

**NASO BOARD** (CONTINUED FROM P. N2)

toward preventing small problems with officials from growing into larger problems.

Sandra Serafini, current NASO board chair and the chair of the board's data & research committee, provided the board with an update on an initiative with Dr. Robert Doan of the University of Southern Mississippi. He is conducting research on the psychological profile of baseball umpires, including their backgrounds, demographics, expert vs. novice

development and video analytics.

"Sandra Serafini chaired the meeting and kept us focused and on track. We covered a wide range of topics and each one topic was about where we are now and where we want to get to," Gregson said.

A board subcommittee also gave a report on possible international expansion of NASO. That committee met in June with Canadian officiating leaders to discuss Canada's officiating organizational structures and plans.

The board also continued to develop the financial model and infrastructure plans for the proposed sports officials virtual history museum.

"I think it was a credit to each member of our board that within the space of just over four hours, these topics and other administrative reports were able to be discussed, digested and developed," said Barry Mano, NASO president.

The board's fall meeting is scheduled for Oct. 18-19 in Chicago. □

## Player Injuries

By Donald C. Collins

**Q** We want to make sure our officials protect themselves related to liability issues. What can we teach our officials in regard to player injuries? What should officials do to prevent them and how should they respond when they happen?

**A** Officials begin protecting themselves from liability years before any injury occurs. The official and his or her association have to lay down a foundation of safety.

We want officials and associations to create a context in which safety and standards are emphasized. That helps the official look like a "safety first" official who was trained by a "safety first" association when the official is deposed or in court. It also makes the official look like he or she could properly control the game.

Associations lay a safety foundation by reviewing safety rules with their members, and by stressing everything from pregame facility inspections to compliance with the concussion rule. Associations also have to evaluate officials, test them and train them. Then associations have to link assignments to the evaluation, ratings and test results.

The official has a role, too. The official must study the rules, cultivate safety habits and build a reputation for rules compliance and meticulousness in enforcing safety and sportsmanship rules. The more sterling the official's

reputation, the more the official reduces his or her liability risk.

Laying a foundation is necessary, but it's not enough. Officials still have to take care of business at the field of play.

Pregame inspection reduces odds of being liable for unsafe field or court conditions. Enforcing sportsmanship rules creates a perception of control that could bode well in court. Controlling the curtilage areas occupied by spectators, cheerleaders, bands, service vehicles, cameramen and other people on the fringes of play reduces the risk to the players, officials and the people who are being repositioned those areas.

The odds of injury may seem small, but football players have run into sideline carts, track coaches have had coaching boxes placed in areas where discs stray, players have collided with cheerleaders who went into unsafe areas, and spectators have encroached on team benches and dugouts with bad consequences for both players and spectators. Unfortunately, the official can be held liable for injuries resulting from those transgressions.

Reducing risks may force us to change some customs. For example, a good risk management practice would be to break up fights as opposed to just recording the numbers. There is some correlation between reduced fight time and reduced odds of injuries incurred in the fight.

Reducing risk does have some pain though. At the lowest levels of some sports, we let parents, coaches

and spectators stray into restricted areas. The more they're in those areas, the greater the likelihood of harm. But it's a delicate dance. At the lowest levels, those same parents, coaches and spectators often assist officials with clerical functions. One moment they're the invited guests, the next moment they need to be removed from an area for safety. The lowest levels can be filled with inconsistencies and chaos.

Injuries are inevitable. When they occur, the smartest thing to do is write a report and note the safety steps you took, the game competitiveness, the amount of tension in the gym, how the injury occurred and what steps you took after the injury. Don't send this report to the league or governing body unless mandated, as an official's legal interest is not the same as a league's or governing body's interest. This is a file report and you want that report to preserve your recollection of events just in case the injured party brings a legal action in the future. Remember, people who are injured have a year or more in which to bring suit, and the last thing that you want is to be sued and no longer have a recollection of the game.

A lifetime of safety habits goes a long way, but when it doesn't, document and be prepared.

*Donald C. Collins is the executive director of the San Francisco Section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer. This article is for informational purposes and is not legal advice. □*