

Confrontation and Dialogue: Ethical Reflections and Rule Education on Physical Conflicts in University Basketball Teaching – From the Perspective of Sports Humanities and Sociology

Hanhua Zhao

School of Sports Law, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, 201701

Abstract: Physical conflict is an unavoidable core issue in university basketball teaching. From the perspective of sports humanities and sociology, this paper proposes a dialectical framework for re-understanding physical conflict in basketball—the tension and unity of 'confrontation' and 'dialogue'. The study finds that physical confrontation in basketball has inherent legitimacy, carrying positive ethical values such as courage, strength, and will within the limits allowed by rules. However, when confrontation exceeds rule boundaries, 'twisted bloodiness' culture and ambiguous moral judgment areas give rise to court violence and malicious fouls, posing an ethical crisis that endangers the legitimacy of university basketball. The threefold mechanism of rule education—temporal discipline, role empowerment, and moral reasoning—serves as the core channel to transform conflictual 'confrontation' into ethical 'dialogue', enabling students to complete the moral subject construction from passive compliance to active internalization. The fundamental task of university basketball is not to eliminate physical contact, but through systematic practice of rule education, to help students learn dialogue in confrontation, experience boundaries in conflict, and complete personality development through physical collisions, truly achieving a transcendence from 'physical conflict' to 'ethical dialogue'.

Keywords: University Basketball; Physical Conflict; Rule Education; Sports Ethics; Humanities and Sociology; Dialogue Ethics

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1.Introduction

Basketball is a sport fundamentally characterized by physical contact. From the shoulder-to-shoulder contact during position-setting and board-snatching, to the physical collisions during drive-and-shooting, and further to the positional battles in defensive confrontations—every physical encounter on the basketball court constitutes a microcosm of power struggle. For college basketball instruction, such physical interactions not only form the core of technical training but also profoundly touch upon the ethical foundations of physical education: In the face of unavoidable physical confrontation, what kind of physical attitude should teaching ultimately cultivate? Should rules serve as external mandatory constraints or as internalized value commitments?

A striking phenomenon in contemporary college basketball education is the frequent occurrence of violent incidents on the court. During a CUBA game, a player from Chongqing Normal University was banned for two years for maliciously trampling an opponent's genital area, while the victim from Wuhan University of Technology kicked another player the following day—a stark reversal of roles that provokes deep reflection. Such incidents serve as constant warnings: when physical confrontation loses ethical boundaries, it degenerates from the "dialogue" inherent to competitive sports into "violence" in interpersonal relationships. In 2025, the Chinese Basketball Association imposed severe penalties for mass assault incidents involving U21 players, with commentators bluntly stating, "Without correcting this distorted spirit of aggression, Chinese basketball cannot progress." These conflicts occurring on university campuses and youth training grounds demonstrate that ethical considerations surrounding physical confrontation are not merely academic issues but persistently highlight critical challenges in college sports education.

Foucault once pointed out that the body is not only an object of power but also a space for subjective perception and expression; the relationship between power and freedom is not one where the latter replaces the former, but

rather one in which both mutually shape each other through a dynamic interplay. This insight provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding physical conflicts on the basketball court. From the perspective of sports humanities sociology, this paper explores the ethical implications of physical conflicts in college basketball instruction and their potential transformation into "dialogue" within the framework of rule-based education, aiming to identify practical pathways for ethical construction amidst the tensions inherent in competitive interactions.

2.The Legal Scope of Conflict: The Theoretical Basis and Ethical Boundaries of Physical Confrontation

2.1 The Endogenous Legal Theory of Basketball Physical Contact

The rules of basketball are not merely additional constraints, but rather the fundamental principles that define the sport itself. Unlike non-contact disciplines like track and field, basketball's competitive logic fundamentally relies on the utilization of physicality: positioning for rebounds requires power dynamics, driving to the basket demands balanced control during physical confrontations, and zone defense necessitates proactive positioning. Basketball professionals regard intense physical play as a hallmark of high-level competition, yet the sport's true appeal lies precisely in maximizing physical prowess within the boundaries allowed by its rules to gain an advantage. International basketball regulations clearly distinguish between legal contact and illegal fouls: contact occurring when a defender occupies a legitimate defensive position is generally not penalized, whereas excessive contact such as pushing, elbowing, or pulling is deemed a foul. This "no-penalization-for-legal-contact" principle essentially reflects basketball's "silent acceptance" of physical confrontation—a careful balance between delivering a fluid playing experience and safeguarding athletes' safety.

From the perspective of sports philosophy, physical confrontation inherently carries positive ethical value. Every successful positioning and every point scored through physical contact serve as a test and refinement of willpower, physical courage, and competitive wisdom. Intense competition fosters a spirit of perseverance and determination; maintaining respect for the game and opponents even in extreme confrontations constitutes the essential ethos of competitive sports. Therefore, physical contact in basketball instruction is not a "negative factor" to be eliminated, but rather an "educational asset" that can be guided and elevated.

2.2 The Crisis of "Crossing the Line": From Physical Confrontation to Court Violence

However, when physical confrontation crosses the boundaries established by the rules, the intensity of competition enters a dangerous realm: extreme incidents such as malicious trampling, elbow strikes, kicks, and even gang fights have occurred frequently, making basketball violence on university campuses an unavoidable governance challenge. In 2015, a gang fight erupted during a match between the men's basketball teams of Wuhan Institute of Sports Science and Technology and Central China Normal University; nearly all players from both teams engaged in shoving and grappling, causing the situation to spiral out of control. Ultimately, the event's technical representative ruled to disqualify both teams from the competition.

These incidents reveal the underlying mechanisms of physical conflict alienation. In intense confrontational situations, players' emotions are highly susceptible to escalation; when factors such as controversial calls and close scorelines converge, physical contact may escalate into deliberate harmful behavior. A study of SBL players found that in typical physical conflict scenarios, most players do not experience strong moral conflict, as they can mitigate their emotions through compensatory mechanisms provided by referees or the rules (free throws, possession changes, technical fouls). However, when access to these institutional or rule-based remedies is blocked—such as due to missed calls, insufficient referee authority, or players perceiving unfair treatment—a moral decline occurs imperceptibly.

The deeper root of the problem lies in a "distorted competitive ethics." Some commentators have noted that in certain youth training systems and cultural environments, "fearlessness" is excessively emphasized; a move that carries the risk of violating sportsmanship yet serves to intimidate opponents is often tacitly permitted or even

encouraged. Over time, the fist has replaced the tactical board as an outlet for emotional release for some players. If college basketball is permeated by this distorted ethic of "using any means necessary—even if it's not for victory"—it not only harms athletes' physical and mental health but also undermines the fundamental purpose of sports as a vehicle for holistic character development.

3. How "Dialogue" Is Possible: The Triple Mechanism of Rule-based Education If physical confrontation is the inevitable "contestation" in basketball, then the mission of rule-based education is to foster "dialogue"—a form of physical ethical communication centered on mutual recognition and respect—within such contests. Education does not aim to eliminate conflict but rather elevate it from zero-sum physical confrontation to a rule-mediated ethical interaction

3.1 Temporal Discipline: Internalization of Rules in Rhythm Control

Basketball is inherently a highly time-sensitive structural system. Rules such as the NBA's 24-second offensive clock, FIBA's 14-second offensive reset, the 3-second zone stay limit, and the 8-second half-court rule collectively form a sophisticated temporal framework. In college basketball instruction, these time markers serve not only as the basis for tactical execution but also as a crucial platform for cultivating students' rule awareness.

The ideological and political education practice at Northwest A&F University serves as a prime example. The university's Sports Department uses the "Basketball Time Violation Rules" as a starting point, extending students' awareness of punctuality in daily life to the 3-second, 5-second, 8-second, and 24-second time limits on the court. This approach seamlessly integrates time management with rule consciousness, allowing students to deepen their understanding of the principle that "no order without rules" through dual experiences of playing matches and officiating internships during regular drills. By incorporating time regulations into the curriculum, students undergo a profound moral transformation: mastering tactical coordination before the 24-second clock expires equips them with an understanding that actions are bound not only by spatial boundaries but also by temporal constraints. As this time discipline extends from the sports arena to everyday life, their sense of rule adherence evolves from external enforcement to intrinsic self-discipline—a true internalization of ethical principles.

Another aspect of time's educational influence manifests in the "cool-down period" following a foul. Penalties such as technical fouls, physical fouls, or disqualification actually provide players with a mandatory space for reflection. It is precisely during this enforced "pause" that emotions subside and moral self-examination begins. Simultaneously, the abstract provisions in the rulebook are transformed into concrete, tangible experiences: an elbow strike results not in a free throw but in being ejected for several quarters; a malicious foul costs not only disqualification from the current game but also months—or even an entire career's competitive prospects. This direct correlation proves far more effective than moral preaching.

3.2 Role Empowerment: Moral Education of Students as "Field Judges"

If rule-based education remains merely at the level of passive compliance, students will always be recipients of rules rather than their masters. Only through role transformation—when students acquire the ability to adjudicate, critique, and enforce rules—can education achieve a qualitative leap. Assigning students to referee roles serves as a crucial pathway for internalizing these rules. The Basketball Association of Tianjin University of Commerce trains student referees by integrating theory with practical on-court experience, emphasizing that "the whistle signifies a commitment." By serving as "court referees" during actual games, students hone their calm judgment skills in officiating decisions, transforming the value of "justice" from verbal understanding into behavioral practice.

From a social psychology perspective, this role transition holds profound significance. When student-athletes assume the role of referees, they must make independent moral judgments about the opposing teams' conduct, rather than acting solely based on their own interests or emotions. This "empathetic experience" transcends the cognitive limitations inherent to the player's perspective, transforming the rules from a "tool to protect against infringement"

into a "public contract safeguarding the rights of all participants."

More importantly, student referees gain firsthand exposure to understanding "moral authority" and "emotional regulation" in the classroom while addressing penalty disputes and handling violent conflicts in practice. This mirrors the profound metaphor of the intense debate among NBA officials, coaches, and players surrounding the Campobello Palace incident: while violence must be punished, establishing rules-based moral authority is essential to strike a genuine balance between "emotional intensity" and "professional ethics." The transferable implication of this governance logic for university physical education is that rule education should not only teach students "what not to foul," but also guide them to comprehend "why they must refrain from fouling."

3.3 Moral Reasoning: Exploring Ethical Boundaries in Case-Based Teaching

From emotional impetus to character transformation, the final stage of rule-based moral education requires conducting ethical reasoning within specific contexts. While daily training repeatedly emphasizes that "malicious fouls must be avoided," during critical match moments, such principles may still be undermined by the desire for victory. Therefore, college basketball instruction should incorporate case-based ethical reasoning sessions—analyzing moments of excessive aggression during games, examining motivations, and clarifying boundaries. As some institutions have implemented situational teaching methods in basketball courses, simulating real-game scenarios allows students to experience the importance of rules firsthand. Students are then guided to engage in in-depth discussions about ethical issues and team conflicts during matches, fostering the development of sound values and moral principles.

In high-level competitive settings, players are not faced with an absolute binary choice between "compliance with rules" and "committing fouls," but rather often encounter ethical dilemmas in "gray areas": When a confrontational action falls between rule-permissible and rule-prohibited, how should fairness and practical considerations be balanced? When the opponent employs marginalized, unethical conduct, should one respond with violence or through "dialogue"? The discussion of these issues itself serves as an exercise in moral cognition—by presenting concrete conflict scenarios, it prompts students to reflect on the true meaning of "fair competition."

Universities have already made explorations in this area. Research indicates that in current college basketball instruction, the cultivation of fair competition principles faces significant challenges in the teaching objective framework, faculty collaboration, and evaluation mechanisms. It is essential to integrate rule awareness into the training process at the cognitive level, continuously narrowing the gap between rule understanding and actual on-court behavior. As this ethical reasoning deepens, students can maintain clear moral judgment during intense competition—reining in retaliatory impulses when provoked by opponents, appealing through proper channels when facing referee errors, and upholding sports ethics even before securing victory.

4. The Final Goal of Education: From Physical Conflict to Ethical Dialogue

When the three mechanisms of rule-based education—time discipline, role empowerment, and moral reasoning—work synergistically, the inherently tense physical confrontations in college basketball transform into a profound ethical dialogue through collective understanding. The physical interactions among students on the court are no longer mere physical contests or emotional outlets, but rather mutual recognition mediated by the rules. Every legitimate defensive positioning, every clean and decisive block, and every well-timed tactical foul carries a silent declaration: "I acknowledge your right to compete; I am willing to engage with you under the shared rules." This precisely embodies the essence of the sports spirit—learning collaboration through confrontation, understanding boundaries through conflict, and cultivating character through physical interaction.

Therefore, the educational objective of college basketball should not be to cultivate students into cold "competitive machines," but rather to guide them to become ethically conscious sports participants in confrontational settings. The ultimate goal of education is not to achieve an idealized state of "zero conflict" —since basketball conflicts can never be eliminated nor should they be—but rather to build a bridge between the passion ignited by

physical contact and the rationality of rules. From a corrective paradigm perspective, some scholars advocate implementing "high-quality, non-judgmental" basketball instruction that encourages reasonable physical interaction among players. The college basketball teaching process should also be grounded in a comprehensive assessment of students' basketball abilities, promoting the full realization of physical potential within clearly defined legal boundaries. Only through this approach can we nurture competitive participants who genuinely understand the essence of the sport.

5. Conclusion

Physical conflicts in college basketball instruction are not merely negative sporting phenomena, but rather a complex domain imbued with profound ethical and educational implications. From the perspective of sports humanities sociology, this paper argues that "contradiction" and "dialogue" are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather achieve dialectical unity through systematic rule-based pedagogical practices.

The boundaries of legitimacy in physical confrontations during college basketball are defined by its rules: Within legal parameters, such conflicts embody positive values like courage, determination, and perseverance; however, once these boundaries are crossed, the confrontations transform into athletic violence, deviating from the fundamental purpose of physical education. Through three mechanisms—temporal discipline, role empowerment, and moral reasoning—rule-based education converts confrontational "对抗" into ethical "dialogue," enabling students to evolve from passive compliance to active internalization of moral agency. The primary mission of college basketball is not to eliminate physical conflict, but rather to help students learn dialogue through competition, recognize boundaries through conflict, and cultivate character through physical interaction—making every bodily encounter on the court a micro-ethical classroom. When physical strength and the rationality of rules reconcile through direct confrontation, basketball fulfills its role as a vehicle for holistic character development.

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