

THE PULSE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION NEWS NATIONWIDE

South Texas Sets Mentoring Example

The South Texas Soccer Referees (STSR) organization is setting an example for the entire officiating industry with a new mentoring policy. In order to address the referee shortage and promote new referees to stick with officiating, the U.S. Soccer affiliated organization recognizes that active referees advancing in their own careers can have an incredible impact on the positive experiences of new, young referees. Therefore, in order to become certified or recertify as a state referee (level 5 or 6), all officials will have to submit documentation of the mentoring they have done with young officials. STSR expects this to be a positive experience for both the mentors and mentees, and it will give the newest officials some role models to look up to and to be in contact with for advice.

CFL Commissioner Honored by Officials Association

Ontario Football Officials Association, an umbrella group for a number of officials associations in Ontario, had a special guest at its annual golf tournament in August at the Burlington Springs Golf Club.

New Canadian Football League commissioner Randy Ambrosie, an Oakville resident, was in attendance and was recognized with an honorary membership to the Burlington-based Lakeshore Football Officials Association.

A Winnipeg native, Ambrosie was a CFL offensive guard for the Calgary Stampeders, Toronto Argonauts and the Edmonton Eskimos, winning a Grey Cup with the Eskimos in 1993.

Nemi Inducted Into Lockport Umpires Association Hall of Fame

Tony Nemi of Lockport, N.Y., was honored recently for his 40 years of umpiring with his induction into the Lockport Umpires Association Hall of Fame at the annual banquet on Sept. 9. He was inducted by his brother, David Nemi, the head baseball coach of Niagara County Community College for almost two decades. Tony Nemi is currently retired from umpiring and serves as a Niagara County legislator.

SOURCES: BURLINGTON (ONTARIO) POST, LOCKPORT UNION-SUN & JOURNAL

YOU'RE BEING SUED; NOW WHAT?

By Donald C. Collins

You're being sued. You officiated a game and somebody got injured or just didn't like one of your game decisions. Now, you're about to spend some time in the legal system and you're wondering what to do. But if you waited to be sued, you're already too late.

Officials can't afford to wait for the lawsuit. Officials have to spend their entire career preparing for the lawsuit — but hoping it never comes. Here are some simple steps you can take prior to game day, on game day, and once the lawsuit is filed.

BEFORE THE GAME

Insurance

Officials need to purchase good insurance the moment they start officiating. This is easy for NASO member officials. Unfortunately, it's not always easy for youth league officials. Local high school officials associations can help by maintaining good ties with local youth leagues, allowing them to educate youth league administrators and youth league officials. The ties with youth leagues will also have some recruitment benefits.

Certification

Officials must pass their required certifications. Officials should not rely upon waivers or exemptions as the official's case will be weakened when an opposing attorney highlights that the official did not meet minimal standards. Officials must also be able to prove that they met certification requirements. In some places, the official will need to save his or her certification records rather than rely upon an officials association or a state governing body to do it for the official.

Extra training

Officials should attend camps, clinics and training sessions even if they're not required for certification. This can be vital in sports when an official may be called upon to work in unfamiliar positions or officiate events that they don't normally work. A skilled attorney can make a compelling case that an official lacks the necessary training and experience if the official works out of position and can't show that he or she trains in a multitude of positions and has an overall expertise in many aspects of his or her sport.

Concussion training

An official should maintain independent concussion certification or maintain proof that he or she has taken periodic courses in recognizing signs or symptoms of concussions. The rules require officials to remove athletes who show signs or symptoms of concussions, but most rules tests don't address concussion removal. It is incumbent upon officials and officials associations to self-educate on this.

Develop a good reputation

The last thing you want to do is to be in a legal proceeding and have the opposing attorney demonstrate that you've done a lot of unprofessional things. Remember, opposing attorneys can attack your credibility and they can do it well before you enter court through time-consuming depositions, and numerous questions in what attorneys call the discovery process. The best way to prevent yourself from being a weak witness or defendant is to be professional at all times so that you have a solid professional reputation.

SEE "BEING SUED" P. 6

HOW TO...

SUPPORT A STRUGGLING MEMBER

There are many reasons officials leave the avocation. Sometimes newer officials just never feel comfortable out on the field or court. Associations need to learn how to support first- and second-year officials. When the job gets tough, newer officials need to have a person within the group to turn to or they'll head for the door.

Make sure meetings are worthwhile.

While you have to make sure your meetings are challenging enough for veteran officials, you also have to make sure you're not losing the interest of newbies because the material is too far over their heads. Some associations split their meetings and present different material to officials, depending on their experience level.

Assign a mentor official.

Ideally your association has a mentor program in which newer officials are formally assigned to veterans. Even if you don't have a program, it's a good idea to ask a veteran official if he or she will take a new official under his or her wing, especially if the official is struggling. That way the new official has someone specific to turn to during meetings or after tough games.

Make yourself available.

In addition to matching an official with a veteran, leaders should take the time to get to know new officials and let them know you are always available to talk if a problem arises or if the official needs guidance. Without the invitation, a struggling official may be afraid to bother you.

Go to a newer official's game.

If you have a free night or you know one of your newer officials is working the game before your game, make the effort to attend the official's game. Afterward, take time to praise the official for what he or she does well and offer helpful hints.

BEING SUED (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

ON GAME DAY

Safety checks

Officials should make sure to inspect facilities, do all required safety checks, and give all required safety instructions. In sports that lend themselves to a written facilities inspection checklist and written safety instructions, an official should feel free to use the written documents.

Reports and file notes

Officials need to know how to write game reports. Leagues and governing bodies need good game reports to support a number of league administrative actions. These actions can, on occasion, lead to litigation against either the league, the official or both. A poorly written report can leave the league and the official vulnerable to an opposing attorney's attack on the official's integrity and credibility.

The standard rule is to tell the official to just write the facts like the old *Dragnet* TV show. A more precise instruction is to tell the official to provide a recitation of the things that occurred in the game that led to the actions the official took combined with a precise statement of what actions the official took.

Officials must also write reports when a player is injured. But these reports are different. Officials need to take file notes where a player is injured. Officials should not share those file notes with leagues and governing bodies. Officials can give leagues and governing bodies a confirmation report regarding how the player was hurt if required, but officials should be hesitant to provide detailed file notes regarding injuries because the league and governing body are not basing an administrative action on the official's ruling. The official and the league don't have quite the same legal interest.

Storage of file notes

As a general rule, officials should store their file notes until the youngest player in the game reaches the age of 21. Officials should consult with their insurer or local counsel to know how long documents should be stored in their state as the age of majority and statutes of limitations can vary from state to state.

Clearly, I am suggesting that officials store their notes for quite some time when officials work a youth or even a high school game. The reason for such a lengthy storage period is that minors can void out their parents' decision to not sue once the minor becomes an adult.

ONCE THE LAWSUIT IS FILED

Officials should contact their insurance company the moment they're sued. The insurer can advise the official and help provide legal counsel. At this point, the official is in the hands of his attorney. However, the attorney's hand will be stronger if the official did the right things prior to being sued.

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.

BYLAW BIT

If you have a dispute to settle, go to your bylaws. Since bylaws are impersonal, they take emotions out of the day-to-day operations of the group by setting the most important rules down in writing.