

# Officials' Jurisdiction Spans Beyond the Game

By Donald C. Collins

Rulebooks tell us when our jurisdiction begins. We can't enforce competition rules prior to that time, but in truth, our games begin well before our jurisdiction begins.

The rulebook is just one beginning and ending point. Administrative and legal obligations aren't restricted to the rulebook's restrictions on jurisdiction. Those obligations can range from partner contact, contacting the game site manager, uniform selections, coordinating your pregame meetings or transportation.

Legal needs can go back even further than administrative needs. Field inspections take place before a game and often prior to an official's jurisdiction beginning. Failure to act can lead to legal liability. In some instances the mandates of the law can go back years before a game. When an official is alleged to be negligent for failing to control the game or an assigner is alleged to

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have made a negligent assignment, part of the issue will inevitably be the official's professionalism, ability and reputation. What you do today is preparation for the game you will officiate five years from now.

The end can be as complicated as the beginning. In many sports, the end of the game and the end of the officials' jurisdiction don't coincide. That leads to the possibility of an official having the authority to make calls that can alter the result of a game that has "ended" because the official still has the jurisdiction to make rulings and enforce penalties after

the end of the game. Officials who don't know when their jurisdiction ends can create a morass of legal and administrative problems for themselves.

Having jurisdiction after the game ends has huge benefits. Officials who are chased off courts and fields gain a sportsmanship benefit as they can issue penalties, assess technical fouls and take other actions that could impact the game result. Also, officials who are in their jurisdiction can occasionally address players' postgame misconduct. Having postgame jurisdiction may deter bad acts in situations where players and coaches would otherwise lack some incentives to exercise proper restraint.

Having jurisdiction after a game also impacts officiating mechanics and game administration. In some sports, the only way to protest is to do so after the event but while the official(s) are still within their jurisdiction. Officials have to adjust their mechanics to hold marks and keep track of results through the protest period.

Jurisdiction issues can lead games to end after they have ended, but jurisdictional endings aren't the biggest problem we face. Premature endings cause administrative and legal headaches. Officials must end games where fields and courts aren't playable. However, officials must know when their termination of a game is an ending, a postponement or a matter whose ultimate resolution must be left up to an administrator. Failing to communicate the information can lead to confusion.

Officials have to learn a wide array of rules related to starting and ending games. A failure to know and master those rules can lead to administrative and legal chaos.

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## When Are Medals Not Considered Jewelry?

Medical alert medals are not considered to be jewelry. By NFHS rules, medical alert medals must be taped and may be visible. Officials should not require or suggest the removal of medical alert medals. They should simply make sure they are taped to minimize potential dangers to the other athletes.

The safety advantage to the player wearing a visible medical alert is deemed to outweigh the potential danger of a medal that otherwise might seem like jewelry.

Religious medals also are not considered to be jewelry, but under NFHS rules they must be taped and worn underneath the uniform, as their visibility does not enhance the wearer's safety.

## Officials With Disabilities Are the Same

Sports officials with physical or mental disabilities can present special problems for associations that want to be fair to the official, protect the integrity of the game and follow the law. The controlling law in that area is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Associations and leagues may feel that they're in a no-win situation when trying to comply with the ADA and still provide adequate and licensed officials for all games that the association is assigning for. Officials with disabilities should be treated like every other official in your association. Those officials need to be held to fair and objective standards, given a fair evaluation of their work and allowed the opportunity to improve on things that need improvement based on the evaluation.

If your association or league is unclear about how to handle an official with a disability, consult an employment attorney with ADA experience. The attorney will provide advice on how to handle the situation and on the proper course of action. The attorney can also give representation to the association or league if a lawsuit is filed.

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