

## **SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY OFFICIALS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The board leaders who were present at the CIAC Officials Association state-wide meeting on June 14, 2012 heard Matt Fischer, CIAC Director of Information Services, address the use of the social media in order to raise awareness and to encourage you to educate and caution officials in this regard. Inappropriate face book posts, tweets, etc can prove to be detrimental to the reputation of the official and other parties and could be viewed by local boards as conduct unbecoming an official. It was an enlightening discussion that resulted in the attendees requesting from CIAC additional educational information on this important topic. In response to the request, CIAC is providing this information for you to consider and to utilize as you see fit.

### **EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION / SUGGESTED GUIDELINES**

With the increased use of social networking through the internet and via cell phone, it is important for officials to understand the importance of maintaining professionalism and adhering to the NFHS Officials Code of Ethics regarding the social media. In part, the NFHS Code states, "Officials shall maintain an ethical approach while participating in forums, chat rooms and all forms of social media". Although social networking sites can be wonderful communications tools, there can be unintended consequences if they are used improperly. Officials, because of their unique standing, need to be particularly careful when using those sites. Accountability and integrity should always be our guiding principles. Jeopardizing your impartiality or professionalism should never be a part of your actions or posts.

The following information is from resources, such as but not limited to, the NFHS Officials Code of Ethics, Referee Magazine, other periodicals, discussions with colleagues around the country and some suggested guidelines developed by the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO). It is our hope this information will help you with your decisions and involvement with social media. Should your board decide to develop a social media policy or guidelines for your officials, this information should help you.

- ❖ DO be aware that posts on social media are visible to the general public. Even if you limit access to your page to friends, it is likely that your post will be viewed by someone beyond the circle of people you intended to see it.
  
- ❖ DO find out your association or league expectations regarding social media. Your association may not have hard and fast rules, but find out if it has an unofficial policy.

- ❖ DO think twice before you post. If there is anything in your post that could be construed as a criticism of officials, of officials' decisions, or of schools, coaches or athletes...it is better left unsent.
- ❖ DO assume that your post will be seen by the two teams you will see in your next game and the teams you worked in your previous game as well as your partner(s) in those games.
- ❖ DON'T post anything relating to the schools you have worked or will work. It calls your objectivity into question.
- ❖ DON'T include anything in a post that makes reference to an upcoming assignment. If teams want to find out who is going to be working their game, they should do so through official channels, not your tweet. DON'T post details about other people's regular season or playoff assignments. Don't use your page as a news service.
- ❖ DON'T use social media to criticize state or local association policies, assigning practices, etc.
- ❖ DON'T make posts regarding calls made by officials in other games, whatever the level. You and your buddies might debate the call you saw on TV, but debating the call on Facebook, Twitter or other forums and social media is a no-no.
- ❖ DON'T “friend”, “follow” or otherwise interact with student-athletes in any social media forum. Regardless of the intentions, it is risky and unwise for an official to communicate with student athletes, since it could call into question your objectivity or motives.

Additionally, to malign or openly criticize another official in any form of electronic communication is considered not only unprofessional, but also undermines sports officiating in general. It is also unprofessional for officials to offer rules clarifications or interpretations through these medium without the expressed directive from their respective boards or the state high school association.

Lastly, I read some excellent information in an article in the August 2012 edition of “NASO ON BOARD” written by Patrick Rosenow, a retired Air Force Judge, basketball official and current federal administrative law judge. He stated, in part...”It’s wise for associations to tell officials that their job is to officiate the games, not to talk about them. Officials who think there’s a huge market for his or her take on a game can hang up their whistle and become a reporter or a blogger...It’s in the official’s and association’s best interest to minimize what officials say publically, particularly in social media.”