

HOW TO...

APPROACH A MEMBER THINKING ABOUT QUITTING

Officiating isn't for everyone. You're going to have individuals who can't cut it on the field and court and give up the avocation. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try to save an officiating career. The right approach could keep that member officiating for another year or many years. Here are a few tips for reaching out to a member who is contemplating an early exit from officiating:

1. Figure out the problem

Don't wait for the member to come to you for help, seek the individual out. Tell the official what you have heard from other members and ask the official if he or she is thinking about leaving officiating and why. There may be a variety of reasons depending on the individual. For newer officials, it sometimes comes down to not being comfortable on the field or court because of sportsmanship issues, lack of training or difficulties with other officials. You need to understand the reason in order to address it.

2. Provide support

Just by listening you are letting the troubled official know you care about any issues. To take it a step further, you should work to provide support for the official through more educational training or by providing a mentor.

3. Improve the environment

Some troubles are caused by outside factors. You can't shield members from every complaining player, coach or fan, but your association can contact leagues to support sportsmanship efforts. If a hostile environment is the cause of a member wanting to call it quits, letting the member know you are working on the issue may help.

4. Ask the member to stay

Let the official know that you want him or her to stay in the officiating ranks. Tell the official how much he or she has improved over the months or years and what a great job the official has done. Psychic income is important and might make the difference between an official staying and going.

5. Keep the door open

After all your efforts, some officials may still quit. Let those officials know that just because they have decided to give up officiating right now doesn't mean they have to leave and never come back. Maybe age will bring with it more confidence or the individual will have more time in the coming years. By providing the invitation, you are opening the door for a return.

+ Spotlight

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assignment secretary who is employed by the Louisiana High School Athletic Association. For ratings, the assignment secretary gets feedback from coaches and uses video.

WEBSITE

The BRAFOA website is located at brafoa.org. The website showcases the group's bylaws, affiliates and suppliers. It also provides special forms for members as well as contact information and news and events. "We have a website to get information to our members and to also pay membership dues," Mayfield said.

RECRUITMENT

The website is also a recruitment tool, but the group goes beyond its site to reach potential officials. "We also use TV and radio to get people interested to become officials by going on morning shows," Mayfield said. He explained that using those media sources is a great way to get the word out about what the group does and let people know how to become an official.

GOALS

While BRAFOA has used some video for training, it wants to use that resource more in the future. "We would like to get more video for officials to be able to review in meetings and on their own," Mayfield said. ■

MICP Q&A

Doctor Statement Required?

By Donald C. Collins

Q: Should our board be concerned when a member who had a very serious heart attack less than two months ago already wants to come back to a full schedule of game assignments? The board is hesitant to do that without knowing his medical limitations. They are not sure if it's OK to ask for a doctor's statement that the member has been cleared to go back to normal physical activity. Is that OK?

A: An officials association walks a very fine line when a member returns from an injury. The association must balance its legal duties to its member officials against its legal duties to provide an acceptable level of officiating to its client schools, teams and leagues.

An association owes no health or fitness duties to its member officials. Therefore, associations have no obligation to make sure that their members are healthy, and associations have no responsibility to make sure that their officials are healthy enough to return from an injury or illness.

Of course, associations always have the contract power to create health and fitness duties toward their members. Associations can always amend their bylaws to require pre-participation physicals, and various other forms of proof of health or fitness.

Assigners can do the same by placing such requirements in their contracts.

The fact that an association can require health and fitness certifications doesn't mean that it's a wise thing to do. Once an association obligates itself to monitor health and fitness, it can become liable for doing so in a negligent manner. There are times when the law frowns upon entities that create duties they otherwise did not have. An association that requires fitness certifications or proof of health following an injury or illness opens the door for members to sue the association — or they make it more likely for members' medical insurance carriers to seek recovery from the association's general liability insurer.

NEW ADVANTAGE

Association Advantage currently has more than 1,000 members. In all, those groups represent more than 100,000 individual officials. We welcome our newest Association Advantage member associations, listed below along with their home cities and contact persons:

California: Pacific Coast Sports, Huntington Beach (Bob Jeske); Menlo-Atherton Little League, Atherton (Grant Bowers)
New York: NYSPHSAA Section 8 Officials, Baldwin (Dennis Cirillo)

Associations that go down the road of certifying health and recovery will eventually face lawsuits alleging that they were negligent in certifying their members' health. They may also face privacy lawsuits where they inadvertently release some medical information. Worse, they may even face lawsuits where they are hyper-vigilant and tell officials that they're not healthy enough to officiate.

In short, associations will face the same types of pressures that schools face when they have to use pre-participation physicals to determine whether their students are sufficiently healthy to play. They'll need storage protocols. They'll need to handle that person who has a conditional clearance that says the official is OK except for some condition. But the condition could require monitoring; worse, it could make the association have to decide whether the condition is inconsistent with officiating. That is probably not a path that most associations or assigners want to venture down.

One may conclude that it's pretty clear that associations should not take any steps to certify officials' health. Indeed, that's probably the safest thing to do and most associations wisely do nothing. Most associations don't require proof of health, and most associations don't require proof of adequate recovery. That seems to work. We have not seen a wave of litigation from injured and ill officials alleging that their associations breached a duty to certify their health.

However, the same associations that owe no duty to certify an official's health do owe a duty to their client schools, teams and leagues to provide competent officials. An association probably has a duty to make sure that it is providing officials who are reasonably competent for the level they're working.

It is reasonable for an association to make sure that its officials can cover the courts and fields of play in the manner expected for the level of play the officials are working. That's part of a standard evaluation of an official's performance. Part of being reasonable here is not so much looking at an official's health, but, rather, looking at whether the official can and does adequately cover the court or field. That isn't so much a health standard as an officiating standard.

Associations evaluate officials all the time, and will be quite comfortable assessing an official's ability to provide court or field coverage. However, it is highly unlikely that associations perform evaluations for the express purpose of seeing whether an injured or ill official has recovered to the point that they can cover the floor or court as well as they did prior to the injury or illness. Absent some association bylaws that provide for such a special evaluation, and a forum in which to conduct it, an association may not be able to legally provide a recovery evaluation. The association's wisest course of action is to continue to use its overall evaluation for an official until the official has established that he or she no longer rates at their pre-injury or pre-illness level.

It is to our credit as an industry that questions about assessing officials' post-injury or post-illness health come up fairly frequently. It also speaks well to our wisdom as an industry that while many associations contemplate certifying health very few associations actually attempt to do so.

Donald C. Collins is the executive director of the San Francisco Section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer. This article is for informational purposes and is not legal advice. ☐

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