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# What To Do When An Opponent Doesn't Follow Eligibility Rules

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**"If you knew a team/school wasn't following eligibility rules, are you obligated to say something? Especially if a player won an event while disregarding these rules?"**

## PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

Thank you for asking an especially difficult question. One of the core tenets of honoring the game is to respect the rules. (We encourage coaches, athletes, parents and fans to honor the ROOTS of the game - the Rules, our Opponents, the Officials, our Teammates, and our Self.) The decision to ensure that others honor these elements can be a difficult.

In this delicate situation, it would be helpful to have a face-to-face conversation with the coach, athletic director, or other organizational leader. Before questioning whether a rule was broken, you should work carefully to understand the exact eligibility rule as well as the school's interpretation and application of the rule. As a former high school athletic director, I can vouch that eligibility rules can get surprisingly complex. To add to the complexity, many schools choose to apply more stringent criteria than are required by the state athletic association (for example, your state may require a "C" average while the school may choose to require a "B" average to participate in contests). Eligibility rules related to transfers and residence locations can also be complex and confusing.

Assuming you've done all this and there is a clear violation of the rule, you are faced with a challenging decision. Before making any sort of accusation, you would be well-served to communicate with the school to understand how they approach eligibility rules and what values underlie that approach.

If after all this you still feel compelled to say something about the transgression, you might want to consider working with the school quietly to allow them to resolve the issue in a way that is equitable and fair. I was honored to work at one high school that chose to self-report an eligibility violation that cost us a state tournament game. As a coach at the school, it hurt to lose that game, but I was deeply proud to be at a place that put integrity first. I am confident that our athletes learned a valuable life lesson and shared in the pain as well as the pride.

Thank you for your commitment to youth sports!