **Medical School, and former Visiting Lecturer**, Harvard Law School. He has been author or coauthor of some one hundred fifty articles, book **chapters and books and has shared in two Guttmacher** awards. Dr. Guthiel lives and works in the Boston **area**.*

It's a real pleasure to address a large audience of athletically inclined folks at the end of a long day of sitting passively in chairs, when your information input has probably reached its maximum and your tolerance for input is

probably at its minimum. The only thing this **presentation has to recommend is that it is in some ways** about sex, and that tends to keep people awake even in **the late afternoon. Even after lunch. The question might arise, even though in high school I was captain of our swimming team, what is a forensic psychiatrist doing up here talking to an audience of coaches, and for a certain subset of you another question is what is a forensic psychiatrist? One way to describe it is it's someone who** works with a psychiatric overlap with the law. That's what the law school experience is all about. Those of you who know Dr. Quincy know that he does forensic pathology as a medical specialty, works for that gray haired guy with the police and therefore helps out the legal system and you could think of me as being a psychiatric equivalent of Dr. Quincy. More importantly than **any of these credentials or descriptions is the fact that in working with courts and with law suits I have handled I 50 cases in my personal caseload as an expert witness of sexual misconduct, accusations, and claims against a** wide variety of people. This includes medical personnel, **physicians, and clergy, one lawyer, and a number of teachers. It is in the teacher realm that coaches are vulnerable to both actual misconduct, (getting over involved, over invested in your athletes, and personally involved with them) or a false claim. In the field of coaching, as you can well imagine, a false claim of sexual misconduct can be easily as damaging as an accurate one. So I'm going to try to broach this subject and give** you some idea of what the issues are and how perhaps to prevent them and then we'll be able to take some **questions because I think it's your concerns that are the most important.**

Let's take a general look at the issue.

This slide has the person on the left saying "censorship **police, sir. Your tie is pointing at your penis, and you'll** have to come with us." This captures the

fact that there **is a certain tendency toward dangerous over reaction in this area and one can get over sensitized to questions of** boundary problems.

I've got to introduce you to two somewhat complicated terms. One is the notion of a fiduciary relationship. You may not have thought of yourself this way. You probably think of yourself as a coach, but coaching in relation to the athlete is one form of a fiduciary relationship. That is a technical/legal term for it, and basically it's one where you're committed to the athlete's well-being and the athlete's success, and so you fit in with doctors, **lawyers, teachers, and other fiduciaries who have some responsibility toward the well-being of your trainees.**

And the second notion you have to get is the notion of a power asymmetry. And that is where one party has **greater social power by virtue of status position or knowledge. You're the authority figure; you're the one who has the knowledge about swimming. The athlete is in a certain sense the trainee and therefore you are in a power asymmetry. You have more power than they have. They are somewhat subject to your control.**

There are some basic axioms in sexual misconduct, and when you see the word "therapist" what I want you to do is to mentally replace the word "therapist" with the word "coach". The coach is the professional. The coach has the responsibility. Therefore only the coach could be **liable in a civil litigation situation, or blameworthy in a situation where some complaint is being lodged against you. Now obviously that's not the same as saying that**

swimmers or the other person in the situation is not responsible at all ; everybody is accountable. But only the coach has a professional code or will be looked at before the law as having a professional code. And therefore it is the coach who has the responsibility. One of the implications of this is that the issue of seduction is **irrelevant. It doesn't matter who's seducing whom.** What matters is that the parties, coach and athlete, are in **an asymmetrical situation. And even though a coach may say, "I got into a sexual relationship with my swimmer because they started it," the asymmetry is going to carry anyway, and unfortunately that is not considered a defense. You're going to see, I predict, an increase in these kinds of concerns as more and more professions begin to be brought before litigation around sexual misconduct, or even sexual harassment. That isn't even sorted out yet, but you can predict that this is going to be occurring. It's happening in every other field.**

This is the advertisement for an HMO, and it shows a **doctor and a patient in bed together, and it says "your doctor should feel this close"**. I think the point is, the HMO is trying to get people to sign up for their plan **because the doctors are so accessible. But this guy's** obviously disobeying my first principle of avoiding boundary violations, which is to avoid even the appearance of a boundary violation, (which we will define in a moment). And even though they're both guys, and they're both wearing clothes, they are IN BED together, and it's hard to take "IN BED TOGETHER" and make it **a benign situation. Now the guy on the left is saying to the guy on the right, "there's nothing wrong with a flowered tie, Sims, but here at the bank we regard it as the** first step on the downward path to full frontal nudity." **The point being here, that nobody gets into a relationship suddenly. Usually there are small personal intrusions into the professional relationship: More informality, more physical contact, non-swimming, non-coach related activities; a gradual expansion of the**

relationship beyond the normal system of interaction. The informality can get romantic, sexual, social, personal, and other kinds of ways. It's a "slippery slope" notion which you actually see in practice all the time.

What's a boundary? Well, a boundary is the edge of appropriate behavior. Obviously there's a lot of leeway **as to what constitutes appropriate behavior for a given coach-athlete pair. But the issue really is going to be** determined by the parties involved. Only you can **decide, by setting a model of professionalism, what is** appropriate for your coaching approach. Obviously the **athlete is going to have some opinions about what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. How much** general physical contact in fact is appropriate ? How much

shoulder patting? How much fanny patting? How much hugging? How much other kinds of contact are considered appropriate? How does it relate to the genders of the coach and athlete. Those are some of the questions **that constantly come up in assessing boundaries.** Boundary breaches occur in two kinds. One is boundary **crossing, which means you step out of your role. You do** something "non-coachly ," but it doesn't hurt anybody. It doesn't exploit the athlete. It doesn't abuse the athlete. It doesn't intrude on the athlete, or harm the athlete. It's **something that you're doing that is for social purposes. You invite them over to your house for dinner.** Again, fairly benign. No exploitation, no harm.

In contrast to that kind of a boundary crossing, a boundary violation is something exploitative or harmful to the athlete, where you use your superior position, your position of authority, your superior knowledge, to take **advantage of the athlete and have a personal-social relationship** or other kinds of exploitation.

The problem is that even a boundary crossing can represent a “promise you can’t keep”. You may out of the most pure and reasonable motives, invite an athlete over for dinner with your family. And it could go perfectly well and could be understood as a nice bonding experience. But athletes come in a lot of different flavors as I certainly don’t need to tell you. And a number of them **can interpret your dinner as a tremendous invitation.** Some athletes come from broken families, dysfunctional **and disruptive families, abusive families, and getting to know a non-abusive family such as your own may be an enormous seduction, an enormous temptation. It may stir very strong longings in that athlete to become** a member of your family, and therefore you may be making, **even with the best of intentions, a promise you can’t keep.** Does that mean never have athletes for dinner? **No, of course not. It means being alert to the fact that even benign extra-coaching activities, extra-business, extra-teaching activities can mean to people who** are susceptible, who are vulnerable, promises that you can’t keep.

Good coaches don’t get in the game; they stay on the sidelines. They consult, if you will, with the athletes. The point is that your job is to help the athlete to become a better athlete rather than use the athlete as the **gratification for yourself or for a relationship as it directly** relates to you. So good coaches stay on the sidelines. They don’t get into the game, that is become personally **involved.**

Now, a couple of axioms about sexual misconduct based on a large number of actual cases. The problem is of

course. by the time we get to this we're already talking litigation, which is very ugly, and particularly ugly in this subject area..

Most sexual misconduct begins with boundary violations, and we're going to give you some examples of those in just a minute. That's the slippery slope model. However, the presence of the boundary violation itself doesn't prove that misconduct occurred. You 'll get people who have a highly informal relationship that's not **sexual. But fact finders (it could be a civil court, it could be, if the athlete's a minor, a criminal court; it could be** various other kinds of administrative bodies) find sexual misconduct more credible in the presence of boundary **violations. That is, the more informal boundary violating** (touchy-feely extra-coaching, extra-teaching, extra-business) the relationship is, the more likely the decision **maker is going to find it credible that this occurred. So** to put this in sort of simplified terms, smoke leads to fire. You could have smoke without fire, but fact finders assume where there's smoke, there's fire. And that's **why**

boundary violations become meaningful. Here is a very famous case in Massachusetts and the board in a transcript is basically saying “we took the presence of smoke, and inferred fire.” Now this turned out to be fake. The patient was lying and it was well established and well documented, but initially, before the rehearing and before all the additional evidence came in the doctor **was in danger of losing her license inappropriately** because it was a fake claim. The presence of boundary violations led the board to assume sexual relations, that is to believe the patient.

Common sites of boundary violations. Again the question of the role. The most profound or basic boundary issue is, “is this what a coach does?” What is your role as coach? What are the boundaries of appropriate behavior for your role as coach, and even for you as the kind **of coach you are? There are some coaches who are all** verbal, some are very physical; people vary in their different styles and approaches and different personality qualities, so the question is not the “universal coach” but you as the “normal coach.” Is that what a normal coach **does? If an athlete actually requests a personal, social, or** sexual relationship with you and it does happen because of the idealization that you see in teacher-student, coach athlete relationships, the question is, “is that what a coach does?” Well, presumably not, but arguably the **pressure can be very high and the temptation very strong.**

Questions arise about time. Extra or extra-long sessions. If normal coaching occurs between “X” hours, and you find yourself spending huge amounts of time with one

particular athlete, what does that mean about the relationship? **What message does that convey either to the athlete or to other people who might be investigating the situation at a later point?**

Place. Where does coaching take place? Well, obviously there are a variety of different answers; the pool, the locker room, the room with the blackboard. and so on, a lot of different places. Coaching usually doesn't take **place in none of those situations; it usually occurs in one**

of those situations. If you're taking an athlete out to dinner, **okay, you could be giving them coaching at that** point. It looks like a date though.

It doesn't look like **what you're supposed to be doing, and that can raise** questions. Does that mean you should never take your athlete to a McDonald's if you feel like it? No it doesn't. But you must be alert to the fact that it may be **experienced as a breach, a boundary violation.**

Questions of money. Do you get paid by individual athletes? **Some of you might be in a consulting-retainer situation. Is it clear that it's work? Is it clear that it's business? Are the business issues of the relationship**

between you and your athletes clear, or are they sufficiently **vague so that it's not even clear that it is a business relationship?**

Next, physical contact. Stuff that doesn't look like **coaching. Not showing a person how to hold their hand as they make the stroke, it's showing them how to do** something else which counts more as hanky-panky. **How about hugging? When you get someone being sued for some form of misconduct they always say "I gave** the person a non-sexual hug." Well that's a little tricky. Non-sexual to who? Some people feel very sexually **aroused by very informal contact. A lot of swimming** contact exposes a lot of skin because of the natural **things you wear for swimming competition and therefore it's more erotic. There's more skin contact in swimming than in football with a lot of padding getting in the** way. Obviously contact may be experienced in a much **more intrusive or invasive or arousing way than in other** sports.

Next, self-disclosure. One of the most useful things that **a coach can do is to show your own experiences. But** suppose you start confiding in your athlete. Suppose you **start using the athlete to confide about your marital,** social, sexual, financial, spiritual, moral problems and difficulties. Suppose you turn the athlete into your confidant and guide, rather than the reverse. That kind of pitfall can be very destructive and difficult for athletes to tolerate. They don't settle well with the idea of some**how being responsible for your troubles. And when you**

burden them with your difficulties you're changing the role. They're becoming the coach for you in a manner of speaking. That can be very stressful and painful for especially younger athletes or athletes with a history

of abusive experiences in their own past. That can really set off very disturbing upsurges of feeling that are much harder to deal with.

Sessions in cars. You may have to drive to meets and there may be a lot of stuff going on in the car. It doesn't look quite like coaching. It looks like two people taking a drive in the car. Nothing wrong with driving to get places, but again if you're spending a lot of time driving around, is that coaching or is some other kind of situation going on? Is this going to create either in the athlete or in people looking on the suspicion that the relationship is getting personalized?

When in doubt, getting a second opinion is very strong in malpractice prevention, and I really strongly recommend it for you. One of the best things you can do to keep your feet on the ground is, if something is developing between you and an athlete that you're puzzled about, get a second opinion. Get a peer. Call up someone you know and run it by them and see if they feel it's a problem as you do. Consultation helps.

This is a description of body zones. I don't put a lot of stock in this directly but you need to get a sense that people have different awareness of how close is too close. For some families, for some cultures, any physical contact is presumably an attack. For other cultures it's assumed that if you're not actually patting somebody on the shoulder, you're not listening to them. This is very culturally affected, very regionally affected. Different parts of the world, different parts of the country. One simply needs to be aware of this fact. What's standing at a respectable distance from person "A" may be feeling to person "B" like you're in the face and down the throat, and not because of where you are, but because of their own cultural location of body zones.

How do people complain? There's this term dysphoria, (that's fancy shrink speak for some kind of feeling of wrongness or badness) and there's the feeling of exploitation, the feeling of wrongness. Usually one or more of these in combination have to occur before someone registers a complaint. I don't know what your experience has been with this. Most commonly I find that the parents (usually the athlete is too mixed in their feelings about what's going on so they don't complain) may hear about it and they may get involved. The question is what triggers the complaint? Usually it's a mix of some of dysphoria, some bad feeling, distress, discomfort, anxiety, depression, panic attacks in some cases. Feeling exploited, feeling used, feeling had, and then basic feelings of wrongness. This is wrong. We shouldn't be doing this. And that feeling of wrongness may be the third trigger in the complaint.

Here is an interesting finding. There are many complicated reasons for it, but individuals who have a history of childhood sexual abuse tend to get involved in abusive relationships. This is really a complicated issue to explore, but one way to think about it is that for many people who have been through abuse as their only relationship, the feeling is if it isn't abusive, it isn't real. So these are individuals who get themselves involved in very destructive situations. Paradoxically you'd think they've been burned before, why would they get into it again? But there seems to be a kind of addiction of involvement or attraction or disposition, and so if some of the young people you work with have been early abused, it does create both vulnerability and a curious form of tropism, a curious form of readiness to get involved in exploitative abusive relationships. The critical point here is that one can see the remarkable coincidence between people abused in childhood and people involved in sexual misconduct.

False claims. There's a whole psychology to this, but it does occur and one has to be careful about assuming that every complaint is always true. Many are, but not every claim is true. The most common basis for a false claim is simple lying. And we'll explain the reasons for this in just a moment. Occasionally you'll get someone who really is delusional, who has lost touch with reality and assumes that something is going on when there is actually no evidence whatever for it occurring. That's actually quite rare. A false claim is more likely to be an outright lie than to be something crazy, and you have to be alert to those possibilities. There is also a kind of distortion where what you're doing is innocent or straight forward, but the athlete experiences it as something more ominous and more grim and more exploitative. Here is a case where a patient attempted to use the threat of a claim to manipulate a doctor. This is an actual case in Massachusetts. How would this work with a coach? There are many ways in which you could conceivably be manipulatable in connection with having somebody on a team. I'm not sure the temptations you're exposed to but again the threat of a claim of sexual misconduct is extremely serious for any coach and that manipulative element could be something you could be having to face. The trigger has historically been termination. That is where you say "look, I can't work with you anymore, or your behavior is unacceptable, I can't have you on the team anymore. You bounce a person from the team, they

say "OK, either I stay on the team, or I bring this claim **against you.**" **Other kinds of rejection: perceived mistreatment. Termination, rejection, and perceived mistreatment** are probably high on the list of triggers in your field.

What are the damages of various kinds in sexual misconduct? This is a boundary violation issue, when you **have sex with an athlete under your care, it does create a** loss of trust in most future relationships. Someone

who **has been exploited by a coach is obviously burned and is more distrusting of future coaches. A large number of emotional reactions can be triggered. Feelings of exploitation, humiliation, shame, betrayal, anger, public embarrassment, all of those can be triggered and of course in extreme cases especially with adolescents who are vulnerable to these feeling storms, suicide risk can** occur. People feel completely had, completely used, then worthless, and that goes on to depression and self-destruction. It can be quite serious. So although one can get sort of light hearted about these kind of relationships, **the seriousness both in terms of your career and** the athletes well-being and life can't be minimized.

Then there is cessation trauma, which occurs when something stops, not when it goes on. You will get a situation where an athlete gets over involved in a personal, social, sexual relationship with the coach and they don't seem to be showing any signs of distress whatsoever. They seem to be "cooking along" and enjoying the relationship, and this wonderful, "I feel special, I feel chosen, I feel wonderful," until something happens that changes the chemistry. It's as if a rubber band which was being stretched during the relationship suddenly snapped. At that point when the coach goes away and doesn't take the athlete along, when the coach says **they' re not going to leave their spouse and take up with the athlete, some kind of rejection, some kind of change;** at that point the rubber band snaps, all the trauma explodes. At that point even though the relationship has been cooking along wonderfully, now you get all the **negative consequences of an exploitative relationship. You cannot use the fact that things seem to be going well as an index that they will always continue to do so, because cessation trauma very commonly occurs.**

Are there things you can do in terms of prevention? Well there may be. Here are some more fundamental questions. Keeping your head screwed on straight about what your role is and what your task is. I suppose this **whole meeting is designed to do that in various ways; to** articulate your role and help you with it. Careful self monitoring. Staying on top of yourself and being aware of the fact that some people can experience what you're

doing as much more intrusive, harmful, invasive, exploitative, than you yourself may mean or be doing. Being vigilant to the process of what's going on. Is the **person responding the way your other students have** responded. Is there something funny going on, something **in the air that leaves you uncertain? Getting** consultation. Check it with a peer. Find out if someone else sees the situation as problematic as you. And then, education which is my humble effort here to try to alert you **to some of this by consciousness raising.**

Here is the issue in terms of context. If someone is willing to lie under oath there's no defense. If I'm willing to make up a claim against you, and I'm willing to lie under oath and it gets into some sort of litigation situation, there's no way you can defend yourself. My lie is going to be expressed. So you could argue that all of us **are vulnerable to false accusations or misconduct, and I think that is unfortunate and true. However there are** three context defenses you can use that will help even with a false claim.

Number one, a basic professionalism that makes the accusation implausible. What you're hoping is that your **reputation with your peer group is so strong that if someone says "hey, I hear Joe is sleeping with one of his athletes," the initial reaction is "no he's not."** You want that kind of professionalism to be known about you.

Number two, no hint of boundary violations. Again that should be obvious by now. The smoke-fire kind of issue.

And then, no hint of sexual harassment by the coach **elsewhere. This is sort of confusing because if a coach is** making the moves on an athlete, you could call it a misconduct or you could call a sexual harassment. What the problem is doesn't matter. Whichever one the claim is **brought as, the other one would be used as corroboration. In other words, if you are making the moves on an** athlete and it is treated as a sexual harassment, the athlete's reaction to that supports the idea that this is sexual misconduct as well. And so there are two different kinds **of challenge. A harassment case, and a misconduct case that would now be brought against you and can be used** to reinforce each other. Anyone who, for example, **harasses the swimming department secretary is therefore** likely to be the kind of person against whom athlete **claims are going to be believed. So harassment and misconduct can be used again to reinforce each other.**

We're going to stop at this point, and open it up to questions, comments, horror stories, examples from your own experience, and hope we can benefit from that. Thank you for your attention.

Questions, comments.

1. I) The question is raised about minors. Obviously minors trigger a whole other level of issues. Number one, they are more likely to misunderstand stuff than older folks. Number two, you're adding criminal concerns on top of all the other concerns. If you're coaching 20 year olds, its certain kinds of problems, but you add a minor and its everything else on top of all that. And there also is low threshold mandatory reporting, as you don't need me to tell you. Yes, with minors it's another acute level of consciousness raising and sensitivity in the
- How do I talk to my assistants about this 9 Let me tell you about the pitfalls of trying to get this point across to different audiences and those might include various kinds of trainees. The equivalent of your talking to your coaches would be my talking to medical students or trainees of various types, ones who haven't really fully gotten their identity in their new role, but they still need to learn this issue. Here are some of the pitfalls to avoid. You want to avoid a punitive moralistic phrase. "I don't want to see anybody's hand on an athlete anytime during this entire time I'm here!" where you're already beating them for what they haven't done yet. The other pitfall is to try to suggest that somehow there's something intrinsically wrong with all the general standard affections that you develop between coaches and athletes. The best way to try do it is to bring it up as a question. "Has anybody had any difficulties with athletes being very sensitive to boundary violations, physical contact, using

their first names.” Use the inquiry to see if you can get people talking about this issue, and whether anybody had any difficulty with family members, teachers, clergy, counselors at camp, and so forth, in the past. Tap into individual experience. It’s an unpleasant subject, but it’s an area where a little bit of consciousness raising goes along way and is probably quite valuable. Staying out of trouble is best in this situation. I think those are the pitfalls: Avoid the punitive model. Try to draw from their own experience. And indicate that this is really a tough thing to be saddled with and so you want to avoid even the appearance, or even the suspicion, or even the accusation of this occurring. Whatever you can do to make that more likely is better for the coaches. It’s better for the athletes

- How and when to bring the issue up with coaching staff? Bringing it up with all the coaches at once avoids accusing anybody of being too loose with the boundaries. Making it a consciousness raising for the whole group would at least start out by saying we’re all starting on the same page here. Then after that if someone gets into some difficulty you can say “I can’t help noticing

you’re doing a lot of physical contact with that particular athlete. Do you notice that too yourself? Do you think this could get you into trouble?” What you want to do is what we call in this business an alliance with one of your coaches which does not say you and me against the athlete, but says me working the best side of you to keep trouble from occurring with the athlete. And maintaining that alliance is usually the trick, which you do best by involving them.

- Question on data available on frequency of misconduct by sex of coach/athlete: I’ve got it for clinicians and patients. I’m not sure it’s that useful for coaches. I haven’t seen the figures for coaches. I would be interested if anybody knows if this has been studied because I think it would be useful as a starting point, but I don’t have that information. In the clinical pairings the most common is (let’s pretend its coach/athlete, but it’s not really, its clinician/patient) male coach/female athlete. Second most common would be female/female. Third most common male/male. And last female/male. Again in my 150 cases I have all those pairings. They all occur in life. I would not be astonished if that frequency were recapitulated in coaching as well, but I don’t have any data. It would be interesting if anybody knows if there are any

- Question, comment: "I've had a couple of situations which did not seem to be a problem; I'm aware of lawsuits, that sort of thingbut I coach prep school and a lot of times at the end of the season, or when something good happens and an athlete will come up and hug me and it doesn't bother me; it doesn't bother them or anybody else. Is there a problem with that? Answer: Doesn't sound like there is, and that's clearly not unheard of, what's called termination hugs. There's a technical name for what you're describing and it doesn't look like its exploitative. I certainly would not, like in the overreaction we saw in the slide, throw the person to the floor. Go with it under those circumstances. Since at that point the student is initiating it and it looks like a one shot, I don't see a problem with
- Question: I coach little kids, and the little kids are trying to learn to dive, and I ask them if I can put my hands.... Answer: Great, you got permission. You've established consent which is an enormously positive thing to do. Your question reminds me of the issue. You are probably aware if only subliminally that this country is in the middle of a sexual abuse hysteria. You've got satanic sexual, you've got ritual abuse, you've got childhood sexual abuse, recovered memories which is a whole industry which is at this moment at the crazy-proliferation stage and is about to reach the bitter-recrimi-

nation and cool down stage but it's not there yet. So you will get people who will see you holding the kid by the rib cage and say "A hat Sexual misconduct under the guise of teaching!" The consent that you're getting is enormously valuable; it probably detoxifies most of the problems for the child which is really an issue of control anyway and it probably anticipates and detoxifies the problem for the parent. There is no defense against someone seeing your benign physical intervention and misinterpreting the hell out of it. You have to do the best you can with the consent you're getting.

- Question: Are there interactions or styles of coaching that seem to be based more on sexuality than on personhood. Answer: The problem is that a number of sexually abused children, people sexually abused in childhood, get rewarded by the abusing family member for being seductive. They get reinforced for And that means that these individuals tend to sexualize (it's called eroticize), and act seductively in all their relationships including inappropriate ones. That's also true for certain coaches for reasons including

childhood sexual abuse in coaches. There's nothing about being a swim coach that makes you immune from a history of abuse. So the critical point is that you will get interactions which are malignant in that the parties are having a relationship based on their readiness to become sexualized in the relationship rather than on the work and teaching of coaching. Its problematic and potentially dangerous to both parties. That is its dangerous to the athlete even if the athlete misinterprets what's going on and its lethal to the coaches career.

- Question: Explain the liability of the coach on deck for swimmer/swimmer boundary violations. How different is it with 5,6,7 year olds, before and after puberty? Answer: Your responsibility is to use what you're being paid for which is your professional judgment. I think it's absolutely okay for a coach to step in because they feel there is something uncomfortable going on. The point is the burden of proof is not on you. If you don't like what's going on, I think you really have the option of stopping it; especially since the things you're describing really aren't about swimming. People getting into a wrestling match; that isn't what they're there to learn from you. So I think you can feel comfortable with a low threshold for your intervention and you don't have to justify it. You can just say "look I don't like watching you guys getting into this knock together. Break it We're not here to do that. Let's get back to work." By redirecting the focus you help the person get back to the business part, and avoid these other kind of issues. It's tricky. When you feel uncomfortable about something going on, if you're a reasonable human being, a part of

you says "Could this be my problem? Could I be over sensitive, or something? Could I be over reacting? Could I be over reading it?" The answer is yeah, you could be. But in a situation where its clearly not about what you're there to do, it's okay to have a low threshold. It's all right to be a stickler, to be reviled for being a Puritan or a tight ass or whatever the issue might be. It doesn't matter. The point is you use your authority to protect whoever might be emotionally affected by something that looks superficial. Low threshold is okay.

- Question: In hiring someone is it okay to ask if someone has past history of sexual misconduct? Answer: I don't think there's a problem in asking because arguably they're in a fairly sensitive kid related There's a fair amount of body exposure and skin contact which makes it different from other kinds of

teaching. So in general unless your state prohibits that as part of the job application, I would ask it. Of course they can always choose not to answer.

- Comment involving the possibility of a data bank on coach applicants at a cost of \$50 per coach

I 1) Question; How do you handle a report of an employee's misconduct? Answer: ...by starting with the person. If I were accused to my superior, I'd want the first thing that person to do is ask me about it and then see where you go from there. So I'm inclined to do that first. Get them into the conversations. Get the other side of the story. And then say, "Look, this is too messy and too ugly. We've got to kick this upstairs. We've got to refer it to this administrative body, or that administrative body. It's really the same if you were hearing a rumor; a rumor that one of the fellow coaches was sleeping with an athlete. The golden rule says do to them as you'd want them to do unto you, right? And so if somebody had that rumor about you you'd want to know about it. And if it was false you'd want to know about it because it would be meaningful to you that this was circulating. So my first approach is, I'd talk to the person. "Look, I don't know what the facts are, but I was in the cafeteria and I overheard two people talking saying you're sleeping with an athlete. That's out there on the street. I don't know if it's true or not. Is there any way I can be of some use here. Shouldn't we talk?"

And a person says "No, I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to my lawyer." Or "Yeah, I never heard of this. How come its happening? It's crazy!" At least then you have something open. You can get the conversation going. People get into difficulty more when they try to sweep it under the rug, pretend it's not true, etc.

I 2) Question: A coach is accused of sexual impropriety.
So far it's been two years and he hasn't had a date in

court yet. He lost his job, he lost his wife, his family, lost his home, and the legal bills are already thousands of dollars; Answer: And I'll bet his usual insurance doesn't cover it. The courts are incredibly slow and this **stuff hangs over your head, and as you give in this vivid** and tragic example it goes beyond coaching. It can affect other areas of your life, as you point out in this **case, the guy's marriage. So this is not a light and** peripheral issue. The damages and dues are very heavy. It has become in my profession because of the national practitioner data bank, the end of your career. There's a **doctor in Maine who is now selling insurance because he cannot get a medical job because every time they credential him the practitioner data bank says he was convicted of sexual misconduct.**

- **Question on coaches giving rub downs. Answer: Have another person in A chaperone for any situation** which could be misinterpreted.
- Question: What about our obligation to report suspected abuse of a child? Answer: Coaches are usually treated like teachers as mandated. If you **become aware of a suspicion you have in most jurisdictions an obligation to alert the social services, or agency that does the same function in that area. Again, that's an obligation that you have in most jurisdictions. There is** automatic immunity, so you're allowed to be wrong. All **you have to have is a suspicion and the agency investigates it** and the rest is taken out of your hands. It is difficult and disruptive and the parents are mad at you. It's **not trouble free, but it often is a very important thing because as a coach you are a case finder; you may have the earliest access to information about somebody being** seriously abused compared to anyone else in their social **circle.**