

Boycott of Game After Coach Isn't Punished

By Donald C. Collins

Q A coach verbally threatened a member of our officials association during a recent basketball game. The coach was ejected, and assistant coaches had to keep the coach from going after our member official. According to the newspaper account, since the coach had a "clean" record of behavior up until that point, the school decided not to reprimand or suspend the coach.

Members of our association would like to boycott officiating games for the abusive coach's team until the school takes disciplinary action against the coach. However, through our assigning service, members are contracted to work the games. What would be the possible consequences for our association or officials assigned to games if we boycott? Is there any other action we can take?

A Officials should get in front of the problem. That's better than waiting for a problem to arise, and then boycotting.

You get in front of problems through your contracts. Officials can use contracts to have schools provide protections, such as secure change areas and escorts to and from those areas. Those protections aren't a safety guarantee — nothing is. However, the existence of the contract inserts the official into the system.

Contracts also empower officials. Officials can demand contract enforcement, and can even legally walk away from the contract if a school or league can't offer adequate assurances that it will comply with the contract. Of course, nobody wants to walk away from their contract — and there could be litigation over whether sufficient

assurances were offered; conflict is not the desired result.

Officials ultimately have to walk a fine line. They're entitled to having someone run interference at a school; they're entitled to a secure changing area; and an escort provides a witness in those situations where the coach does attack.

Ultimately, a contract is better than a boycott. Still, contract or not, there is always the chance that a group of sports officials will want to protest league or school inaction related to discipline or something else. In such a case, structure is everything.

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Officials can easily boycott when they're not part of the contract. That occurs when officials contract with an assigner who holds the contract with the school. At the high school level, those contracts usually make it clear that the official doesn't have to accept every game offered. That out clause means that the officials aren't obligated to make themselves available, and the assigner or school will have to look elsewhere to get officials.

Officials in associations may have a harder time. Generally, those officials are part of a collective that contracted to service the game. When push comes to shove, they may be obligated to work even though they customarily don't take every game offered.

Structure aside, though, there have been a number of boycotts

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