

Winning the Sportsmanship Battle

By Donald C. Collins

The sports world has gotten ugly in the past 10 years. The increase in unsportsmanlike conduct has led to a new focus on sportsmanship by sports governing bodies and officials associations should take note.

In the past, sports governing bodies primarily wrote rules to address sportsmanship problems. Recently, we have all seen unsportsmanlike attitudes

that transcend the parameters of conduct rules. While sports officials have done an excellent job of enforcing conduct rules, the enforcement of rules alone does not create a sportsmanlike environment.

Sports governing bodies are now struggling with the problem of creating an atmosphere in which sportsmanship can be defined, rewarded and become a normal part of the sports culture. To succeed, everyone in the sports world must have a clear idea of what is and what isn't proper behavior. Dr. Shari Young Kuchenbecker, a research psychologist and author of *Raising Winners*, says, "Unless you have some very clear guidelines in your mind as to what behavior is appropriate, some very inappropriate behavior is justified." Kuchenbecker points out that if governing bodies don't define standards of behavior and prepare parents and coaches to implement them, "they'll feel the negative effects of adrenaline."

Sports governing bodies will have to work as partners with officials and officials associations in order to fully succeed in creating a sportsmanlike atmosphere. Governing bodies are just beginning to move in the right direction. For example, the NCAA does not currently involve officials in its sportsmanship efforts, but it does intend to work with officials groups in the future. Even groups that have a history of working well and closely with officials have some room for improvement. The California Interscholastic Federation (CIF), for example, has not fully developed statistical information on sportsmanship problems even though it works closely with officials and officials associations and is one of the country's leading groups in advocating sportsmanship.

Sports officials associations must continue their traditional roles: teaching members the conduct rules; reviewing casebook and play situations; teaching the intent behind conduct rules; teaching mechanics used in implementing the conduct rules; applying standards of professionalism to the enforcement of

conduct rules; and evaluating member officials.

Mike Gutierrez, the California high school basketball rules interpreter, points out that officials associations can supplement their traditional role by taking some steps to be more interactive with coaches, administrators and sports governing bodies. Some of those steps are:

- Have association leaders hold individual meetings with every school's coach and athletic director to review expectations — this is a chance to do more than can be done in reviewing rules with coaches. Howard Mayo, the commissioner of the Portland Basketball Officials Association and the Oregon state basketball rules interpreter, says that has been most helpful in Portland. It is an extra, but significant step for an association to take, and gives an association the opportunity to stress sportsmanship expectations as well as a school's administrative responsibilities toward officials.

- Have game officials complete a sportsmanship card, grading a school on sportsmanship. That practice is used in a number of places. According to Mayo, the Portland public schools keep a running tally on all sports throughout the year and give recognition and awards to the most sportsmanlike schools and programs. It should also be noted that the grading system has worked at the recreational level in some cities. If the sportsmanship tally is combined with incident reports and sent to state and regional governing bodies along with data from incident reports, groups like the NCAA or state high school governing bodies would have easier access to statistical data on sportsmanship. That is the type of idea an association can propose to a league or a governing body that seems receptive.

- Many, if not most, state governing bodies require the suspension of individuals who are ejected from a contest. Few appear to extend that to program penalties, imposing a sanction on schools which show a pattern of

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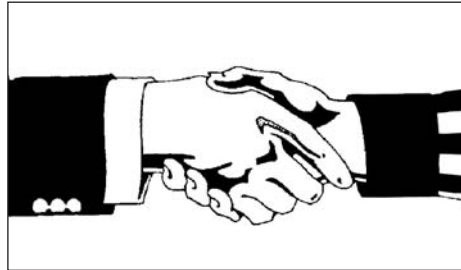
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misconduct or ejections. Again, that is a situation where associations can work with leagues and governing bodies to fashion an appropriate remedy. The Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) is one group that uses program penalties. The OSAA will fine a school if a sports team has more than one ejection per season. Each additional ejection brings a new fine. When poor sportsmanship affects a school's bottom line, the school has the incentive to clean up its act.

- Associations don't have much access to parents and fans, but having a Q & A session with them allows association administrators to let them know that there are sportsmanship expectations from fans and that officials have unique safety concerns. It also humanizes officials who answer parents' and fans' questions. Mayo points out that his Portland association blends Q & A sessions and scrimmages, killing two

birds with one stone.

- Creating situations where players officiate lets players gain some exposure to what officials do, and helps in the sportsmanship battles. In some states,



schools provide players to regularly officiate youth games. Associations can benefit if they work with schools to structure student officiating programs.

- Finally, officials should have some exposure to basic sports psychology. Dr. Ronald Kamm, a New Jersey sports psychiatrist and the vice president of

the International Society for Sports Psychiatry, points out that there are proven risk factors to be aware of. Kamm notes that among the risk factors are, "When there's a perceived threat by the opponent. If the expected retaliation is not going to be too severe. If there's a large point differential, violence tends to break out." Kamm also notes that being at home and being near the end of a contest increases participants' and fans' tendencies to be violent.

Those are just a few of the things which sports governing bodies and officials associations can do to help win the sportsmanship battle. The key is for officials associations to work interactively and as equal partners with schools, leagues and governing bodies. The sportsmanship battle is a battle we must win for our own personal safety and for the well being of sports.

(Donald C. Collins is a lawyer and longtime official from San Francisco.) ■

Online Privacy (Continued from page 1)

used in the privacy policy of the Walt Disney Internet Group, the flagship web company for sports sites such as espn.com:

"WDIG uses personally identifiable information in a limited number of ways. We use the information to complete transactions. For instance, if you purchase a fantasy team on ESPN.com, we use your information to process your order, or if you contact us for help we will use the information to contact you. We use information collected to notify you if you've won a game or contest. Information we collect is used to send you e-mail updates and newsletters about our sites. We also use the information you provide to send you WDIG e-mail promotions and special offers from our third-party sponsors."

It also is important that your policy specify a contact for your association — including name, address, phone, fax and e-mail address — should anyone have any questions regarding the privacy policy.

Kids. There aren't that many out

there, but if you have a young teenager working games in your association — perhaps even as part of a referee training program, you must be sure not to disclose any identifying information about the young man or young woman. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 prohibits disclosure, under certain circumstances, of any "identifiable information" — such as name, address, phone number and e-mail address — collected about pre-teen boys or girls. If you have a few of these future big league officials working in your association, check out the federal law — accessible at www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm — before posting their names and contact information on your association's website address book.

Law enforcement officers. Many states prohibit Internet sites — just like any publisher of personal information — from disclosing identifying information on law enforcement officers, such as police or corrections officials. It is a prohibition that makes sense: The

police would rather not have a criminal showing up at his or her front door. If one of your members happens to be a cop during the day and a referee at night, check your state law for specific requirements on disclosure of that information.

For more information on online privacy, check out Trust-e, accessible at www.truste.org, an independent, non-profit privacy initiative that has developed a third-party oversight program that examines companies' online privacy concerns. Other useful organizations include the Electronic Privacy Information Center, accessible at www.epic.org. And, of course, as with every issue that has legal implications, be sure to consult your association's attorney for advice and assistance.

(Ted Curtis is an attorney and journalist in south Florida. He is a frequent contributor to NASO publications. This article is provided only for general informational purposes and is not legal advice. If legal advice is required, a competent professional should be retained.) ■