

When a Fan's Comments Go Too Far

The following question was asked during the "Current Legal Issues: Your Questions Answered" session at the 2009 NASO Summit. The answers are from session leaders Alan Goldberger, New Jersey lawyer and official who wrote the book Sports Officiating: A Legal Guide, and Don Collins, an NASO board member, lawyer and executive director of the San Francisco section of the California Interscholastic Federation.

Q I've been in a game before where a fan yelled out from the crowd that I should go home and cook my husband dinner. That I can handle, but what I'm seeing more of and have had to on occasion deal with is a racial or minority slur from fans and sometimes even coaches. How should an official handle that? Is there a process or procedure to follow?

A Alan Goldberger: You covered racial and ethnic slurs from spectators and from coaches, so you have two distinct situations. The number-one most important answer to your question, and the best guidance for all of us is, if you have someone who is disrupting your game or presenting a danger to the venue, then you treat it

like you treat any other similarly placed spectator remark where you need to take action. You treat it as something that's disrupting your game, that's your judgment. It's what you do after that that counts.

You never, ever address a spectator directly, particularly a spectator whose I.Q. has not approached double digits, who is the type of person likely to utter such a remark. You get game administration to deal with it. Under no circumstances do you want to have a dialogue with that person.

If the individual is a coach, team member, squad member, headmaster, somebody that you have control over, then you do what you need to do. Those situations obviously sound to me like you're traveling into DQ territory.

So you have two very different responses. That's why you need to know before the game starts who the site manager is and what the security arrangements are — who's in charge of the building — so that you can have somebody else deal with it, but not you, not ever.

Don Collins: I don't know where you work, but if you worked in an office and the UPS person came in and he said, "Hey baby, here's the

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packages," I think at some point you would file some report, just as a basketball official you are going to file a report after you do the things stated by Alan. That report is going to go to the association management as well as to the league. It is contingent upon them to basically make some address of the situation. The reason is as an association leader, you don't wish to subject yourself to a Title 7 suit that you did nothing when you had information about a hostile work environment. So at the end of the day when it crosses your desk as the leader of your association, just make a call to the school and document that you made it, saying we understand your administrator hauled out the racist fan or sexist fan or ageist fan, thank you very much. If nothing was done, say next time let's get an administrator because we can't have someone calling an official "old" and "baby" and all of that. □

Who Will Be the Next Gold Whistle Award Recipient?

The NASO Gold Whistle Award has been called "Officiating's Highest Honor." NASO has been recognizing those who have provided great service to the industry since 1988.

Included on the list of past recipients are some officiating greats you may recognize: Art McNally, Ed Myer, the late Pete Pavia, Larry Barnett, Jim Tunney, Steve Palermo, Ron Asselstine, Ed Hightower, Bernie Saggau, Ted Butcher, the late Durwood Merrill, Tommy Nunez, Tom Dooley, Paul Stewart, Larry Young, Bob Delaney, Bob McElwee, the late John W. Keys, V Foundation,

Jerry Markbreit and Marcy Weston. Mills Lane, former judge and boxing referee, was the 2009 recipient of the Gold Whistle Award.

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How to nominate: Submit the name of the individual or organization, along with a brief biography to the Gold Whistle Award Committee, c/o NASO, 2017 Lathrop Ave., Racine, Wis., 53405. You can also

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Consideration is given for:

- Significant contributions to the betterment of officiating.
- High integrity and ethics.
- Qualities that are held in high regard by the industry.
- Consistent record of presenting officiating in a positive light.
- Public service to officiating, having a motivating effect on others and/or community involvement.
- The award can be made posthumously. □