

Dating an Athlete

Text Gretchen Schlabach, PhD, ATC

Have you ever been in a situation that gave you a gut feeling it might not be right? Pay attention to your gut. Let it serve as your ethical compass.

Consider the following scenario:

Franci, ATC, LAT, received a graduate assistantship at Lake Michigan University in the Great Ten Athletic Conference and was assigned to football. One night after completing her athletic training duties, Franci and another graduate assistant headed to a popular club. There, Anthony asked Franci to dance, something just clicked, and they began to date. Only after their third date did Franci learn Anthony is the back-up quarterback for the football team she's assigned to cover.

Is it ethical for Franci to date Anthony?

In this case, no. Dating can be construed as professionally unethical. Franci may be in violation of Principle 1 of the NATA Code of Ethics: Members shall respect the rights, welfare and dignity of all.

Respect requires us to honor the Principle of Autonomy or self-determination. Two ethical obligations evolve from this principle, conveyed

in the health care professions in the following ways: 1) the requirement to acknowledge autonomy, and 2) the requirement to protect those with diminished autonomy. These ethical obligations are not only grounded in the Principle of Autonomy, but also wrapped in the fiduciary relationship between the health care provider and the patient/athlete. That relationship is based on trust. At no point should the health care provider betray it for self-interest. It is very important that athletic trainers avoid issues that may be construed as "self-interest" or "conflict of interest."

In Franci's situation, she could be called on to care for not only Anthony but also for players competing for Anthony's position. If she's dating a player, Franci's actions and decisions as a certified athletic trainer may be significantly influenced; she might give Anthony preferential treatment. That's unethical.

Another ethical consideration: The American Medical Association prohibits sexual relations with patients because it may compromise medical care. Since athletic trainers work

under the team physician's license, it could be argued that athletic trainers are an extension of the physician, and therefore, are prohibited to have sexual relations with athletes.

Ethics Resources

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