***Vernonia School District v. Acton* (1995)**

**Issue:** Student Athletes and Drug Testing

**Bottom Line:** Schools Can Require It

**Background**

James Acton, a 12-year-old seventh-grader at Washington Grade School in Vernonia, Oregon, wanted to try out for the football team. His school required all student athletes to take drug tests at the beginning of the season and on a random basis during the school year. James's parents refused to let him be tested because, they said, there was no evidence that he used drugs or alcohol. The school suspended James from sports for the season. He and his parents sued the school district, arguing that mandatory drug testing without suspicion of illegal activity constituted an unreasonable search under the Fourth Amendment.

**Ruling**

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school district. Schools must balance students' right to privacy against the need to make school campuses safe and keep student athletes away from drugs, the Court said. The drug-testing policy, which required students to provide a urine sample, involved only a limited invasion of privacy, according to the Justices: "Students who voluntarily participate in school athletics have reason to expect intrusions upon normal rights and privileges, including privacy."

The Court noted that all students surrender some privacy rights while at school: They must follow school rules and submit to school discipline. But student athletes have even fewer privacy rights, the Justices said, and must follow rules that don't apply to other students. Joining a team usually requires getting a physical exam, obtaining insurance coverage, and maintaining a minimum grade point average. And athletes must be willing to shower and change in locker rooms, further reducing their privacy. "School sports are not for the bashful," the Court said.

**Impact**

More recently, the Court has ruled in favor of school policies requiring random drug testing for all extracurricular activities (*Board of Education v. Earls*, 2002).

Information from: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20080915monday.html>

**Thematic Question:** How does the topic of rights and responsibility relate to this court case?

**Notes:**