

HOW TO...

PROMOTE FITNESS

Officials associations are known for helping officials train their minds for the game. Sure, officials need to be strong mentally. They need to know the rules better than anyone. But training your body is also important. Associations can play a role in promoting physical fitness for members. After all, in order to make the right call, you have to be in position to see the action. Being physically fit will also help with the way coaches and participants view officials right from the start. What can associations do to help members look the part?

Lead by example

Association leaders need to set an example for members by making sure they are caring for their bodies. If fitness and healthy eating aren't important to leaders (and it shows), it is going to be a tough sell for many members.

Promote healthy living

In addition to providing rules and mechanics articles to members, share fitness articles and tips at membership meetings or on the association website. Make sure you emphasize that before members try any new exercises, they should consult with their doctor.

Teach fitness

Bring in a doctor, nutritionist or athletic trainer to speak at one of your meetings. Offering guidance from an expert could provide the motivation an official needs to kick-start healthier habits.

Challenge members

Offer a fitness challenge that members can participate in. It will allow members to work toward a goal, promote team camaraderie and help members get healthier in a fun way.

Acknowledge accomplishments

If you have noticed that a particular official has lost a lot of weight in the offseason, take the time to praise the official. Positive reinforcement will go a long way in helping a member continue on a healthy path.

Don't Be Liable for a Member's Mistake

By Donald C. Collins

Q: What should associations do or how should they organize in order to make sure they are not held liable for a mistake an official makes during a game that results in a lawsuit?

A: Association leaders must note that officials can be liable for failing to control a game, and associations can be liable for negligent training and negligent assigning. Associations can use their bylaws to reduce their liability risk.

Association bylaws must provide for adequate testing, training and evaluation of officials. Then associations must use their bylaws or their contracts with assigners to link assignments to officials' testing, training, evaluations and overall ratings, and must do so in a manner designed to place officials on games that they can presumably control.

That all sounds fairly easy, but associations don't operate in a laboratory. It is imperative that associations account for their governing bodies' standards in their bylaws or contracts. It would be hard for an association to reduce its liability risk if it doesn't meet the training standards, background check standards or other standards set by its state governing body.

Also, associations can write the greatest bylaws in the world, but if those bylaws don't account for the daily realities of officiating, the association won't be able to meet them. Not meeting one's bylaws greatly increases the likelihood of losing a court case. So, if your association has a shortage of officials, don't write a rigid bylaw or have a rigid assignment policy. You can have reasonable policies that provide the flexibility needed in the real world. For example, one can have the referee on a two-member basketball crew be highly rated, and have a bylaw that allows a mid-level official to work with her. Your preference may be to have two highly rated members, but the bylaw can provide flexibility as long as

you don't flex beyond the parameters of that which is reasonable.

Unfortunately, bylaws are not the only area where law is made. There is a vast area of law in which we simply don't know our duty until a court tells us what it is.

For example, we just don't know who is liable when an official doesn't do something that isn't required by rule, but is done by every official in his area. Does the fact that every official does a non-required act make the act an industry standard? Can an association be liable for not training or requiring officials to take the action? The answers aren't clear.

The best thing officials can do is to meet industry standards and best practices. That means associations have to cultivate a culture of safety. Safety must be stressed and tested for. Examples must be given, and best practices reviewed. The most common example of that is the field inspection. Inspecting the field is such a common expectation that an official needs to do it in sports where the officials' manual provides for an inspection and in sports where the inspection is not mandated.

Now, officials associations can't just rely on meeting a best practice; they have to be able to document that their acts were in accord with best practices. That means that report writing is vital and officials must teach it.

NEW ADVANTAGE

Association Advantage currently has more than 1,000 members. In all, those groups represent more than 100,000 individual officials. We welcome our newest Association Advantage member associations, listed below along with home cities and contact persons:

Missouri: Professional Officials Assignors, Kansas City (Jeffrey Bink)

New York: Capital District Referees Elective Federation, Latham (Ronald Clark)