

# Report Electronic Threats

By Donald C. Collins

**Q** After I ejected a coach during a grade school game, he refused to leave, so I had the game administrator call the non-emergency police. The coach eventually left, the game continued and there was no further incident until the next day. The coach acquired my e-mail address and sent me a threatening e-mail. How should I respond?

**A** An official who is threatened by a coach needs to report the threat immediately. The report should go to the league or governing body that oversees the coach's school. However, many leagues only have supervisory authority during league competition. As it is vital to report the threat to someone who can deal with it, the official may need to copy the head of the coach's school. Finally, the official should inform his assigner.

The official's report should be fact based. Characterizations of the coach are neither professional nor helpful. The key to the report is simple: A coach obtained your e-mail address and sent you a threatening e-mail. The official can directly quote the threatening language in the report, and then offer to make the e-mail available.

The report should not discuss

anything other than the threat. Doing so creates distractions that can be used to switch the focus from the coach's conduct to the official's actions. It is not important to defend your calls or show that the coach is a hothead. Those things could lead to discussions on matters that have nothing to do with the coach tracking you down and threatening you. Keep the focus on the coach's inappropriate conduct.

Follow up is vital. Hopefully, your association will take the lead. Schools may not look kindly upon employees threatening people, but there is no guarantee a school will issue a sanction that will be a strong disincentive in the future, and grade school leagues could be under constraints you don't know about. Your association can support you in making sure that the school/league takes strong action. Pressuring schools is never pleasant. Your aim is to make sure you and other officials can safely be in the coach's presence, and that the coach has been deterred from repeating the offense.

The official may also wish to notify the police of the threat. After all, making a threat against somebody is a crime by law. Notifying the police of the threat may bring even more pressure against the offending coach. There is stigma attached to being the subject of a police report, especially

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when the report comes to the attention of the coach's school and league. The police report may give the school and league a welcome push or offer them support for any strong steps they take.

Officials should note that a coach is ultimately not likely to be prosecuted for threatening an official. Heated comments pertaining to sports don't tend to result in criminal charges. Also, while it is true that making a threat against somebody is a crime, the threat usually has to be imminent. The combination of sports being perceived as a unique environment, and sports-related comments not generally spilling over into non-sports forums will likely lead the coach to escape prosecution for a general statement such as, "I'll kick your butt," "You'll never ref in this town again" or "My fans will make your life unpleasant." Of course, a coach could be prosecuted if he made a very specific threat or has shown violent inclinations in the past.

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