

Spectator Trouble With Game Administrator Gone

By Donald C. Collins

If there's trouble with a spectator, officials are advised to get game administration involved to handle it. What if game administration isn't right at the field or court, such as at a large tournament or if the person is in another gym at the school?

The law requires a site to be run with reasonable vigilance. This vigilance extends to the distant places such as parking lots, locker rooms and that distant field at a multi-field site. Game administration simply has to supervise five softball fields at a tournament. The law is a limited tool though. One needs a statute, a contract or some sort of quantifiable harm to best enforce it.

Officials should not directly speak to a spectator who is creating a sportsmanship problem — even if they can't find the point person.

Unfortunately, statutes aren't going to generally tell you how a site should be run. An official may have the good fortune of having his or her association write certain obligations into a contract, but the official still needs to work with game administration on the mechanics of implementation. Officials may be able to win a lawsuit if they're harmed by game administration's failure to properly run a site, but who wants to be harmed?

Proximity issues are best solved through administrative vigilance. For officials, we start with our rules and mechanics.

The first question is whether our rules contemplate a lack of proximity. Some sports do. Track, for example, has rules that clearly contemplate various aspects of rules enforcement being spread out over a large area. Of course,

most sports don't have mechanics dealing with connecting people from Point A with people from Point B. The normal softball game clearly doesn't contemplate this.

Whether it's a softball tournament spread across five fields or a track meet that has rules that contemplate a spread-out event, the official faces the same issues.

First, the official needs to know who is his or her point of contact. It may be the tournament coordinator. It may be a head referee designated in the rulebook.

Next, the official needs to know how to get information to the point person or tournament coordinator when he or she is not proximate.

Third, the official needs to know if there are assistants and volunteers who can make certain decisions or get things from Point A to Point B. The official needs to officiate, not chase down tournament directors.

Fourth, the official needs to know what the rulebook allows. For example, some sports provide for team penalties for spectator misconduct, which might incentivize the coach to help with the spectator. And, of course, the official may have to temporarily suspend play if safety compels it.

Finally, the official should not directly speak to a spectator who is creating a sportsmanship problem even if he or she can't find the point person. The official may have to waive that rule if, and only if, overall safety demands it — but that's a last resort. Still, there are times where an official will need to directly address non-participants, such as cheerleaders in an unsafe place and photographers standing in the line of fire.

Whatever you do, just remember to get out in front of the issue. Don't wait and let it become a problem.

Donald C. Collins is the commissioner 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. □

If the P.A. Announcer Takes Things Too Far

Public address (PA) announcers can be an official's worst nightmare, especially when they make mention of one of the more unpopular calls during a game or match. Worse yet, when the "big shot" behind the microphone makes a threat, like announcing where the officials are parked, those officials suddenly might find themselves in a riot-like situation.

The best course of action is to contact game administration immediately. If no game administration is available, call the police from the safety of the locker room or a locked, moving vehicle. When you are free from that situation, contact the assigner of the game so proper remedial measures can be taken. Submit a written report to your association.

If the situation with the announcer occurs during the game with any appreciable amount of time remaining, stop the game, have the announcer removed and the police or security summoned immediately.

Partner No-Show

Your partner is a no-show and the schools say they want to pull a fan from the stands to get the game in. There are things to consider before you agree to work the game:

- Do the governing bodies allow a non-qualified official to fill in? That might stop things dead in their tracks.
- Is this a varsity-level game with lots at stake between the teams? Even if your state doesn't have rules against it, it's probably not a good time for an unqualified person to step in.
- Is it a lower-level game with limited physicality and a low potential for potentially injurious contact? That brings a lower risk of legal threat. Yet, even a JV or rec league game can get nasty depending on the teams and circumstances.
- Finally, if you've agreed to proceed with help, but things quickly get out of hand, don't be afraid to shut things down.

SOURCE: LAW COLUMN 8/16 ISSUE

PRESENTED BY
member information
[micp]
consultation program

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