# Is cheating a way to make sport fairer?

## Unit 15 Is cheating a way to make sport fairer?

### 15.1 Introduction

Cheating and rule bending seem to be behaviours that are as old as sport itself. Even at the ancient Olympic Games athletes had to swear an oath that they would not be guilty of foul play, that they would be fair and would not accept bribes; however, plenty of cheating and bribery still went on – to the extent that a statue of the Greek god Zeus was paid for by fines imposed for cheating (Goldblatt, 2016).

Cashmore (2010) regards cheating as any activity designed to deceive, trick or flout the rules of a given sport. He believes that the increase in cheating has been one of the results of an increasingly professional attitude in sport that has shifted the emphasis of sport towards winning at all costs. Quotations such as the following would support this view:

Second place is just the first place loser.

(Dale Earnhardt, racing car driver)

Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.

(Vince Lombardi, American football coach)

When referring to ‘professionalism’, Cashmore is using the term in relation to the approach of athletes rather than with reference to whether they receive financial rewards for their participation, as cheating is present in all levels of sport.

This unit explores the concept of cheating and examines the reasons why people cheat and the different ways in which they do so.

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### 15.2 Cheating and gamesmanship: at least 50 shades of grey

Cashmore’s definition of cheating is black and white in that it takes the view that there are rules to be adhered to and any breaking of these rules is cheating. However, behaviours in sport are not always that clear-cut: there are grey areas between the poles of acceptable behaviour and cheating. For example, consider a tennis player who is losing a match and calls a timeout for medical treatment because they say they are injured. They have ten minutes in which to regain their composure and disrupt the momentum of their opponent. As a result, this player goes on to win a match they were losing. You could argue that this player has not broken any rules because they are entitled to a timeout for injury, even though they may have been feigning the injury. Although they may not, strictly speaking, have broken any rules, they have misused or abused the rules to their unfair advantage and in doing so have stepped outside the spirit of fair competition in which the game is meant to be played. This is an example of gamesmanship, in which rules are interpreted to gain an advantage. Gamesmanship is sometimes penalised, sometimes not, depending on how behaviour is interpreted by officials. Some is even accepted by opponents as part and parcel of the game.

#### Activity 15.1 Cheating, gamesmanship or acceptable behaviour?

*Timing:Allow 20 minutes*

Click on the link to access a [poll](https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/olink.php?id=1636743&targetdoc=Activity+15.1+Poll)  and then vote to indicate whether you think that each example given in the poll represents cheating, gamesmanship or acceptable play.

As the rest of your tutor group complete the poll, you will get an idea of their opinions and which examples they regard as cheating and which as gamesmanship or acceptable behaviour.

In all these examples the interpretation of rules and our concept of acceptable behaviour in sport are important. If you take Example 3, it is likely that the player committing the foul would be sent off, but they may see that as an acceptable penalty for potentially saving a goal. Their behaviour may be approved of by their coach and supporters and put down to ‘taking one for the team’. Their opponents would be likely to see it as cheating, but it is possible that they would have done exactly the same thing in that situation.

There are norms that govern behaviour. For example, in football it is accepted that if a player is injured, their opponents will kick the ball out of play so the player can receive treatment. On resumption of the game the team taking the throw-in will return the ball to their opponents who were previously in possession. If this does not happen, and particularly if a goal is scored as a result, it is regarded as unacceptable behaviour, even cheating. However, no rule has been broken: in fact the rules have been adhered to but the ‘spirit’ of the game or behavioural norms have been flouted.