

Game Reports: The Dos and Don'ts

By Donald C. Collins

How do you write a game report to protect yourself after a player injury occurs or a fight breaks out in your game? What should you include? What language should you avoid?

An official should just report the facts. Don't attempt to look more credible or make the participants and coaches look less credible.

For a regular ejection, an official should keep it simple. An ejection report should state the act that led to the ejection and the official's action.

For example, we want to write, "Player number 24 said, '(Expletive) you!' to player number 15 on the opposing team." We don't want to write, "Player number 24 has a bad attitude. I was keeping a close eye on him and I caught him saying, '(Expletive) you!' to player number 15 on the opposing team." There is no reason to get into the player's overall attitude. It's not at issue.

Also, if an official goes too far

At all times, the official should stick to facts and avoid characterizations.

down the path of tearing down players, he or she could say something that would be defamatory. Opinions are not generally defamatory, but if the opinion implies that you have knowledge of something that would be offensive you can defame somebody. Just think if you stated that you knew that an ejected coach often has a few cocktails after lunch and may not have been fully in control of himself when you ejected him. That's pretty strong and that can be defamatory since you implied that it is true. Focus on the acts that led to the ejection.

For fights, an official needs to provide the game situation, the score, the time remaining and anything that

showed tension in the game. The official should identify the players fighting, describe their actions, note the location and acts of bench personnel and report on the coaches' actions. Finally, the official needs to report on his actions. At all times, the official should stick to facts and avoid characterizations.

Fights and ejections should be reported immediately. They're needed for league disciplinary and administrative procedures. They're also useful if a participant challenges league discipline in court. Officials may not be a party to those challenges, but a poor report could make it harder for a league or court to back the official's action.

Injuries don't generally link to league-required actions. If an injured party files a lawsuit, a school or league may not be inclined to back the official. Ejections and fights tend to force leagues to back an official through league disciplinary rules; injuries don't. Indeed, injuries may force leagues to distance themselves from an official in order to establish that the league doesn't exercise control over the official.

An official may be best served by not filing an injury report unless required to, although an official may wish to provide notice of the injury in situations where he or she is filing a full-blown report. An official should keep very good file notes of field conditions, his or her field inspections, the game itself and the play that led to the injury.

Officials associations and sports governing bodies must work together to train officials on report writing. It is not something that an official should have to master on his or her own. *Donald C. Collins is executive director of the San Francisco section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer. This material is for informational purposes only and is not legal advice. □*

Be Ready for Lawsuit Long After the Fact

A lawsuit for negligence can be brought against an official immediately or many years after an injury occurs to an athlete during a game. Such a claim, regardless of merit, will have to be defended.

It is important that you keep a record of any incident in which an athlete suffered a serious injury, such as a broken leg. Even better, report it to your insurance company and update the file in the event that a lawsuit starts. If the incident was not reported to the insurance company, there is no time like the present! Any insurance company with whom you or your association has (or had at the time of the incident) any type of liability policy should be notified in writing.

A copy of your game report and your contact information will ordinarily be sufficient to enable the insurance carrier to be ready to act should the situation take a turn for the worse and a lawsuit be filed that includes your name and association.

State Association's Rights

A state association has every right to require officials to belong to approved officials associations and set training and testing requirements. State associations may also state that an official can't work postseason assignments without complying with those requirements.

A state association has the legal right to set terms as to whom it will contract with. If a state association will only do business with officials from officials associations that meet certain criteria, that's the right of the state association. Also, the state association has the regulatory responsibility to set standards for schools in its state.

Sports officials are often independent contractors and have the right to control the means of their performance, but state associations can dictate how you carry out your duties in state postseason games.



Go to www.naso.org
and click on
member benefits for
more on MICP.