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BOARD WORK DOESN'T END IN THE OFFSEASON

By Joe Erwin

Our officials association has a motto, which is “officiating never stops.” This can also be said for running an association. Here are some things your association’s board should do during the offseason to prepare for the next season.

Assessment and Look Back

Before you prepare for next season your board should look back at the previous season and do an assessment of what went right and what went wrong. Did your association accomplish its goals and objectives, or were there shortcomings? Was there grumbling among the members about things they were not happy with, especially lingering problems? An honest assessment of the previous season will allow the leadership to set new goals for the next season and address areas that need to be fixed.

Solicit Member Feedback

One thing our board initiated was member roundtable meetings during the offseason to allow our officials an open forum to discuss issues and concerns, and say what’s on their mind. These roundtable meetings afford everyone the opportunity to address the board and talk about their issues from

the previous season. Association leaders can use these types of meetings as an opportunity to listen to the membership and solicit their feedback on a variety of topics that can be addressed during the offseason. Leaders can’t fix something they don’t know is broken, so solicit feedback from the membership and use it productively.

Offseason Training and Evaluations

The offseason is also the perfect opportunity to provide training and evaluation for your officials. Encourage your members to participate in offseason camps and be prepared to provide evaluations and feedback. Several associations require

[SEE “OFFSEASON” P. 8](#)

PROMOTE PROFESSIONALISM

By Scott Tittington

A few years ago, I was eating lunch at a local pizza joint and in the next booth over were two young men who, based on the lime-green vests they were wearing, worked in construction or surveying or something of that ilk.

Funny thing is, it wasn’t their attire that caught my attention. Instead, it was the words coming out of their mouths. Or, more specifically, one word. These two could not share more than five words of conversation without use of one particular profanity (let’s just say it rhymes with luck). They used it as a noun, a verb, an adjective. You name the particle of speech, they had a way to substitute some variation of this word for it.

Were it not so vulgar, I may have found their ability to completely manipulate the English language in service to one word as impressive.

While I make an effort to not use such language, I am not so prudish to think that such colorful dialogue isn’t prevalent in society. I am a former college and professional athlete. I am a three-sport official. And I am married. So I’m no stranger to the occasional off-color word hurled in my direction.

That said, there is a time and place for all things. I am thankful that restaurant was fairly empty that day so that no one else was in earshot of these two men. If that’s how they want to talk on the construction site, out of public purview, that’s their business. I

would hope that's not standard operating procedure if they are sitting in a meeting with their bosses, or if they themselves are the bosses. In such settings, I would hope that professionalism and proper decorum rule the day.

Such is the case when it comes to officials and how we speak to each other and about each other in the public sphere and during association gatherings. Officials are representatives of the entire avocation for all the world to see. And in that role, we should do everything we can to promote professionalism — not just individually, but on behalf of our association and officiating.

For the same reason that we should not show up at a game wearing blue jeans with holes in them, a T-shirt with a big mustard stain on it or three days of beard stubble, we should be cognizant of the language we use when we are on the officiating clock. There

are more than a few danger zones we would be wise to avoid:

- **Profanity:** You may think dropping an "F" bomb in casual conversation is no big deal. But there is no place for it in professional conversation. Be cognizant of the words you are using. There are literally hundreds of ways to accurately and colorfully express what you are trying to say without having to resort to one of George Carlin's seven dirty words.

- **Stereotyping:** This runs a wide gamut. Association meetings and other times when we are representing the stripes are never the time to joke around about ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexual preference, etc. When your audience is 200 fellow officials, steer clear of the impulse to break out your "Night at the Improv" routine.

- **Sexual harassment:** There is no excuse for officials to behave as though they are part of the good ol' boys club. More women are

officiating than ever before. We need more female officials than ever before. We need to find a way to make them feel welcome, valuable and equal in everything we do. Be aware of sexually charged language — "three-MAN mechanics" for example — and make it clear that when it comes to officiating, the chromosomes don't matter.

Cleaning up how we communicate with one another and around one another delivers the message that we have our act together. It creates respect in our officiating circles, and from those who are on the outside looking in at our avocation. Now, more than ever, it is important that we don't give a fellow official or someone who enters our officiating orbit a reason to write us off solely based on the words that come out of our mouths.

Scott Tittrington is an associate editor at Referee. He officiates high school basketball and football, and umpires college and high school baseball. ■

March 2020. NASO Association Advantage Advisor is published monthly by the National Association of Sports Officials, 2017 Lathrop Ave., Racine, Wis. 53405. Association Advantage is a service affiliate of NASO providing educational services and benefits to local associations of sports officials, their officers and members.

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PAID POSITIONS

By Donald C. Collins

If a group decides to pay a stipend to board members or officers, how should it go about doing that? The answer goes back to the bylaws. An association's bylaws and its legal structure are the key factors in determining how to pay board members and officers.

First, an association must look at its bylaws to see if they have any provisions that bar paying board members. These provisions will generally bar compensation other than reimbursement.

Structure is often the key here. A provision barring compensation to board members is very common in nonprofit bylaws, and a nonprofit officials association could very well have used a

boilerplate set of bylaws with slight modifications. If an association doesn't check, it could violate its own bylaws.

An association doesn't have to be a nonprofit to have bylaw provisions that bar compensation to board members. Some unincorporated associations may have bylaws that bar such

BYLAW BIT

Know and follow your bylaws. A court will side with your bylaws in any dispute brought by an official or board member in your organization.

compensation. One has to check no matter what one's structure is.

Even if the bylaws don't bar compensation to board members, nonprofits seldom provide it. Indeed, compensation that seems excessive may threaten an association's nonprofit status. Unincorporated associations do not have this problem. However, the economics of associations may place severe practical limitations on any association's ability to provide more than a minimal amount of compensation to board members.

The restrictions on paying board members generally don't apply to officers. Of course, it is possible for bylaws to bar payment to officers, so an association still has to check its bylaws. However, it is much more common for officers to be paid as officers do the daily work of cutting checks, managing funds, conducting business and assigning — in those associations that put the assigner on the board.

Fortunately, the law distinguishes compensation from reimbursement. It is likely that most associations that want to pay their board members probably are not seeking to enrich the board members. They probably just want to make sure that they don't lose money for driving to board meetings, getting food and maybe staying at a hotel in associations that cover a wide territory.

Associations can resolve a lot of problems by reimbursing board members. Reimbursements don't have to be reported for tax purposes where they are backed up by receipts and a reimbursement procedure. However, associations that simply issue a flat stipend such as a flat meal allowance or a nominal stipend for attending a meeting will have to report to the IRS. The devil is in the details, and it would be wise to have your accountant tell you how to handle receipts and develop a proper reimbursement plan.

If your group chooses to pay compensation, it will have to address independent contractor/employee issues. As a general rule, board members will be independent contractors when they are receiving a stipend for board meetings and work. The law pretty much compels independent contractor treatment.

An employer has the right to control the means by which an employee works. An employer does not have such a right with an independent contractor. Independent contractors are hired to do the job and are free to do it in the means that they deem best. Board members cannot by definition have the means of their work controlled by a company; after all, the collective board controls the company. Board members are independent contractors. Officers are different.

An officer doing the daily work of an association is an employee. The association has every right to control the means by which treasurers cut checks and report on finances. The association has every right to tell presidents and assigners the parameters of their daily work. These are employees. They are to be treated as such.

Associations must remember that bylaws are still the key when paying board members or officers. However, nonprofits have limits that an unincorporated association or a for-profit association won't always confront. Once you decide to pay, consult an accountant and remember that board members are generally independent contractors while officers will generally be employees.

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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THE PULSE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION NEWS NATIONWIDE

Committee Awards Scholarships

The Snohomish County (Wash.) Football Officials Hall of Fame Committee awarded a total of \$15,000 in scholarships to five high school football players Dec. 4 at its annual Scholar Athlete Banquet. The following recipients received the \$3,000 scholarships: Joe Gonzales of Lake Stevens, Kobe Balora of South Whidbey, Spencer Coomer of Cedarcrest, Kirahy Meyers of Arlington and Garrett Devereux of Marysville Getchell. They were among 51 seniors nominated and were selected based on their citizenship, leadership, academic performance and athletic achievement.

IVVOA Recognizes Schools for Excellent Sportsmanship

The Illinois Valley Volleyball Officials Association (IVVOA), of Mendota, Ill., presented its 2019 IHSA sportsmanship banners to Ottawa Marquette Academy and Newark High School.

"Not only are these two schools excellent volleyball programs including the back-to-back state champion Lady Norsemen, they are excellent examples of sportsmanship and how to sport a winning attitude," said Holli Rapp, IVVOA public affairs officer.

The IVVOA has been an association for the past 20 years and annually selects one junior high and high school program to receive the award.

Association Adds 13 to the Ranks

The River Cities Basketball Officials Association (RCBOA) in Huntington, W.Va., had a major increase in new officials for the 2019-20 season, adding 13 new officials. The rookie officials finished a 39-hour course of instruction on Nov. 13 to be able to work games in Ohio and West Virginia.

RCBOA instructor Lou Peake, a 40-year veteran of officiating, said he was thrilled with the number and quality of rookies. "This is the largest class we've had in years," Peake said. "These individuals are coming in at a time when our ranks were low and we need officials."

SOURCES: HERALD.NET, THE TIMES (OTTAWA, ILL.), THE HERALD-DISPATCH (HUNTINGTON, W.VA.)

SAFOA FOCUSES ON RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The San Angelo Football Officials Association (SAFOA), which has approximately 70 members who are registered with the Texas Association of Sports Officials, understands the need for more officials throughout the country and right at home in its chapter.

Angelo State University is one of the main focuses of its recruitment efforts.

"We successfully recruit students from our local university who have participated in high school athletics and wish to remain active in sports," said Bradley Petty, SAFOA secretary. "Many of our experienced officials are beginning to retire, so the chapter board's emphasis has been to visit with local coaches to secure names of their student-athletes who plan to attend the local university, as well as local professionals who are interested in athletics. Several board members are employed by the university, so we use a concerted effort to individually meet the identified students and encourage them and their friends to join. The local professionals who express interest are visited, and

chapter information is shared with them as well."

SAFOA reduces chapter dues for new members and works hard to educate its novice officials to make them feel comfortable. The group holds an on-the-field clinic where officials are divided into groups and rotate through several teaching stations. After that, the new officials are assigned collectively at scrimmages with several clinicians, who work individually with each official at several positions. The training for all SAFOA members continues during weekly sessions throughout the season.

"The San Angelo Football Officials Association have been extremely welcoming and very focused on providing training and mentorship," said first-year member Felicia Teeter. "This first year has been going even better than I expected. We have weekly training meetings. The new members come about 30 minutes early and they have tailored topics for us or just an open forum in a very relaxed setting for us to bring up anything and everything we have questions about. Even when everyone

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California: Athletic Referee Community, Gilroy (Anthony Ortega)

Colorado: Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Officials, Denver (Arnold Archuleta)

Pennsylvania: Eastern Pennsylvania and District Intercollegiate Soccer Officials Association, West Chester (Dan Rudloff)

Michigan: College Stunt Officials Association, Allen Park (Marissa Cox)

Military Fleet: Atsugi Athletic Officials Association (Patrick White)

New Hampshire: Equine Sports Council, Hampton Falls (Shane Darnell)

New York: Metropolitan and Long Island Ice Hockey Officials, Mineola (Matt Kreinces)



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HOW TO ...

FIND THE RIGHT MEMBERS TO RUN FOR OFFICE

The right candidates for your officials association board don't always just volunteer to run for election. If it were that easy, associations wouldn't need nominating committees. So, how do you find the right members to run for office? There are several qualities you should be looking for right away.

They must be reliable.

Leaders set a good example. They are prepared for training meetings and start them on time every time. Members worthy of moving up to a board role should have the same priorities. They should show up to meetings on time and be ready to listen, participating when called upon to do so.

Top candidates will be available.

You want committed candidates who will make time for association business. Some officials spread themselves so thin that you know anything they add to their plate will turn into forgotten leftovers. Your association work won't get first priority or any priority. You want members running for election who have the time (or can make time) for the office they are elected to serve.

Likability is important.

Reliability and availability only go so far. If the members you find to run for office aren't liked, they likely won't be elected. A friendly personality is an important quality for any candidate. Look for members who care about officiating, their fellow officials and the association. They will work hard to make a positive difference for the things they care about.

Look for the movers and shakers.

You want people of influence leading your association. Look for individuals who have had business and officiating successes. No, the members don't have to be college officials or state tournament regulars, but they should know how to conduct themselves professionally. You want your group to be successful, so putting members who are successful in their endeavors in positions of leadership makes sense.

else shows up, we are highly encouraged to ask questions and provide feedback.”

For one of the meetings in 2019, officials from the group attended a local junior high game to observe fellow members officiating.

“We gathered in the stands, away from the crowd, and provided feedback to our members who were observing the game situations that occurred,” Petty said. “We utilized our field radios for discrete communication to the group observing. The feedback was positive as the members were able to receive immediate, visual assessment of live plays with group discussion, which was more effective than diagramming scenarios in a classroom setting.”

As part of its outreach and retention efforts, SAFOA also provides the Dr. Tony Dutton Student Officials' Scholarship, named after the chapter's veteran clinician who is a retired faculty member at Angelo State University. Students enrolled at Angelo State University or Howard College who are members in good standing with the SAFOA

are eligible to apply. Selection criteria includes availability, game performance and academic success.

SAFOA understands that outreach to its younger members is critical to the success of its organization, so it plans to continue to make that a priority.

“We have a very young chapter, so our focus is on mentoring and evaluation,” Petty said. “As previously mentioned, many of our board members are employed by the local university as faculty, recreational professionals and within student affairs, so students feel comfortable visiting with them regularly regarding play scenarios and rules and mechanics questions. These board members are superior instructors, who meticulously assess performance and provide recommendations for enhancement.

“We have learned that officials listen and apply feedback more effectively once they determine how much you concentrate on their well-being and performance.”

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Straight Talk: Al Fuller

PROGRAMS HELP NEW OFFICIALS

States across the country are dealing with a shortage of officials. New York is not immune. However, the Western New York Chapter of Officials (WNYCFO) is not sitting idly by and letting the issue manifest.



Have you seen an increase in recruitment and retention because of those programs?

FULLER: Recruitment is still a problem because of the nature of it. They are not willing to put everything in we put in the game. We have gotten bigger classes. We have 15-20 guys on average that come to classes and pass the exam. Unfortunately, through the first season we probably lose half. We probably in the first year have 14, second year, eight guys, the third year we only have three to four who are ready to move to full-time status. It's two-fold – there's a lot of meetings and stuff you have to attend, you don't just walk on the field on Friday night. I think it's a combination of that and they don't take criticism very well.

Instead, the group has developed two programs to help recruit and retain officials and prepare them for working high school football games. The Mentor program aims to assist new members during the process of becoming a productive member of the organization. The Facilitator program focuses on first-year associates and their efforts to acclimate into the group.

Al Fuller, the sergeant at arms for the WNYCFO and the chair of both of the programs, answered a few questions about the programs:

How did the Mentor and Facilitator programs come about?

FULLER: The idea is to help the younger officials get acclimated to the game and spread the wealth of information from the organization.

What do those programs entail?

FULLER: Basically, we hook up a veteran official with a younger official from the time they become candidates. They progress from candidate to 1st year associate, to 2nd year associate, then 3rd year associate. The idea is the inception helps them with fingerprinting and uniforms and all they have to do. We ask that the younger official attends mentor games over the season. There is an observation report they fill out that lists the crew, what did you see that made sense, see that didn't make sense. They submit it and it's reviewed. We keep guys hooked up for two years. We want some diversity so every two years we switch them out and give them someone else, so they get a different look.

What impacts have you seen on members who mentor?

FULLER: They really take pride in it. ... We have split crews, three guys who work together – and they feed fourth and fifth guys into us and sometimes it is the newer guys. If they're a weak link, the whole crew is a weak link. The mentors put every effort into it as it strengthens it. If we can help strengthen our crews, that's what it's all about.

How long have you overseen the programs and what has been the impact?

FULLER: At least six years. We have under 100 approved officials. Our officials are maxed out and we bring in some of these associates to work and they've done a phenomenal job. A guy who wants to put his heart and soul into it, they can move up pretty fast. A guy that is willing to learn, ask questions and take constructive criticism, those are guys that shoot to the top. ■

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OFFSEASON (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)

newer officials to attend these training camps and associations use them to evaluate their officials. It sends a clear message to the members that officiating never stops, so use the offseason to help those officials who want to get better and improve their skill set.

Fix What's Broken

It's incumbent upon the board to be realistic and identify things that need fixing before they become larger problems. Whether it's issues regarding pay, training, evaluations, scheduling or something else, use the offseason to select the items to fix. The board should identify significant problems that impact the association and then come up with an action plan and timetable to implement the fix. Identify key stakeholders who will be responsible for implementing

the changes and hold them accountable. During preseason meetings, be sure to communicate to the membership what the board did during the offseason to address and fix problems.

Get Committees in Place

Use the offseason to get your association's committees in place by identifying members who can fill key positions. Identify those individuals who want to get involved and afford them the opportunity to participate by joining a committee. Doing so will allow your association to hit the ground running when the season starts.

Revise Policies and Procedures

Another thing your board can do is revise existing policies and procedures. Whether it's bylaw changes or operational procedures, use this time to make

the necessary changes. Things change over time, and policies and procedures that may have worked years ago may now be antiquated or no longer applicable. If these changes require a vote by the membership, announce the upcoming vote and provide the proposed changes well in advance to allow time for member feedback and questions. The offseason is the perfect time for the board to review your association's policies and make revisions as appropriate.

Stay engaged and focused during the offseason, because running an association never stops.

Joe Erwin is president of the East Coast Basketball Officials Association in Palm Beach County, Fla. He is a two-time Official of the Year recipient for basketball in Florida and has officiated nine state finals. ■

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