

# ADVISOR

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How to get back to work.



## 7 TIPS FOR OFFICIALS ASSOCIATIONS AMID COVID-19

By Brent Killackey

**A**mid the COVID-19 pandemic, business as usual for officiating associations has been anything but usual. Yet amid all the disruptions to normal ways of doing things, there is still business to conduct.

Here are seven things for association boards to consider when navigating our pandemic-upturned world:

1. Follow the mandates and guidelines from your state, regional or local governmental bodies related to the pandemic. The optics are bad if an officials association — a group whose members are charged with ensuring the rules of the games being officiated are followed — doesn't follow rules set for it. This may impact your association's ability to meet, run tournaments, etc. These days, plan for disruption — it's the only certainty.

2. Don't neglect the organization's bylaws. Just because the pandemic has upset usual operations, it doesn't mean bylaws can be ignored. Making sure the organization is following the bylaws will help avoid trouble down the road, including potential legal trouble if someone later challenges the board's actions. Board member term length, board elections, the selection of officers, required audits, etc., may all be spelled out in the bylaws. Don't let

these things slip just because we're in a pandemic. You still have to pay attention to those legally binding responsibilities.

3. Is it time for a bylaws update? This might be a good time to examine the organization's bylaws to ensure smooth operating in our new reality. Are there provisions that allow your board to meet virtually? Are there provisions for voting for new board members electronically? Are there outdated restrictions that need to be changed to reflect our new reality?

4. If you have a regular venue for your board or member meetings, check well in advance that it will be open and allow in-person meetings.

Some businesses and institutions may have additional restrictions beyond what state and local governments are requiring. That's their prerogative. You might have to find an alternate location, which is best done well in advance.

5. Prepare for virtual meetings. Even as things start to open back up in places in the country, there's a lot of uncertainty ahead. Overseas, some countries have had to resume stay-at-home measures amid increasing cases of COVID-19. It's a good idea to plan for the future, including making sure you're ready for online meetings, whether that's the executive board or the entire

SEE "COVID-19" P. 7

## VIRTUAL SUMMIT FOCUSES ON WHY OFFICIATING IS SO IMPORTANT

**A**s sports officials prepare to return to the craft they are so passionate about, NASO is working hard to capture that excitement with its virtual Summit. Launching in late summer or early fall, the Summit will tap into the best the industry has to offer to generate enthusiasm and focus on why officiating is so important.

The Summit will kick off with an introduction on why officiating matters and an overall welcome. The opening session will be led by NASO President Barry Mano and NASO Board Chair Bob Delaney, former NBA referee and current special advisor for officiating development and performance for the Southeastern Conference.

Each day will feature six

to nine different sessions on a variety of topics and last a total of three to four hours each day to keep viewers engaged.

Below are a list of some of the sessions that will be offered and the speakers involved in those sessions:

- “Why I Wouldn’t Trade This Job for Anything” (Brad Allen, NFL referee since 2014).
- “Commitment, Character, Courage” (Penny Davis, NCAA national coordinator of women’s basketball officiating).
- “Scrutiny: What Are We Up Against” (Dean Blandino, director of instant replay for NCAA football, Fox Sports analyst and former NFL vice president of officiating).
- “Why Officiating Matters” (Joan Powell, Pac-12 and Mountain West conference coordinator of women’s volleyball officiating and former NCAA national coordinator of volleyball officials).

- “Diversity in Officiating” (Robert Smith Jr., Big Ten football official, NCAA national championship game official and chair of the Collegiate Officiating Consortium’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee).

- “Bright Lights, Big Responsibility” (Pat Adams, 27-year veteran NCAA Division I men’s basketball official and four-time Final Four official).

- “Critical Legal Issues” (Alan Goldberger, sports law attorney and recognized legal authority for game officials; Don Collins, California Interscholastic Federation San Francisco Section commissioner and longtime lawyer; and Drew Smith, American Specialty Insurance

and Risk Services Inc. president).

Other speakers scheduled to participate include Joey Crawford (39-year NBA official), Stephen Walkom (NHL vice president and director of officiating), John Higgins (seven-time NCAA Division I men’s basketball Final Four official) and Sarah Thomas (first full-time female official in NFL history).

The virtual Summit will also feature sport-specific webinars, an NASO 40th anniversary celebration, a best of NASO Summits and an acknowledgement of the 2020 NASO award recipients. Go to [sportsofficiatingsummit.com](http://sportsofficiatingsummit.com) for the most up-to-date details on the event. ■

## BACK TO BASICS

By Tim Sloan

A doctor I know had a new patient come into his office. She was a middle-aged lady, a little on the heavy side, flushed in the face and complaining of dizziness. He asked to see the medications she was currently taking, and she dumped nine different prescription bottles out of her purse. As the story goes, they included something for this and something for that, so he performed a full physical and came to a surprising course of action: Over a few weeks he slowly weaned her off *all* the pills; within a month, she had never felt better. Over the course of several years, prescriptions for one ailment seemed to lead to another to the point where she became totally overmedicated.

Is your organization overmedicated? Is dealing with all your issues the cure or the disease?

Governing bodies have become ever more risk averse and the lunatic fringe is skeptical of our skills and motivations. Combine that with our members becoming more needy and the result is running an association has grown proportionately in complexity. If you’re actually having face-to-face meetings with your group, how much of the precious time you have is taken up with X’s and O’s anymore? After you’ve drummed up volunteers for the new official seminar at the college and explained the NFHS memo on examples of taunting, how much time is left to review basic spots and management of persistent infringement? We risk creating a paradox: a liability-savvy, corporately hip group of officials who can’t officiate their way out of wet paper bag. That’s because we’ve been distracted into neglecting The Prime Directive: Teach officials to officiate; prepare them to make the right call.

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But how do you, as a leader, find the time to devote to honest training if all these other “obligations” stand in your way? Take my advice: Book off some Friday night from your own schedule and go out and watch some up-and-comer(s) in your group work. Don’t go near their dressing room before, during or after the game. Sit in the stands among the supporters of one team or the other. Also sit close enough to the table or a bench or both that you can tell what the interaction with the officials is like. Buy a hot dog, watch the band at halftime, notice the pyramids the cheerleaders are building these days ... inhale deeply of the fresh air. View your product from the customer’s perspective.

Do you like what you see, or have you just been seeing what you like for too long? The amount of information we can receive or be expected to provide in the 21st century can be overwhelming. The problem is our brains remain the same old size and saturation becomes inevitable at some point. As leaders, we become so fixated on the process of managing that information that we lose sight of the purpose. Hopefully, on your Friday night off, you noticed the teams just wanted to play and win. Those partisans you sat among wanted something to cheer for. The table and minor officials wanted to do their jobs inerrantly, with a sense of pride. The booster club and entertainment just wanted

everything to go off well. All your officials had to do was run the game: penalize the team causing the problem, communicate clearly with the benches and table and manage the event so it was safe for the participants and spectators.

You aren’t teaching them to run the game if organizing that college seminar or reading back memos from the state is all they hear at your meetings. Beating next year’s dues or this year’s banquet menu to death doesn’t help them sculpt a better strike zone. Meetings must be about the people we work for: the membership. You see, when we’re down on the field or floor ourselves, between the teams, under the lights, around the entertainment and in the crosshairs of rabid fans, it’s easy to forget what got us there. We had to learn the rules, mechanics, management skills and priorities well enough to rate teaching it all to the membership.

So, do it.

Consign as much of the regulatory stuff as possible to your website. Have the members supply a password if you must prove they got the memo. Bribe them with a free meal at the banquet to work the seminar; don’t waste valuable meeting time giving them your best Knute Rockne speech for the same objective. Turn up the lights, roll down the shades, crack open the rulebooks and manuals and challenge them — every chance you get — to become better officials. Stimulate them, demonstrate to them, chide them and elevate them to be more effective at what they do.

If a lot of the stuff you handle these days as a leader doesn’t seem to be about development, then find ways to spend more time on development.

It’s that simple.

*Tim Sloan, Davenport, Iowa, is a high school football, basketball and volleyball official, and a former college football and soccer official. ■*

## BYLAW BIT

Review the bylaws in a comprehensive manner so that any changes to the bylaws are consistent with all sections of the document and with other governance documents.

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## THE PULSE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION NEWS NATIONWIDE

### Association Joins Birthday Parade

Members of the Capital District Umpires Association were among those who helped surprise baseball fan Carter Wasula in East Greenbush, N.Y., for his 10th birthday. They took part in a May 18 parade past his house — dropping off baseball memorabilia.

“I think we as umpires, we’re glad to congregate and see each other, because we haven’t seen each other this year, and I think it’s also a situation where we want to go out into the community and do our little part, like everyone else is trying to do,” umpire Dick Kaplan said.

### Four Local Associations in Michigan Merge to Create Mega-Association

Four Michigan officials associations — Saginaw, Midland, Bay Metro and Mid-Michigan — have merged to create the Tri-City Area Officials Association, representing approximately 500 high school officials in football, volleyball, basketball, baseball and softball.

“Just through historical development and based on geography, we ended up with four primary associations in one area,” Tri-City president Bruce Moore said. “To have four associations basically in a 20-mile radius of each other, it didn’t make a lot of sense.”

One of the reasons for the merger was the shortage of high school officials. The groups thought they could better address “recruiting and retention” together. The leadership also sees consolidating training and assigning as an upgrade as well.

The new association will sponsor officials for approximately 90 schools covering a large geographic region.

### Simons to Serve as NYSFOA President

John Simons, who has 40 years of football officiating experience, is the new president of the New York State Football Officials Association (NYSFOA). He begins serving a one-year term in late June. There are 19 chapters in the NYSFOA and every year a new president is picked from a chapter. Simons, along with having worked nearly 1,300 football games at the modified, junior varsity and varsity levels, has been a boys’ lacrosse referee for more than 20 years and officiated high school hockey for almost 20 years before retiring.

SOURCES: WNYT13, MLIVE.COM, NNY360

## Straight Talk: Chris Balasinski

# REF UNION CARES PROVIDES FOR REFEREES IN NEED

**W**hen the COVID-19 pandemic struck the country, one officiating association in California decided to help its members out in a non-conventional way. Ref Union, a California-based assigning group focused primarily on the travel basketball market, began providing no-interest loans from its treasury to its members. They also set up a Go Fund Me page to provide additional loan funds. Director Chris Balasinski spoke with NASO and explained he wanted to do something to help referees during a time of crisis.

**NASO:** How did you come up with this idea that you have titled Ref Union Cares?

**BALASINSKI:** Once I realized this pandemic was going to be going on for a while, especially here in California with everything locked down, I started thinking about our officials. I figured there would be some people who could really be hurting financially the longer this thing went on and the more games and tournaments were being canceled. The majority of our membership has done well so far though.

**NASO:** How many members have taken advantage of the no-interest loans at this point?

**BALASINSKI:** So far only about 15, which is pretty good when you have an association as big as ours with 700 members. But that is not to say more people won’t come forward soon. If the stoppage were to go on for another two months, we should still have the funds necessary to help those in need.

**NASO:** Why did you decide to offer the no-interest loans?

**BALASINSKI:** I think too often sometimes associations demand a

lot from their members and their members want to see more in return. I thought this was a great opportunity for us to look out for our own members.

**NASO:** How does the process work?

**BALASINSKI:** It’s a pretty simple concept. Members can get up to a \$500 interest-free loan from the organization. It’s good for up to a year and we don’t start counting that year until the games are back to being played. It’s really a no-questions-asked kind of loan because, it’s our members who are in good standing with the association. They will have a year to pay the loan back.

**NASO:** Is there a limit on how they can use the money?

**BALASINSKI:** No. They can use it as they so choose. Although I know a few are using it for rent and utilities. Others are using it for minor expenses. Some of our members are not currently employed from their regular jobs and with officiating shut down, too, they are in a tough spot.

**NASO:** You also have launched a second phase of this effort. You started a Go Fund Me page. What is that all about?

**BALASINSKI:** The timing of the pandemic could not have been worse for us, in terms of funds that we are using for this effort. We usually collect dues from our members in March. So when people started applying for the loans, we wanted to ensure there would still be funds available in our treasury. So we started a Go Fund Me page to supplement what we already have. We are trying to reach \$7,000. We are currently at just over \$6,000 donated. But we are not asking for donations. We are asking for





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## HOW TO ...

### MOVE FORWARD AFTER A BAD MEETING

Just like bad games, bad meetings are bound to happen once in a while. Maybe technology failed you or an obnoxious member took over the meeting with ramblings about a specific play. Maybe you weren't as prepared as you thought you were and your presentation was a fail. Whatever the case, you'll have another chance to prove yourself as a leader. Move forward the right way.

#### Admit your mistake and learn from it.

Accepting responsibility for your mistake is the first step to moving forward. Don't shift blame to a member who caused you problems. Accept that you should have done a better job taking control. After you admit your failings, review what you could have done to prevent the situation.

#### Accept feedback from others.

Sometimes it's tough to see your own failings or maybe you're not sure how to best correct a situation. Go to a trusted fellow officer and ask for feedback. Then listen and take the advice to heart. Experienced leaders can help you navigate situations because they have been there, done that.

#### Let it go.

After you've reviewed your error and discussed what went wrong, it's time to let it go. It won't help to replay it in your mind. In order to move on, you have to focus on the future and your next opportunity to prove yourself.

#### Step up your preparation.

Sure, maybe you thought you did a good job preparing the meeting and things still went south. Now is not the time to give up. Get to the meeting extra early to check on the technology. Practice your presentation in front of your family. Have responses ready if a member questions you. Be ready to face future challenges.

#### Get back to work.

After you've done what you can to prepare, go to the next meeting and excel. Use what you've learned to lead the meeting. Members will appreciate your efforts.

contributions toward furthering our loan program. Meaning that the money you volunteer to put up at this time, is going to be paid back to you. By doing it this way we are making the money available temporarily to referees going through a tough stretch that may need a loan. Once they pay it back to us, it will be returned to the donor.

**NASO:** That's it?

**BALASINSKI:** Yes, it's a really simple thing we are doing. Donors will get their money back approximately six to eight weeks

after the games reconvene. We are keeping track of the donations for our records and the donors. The money people donate is guaranteed minus a small transaction fee of about 3 percent.

**NASO:** What has been the reaction of the members?

**BALASINSKI:** They have loved it! They really appreciate the association looking out for some of our members who may be down on their luck. We say how this avocation is a fraternity, but sometimes we only say it; we have to show it as well. ■

## GET NEW BOARD MEMBERS READY TO SERVE

By Scott Tittington

**W**hen your association has completed an election of officers and is ready to officially welcome newcomers to leadership positions, there is a tried-and-true adage to keep in mind: These new board members don't know what they don't know.

Words of advice from those who have previously served only go so far. You need a plan in place for the specific materials these rookies need to get up to speed and to be able to effectively serve your membership.

The starting point is a copy of the association bylaws. These governing principles are the road map by which all business is conducted, and while there are commonalities applicable to any association, there are also sure to be specific items about which new board members must be made aware. Bylaws should be made available to newcomers in the interim between their election and their first official duties so they can be prepared to work and offer leadership from Day 1. Think of it as a summer reading list so they are ready to contribute on the first day of the fall semester.

A second key item that should find its way into the hands of new board members is a copy of the association's financial report. While the bylaws will cover how the board may legally handle the group's finances, the financial report will show how much money is available, from where it is coming and to where it is going. New board members need to understand how the finances of the association work, as this is inevitably an area where they will be questioned by the rank and file. When a member starts

## QUICK TIP

### BACK-UP PLAN

Always have an alternate plan in place to provide substance at your meeting in case of an unforeseen speaker cancellation. You owe it to your members to be prepared for anything.



asking questions about what the membership fees are paying for, or why the end-of-the-year banquet changed from a catered affair to pizza and soda, every board member, including the newbies, need to have the data to provide honest answers.

The minutes from recent board meetings should also be shared. New board members are only aware of association business that is being handled out in the open in general membership meetings. They are not aware of business being addressed behind closed doors by the board itself. Such information will allow board rookies to have an accurate pulse of what is happening with the association at the board level once they are seated instead of having to play catch-up.

Another important item is a detailed schedule of association meetings and events. Often those running for office believe it would be a fun experience to secure a leadership position, but don't grasp the time commitment that entails. Once they are elected, they realize it is no longer just attendance at the handful of meetings required of general association membership. Now, their calendar will include

board meetings, meetings with outside groups or individuals such as a state association, conference commissioner or athletic directors, various camps and clinics, and more.

New board members need to have this information so they can manage their time wisely and make sure they are available for all board business. The last thing an association needs is someone new in a leadership position who is habitually absent due to a lack of proper planning.

Finally, new board members need to be given a document with contact information for every board member and, if applicable, other key stakeholders such as the assigner, rules interpreter, etc. Officiating is a communication business, especially at the board level, where so many decisions are being made on behalf of an entire membership. New board members need to have phone numbers and email addresses so they can communicate on behalf of the members they represent.

*Scott Tittrington is an associate editor at Referee magazine. He officiates high school basketball and football, and umpires college and high school baseball. ■*

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### COVID-19 (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)

membership. There are lots of tools out there to make online meetings happen, but it takes a little time to learn the bells and whistles and have everything running smoothly. Do the work in advance so you're ready to run the show without any hiccups.

6. Ensure your members have a voice. State associations, conferences and leagues have a lot to deal with right now, and it's easy for officials to get forgotten as they plan for a return to play. Reach out and ask for a seat at the table. Not only will you be able to contribute to the planning, but you can head off officials being asked

to handle inappropriate additional duties. Plus, you'll have a voice if discussions start to turn toward pay cuts amid any financial woes organizations are facing.

7. Prepare for the future. Some officials associations that deal in spring sports have found themselves without any dues collection for 2020 because the season was canceled before it started. Can your association weather such a disruption in revenues? If your group doesn't already have adequate reserves, it's not too late to start setting aside adequate funds to weather the proverbial storm.

*Brent Killackey is Referee's managing editor. ■*

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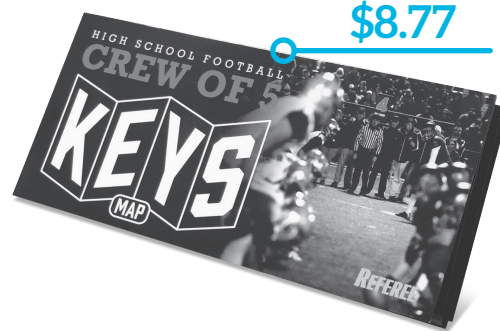
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