

Helpful Hints for Officials Using Social Media

By Dana Pappas on January 20, 2015

officials

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter can be great tools for reconnecting with old friends, staying in touch with family and even networking with colleagues. One of the “hot-button” topics of discussion among the officiating community over the past couple of years has been the use of these media. While most agree that associations do not need to have a steadfast policy for such use, industry leaders advise that association leaders provide officials with some helpful hints for using these communication avenues.

As a Facebook user myself, I have been able to reap the benefits of having a Facebook page and having many of my association members on my “friend list.” There are times that I have engaged in chats with officials while updating family pictures on my page, thus enhancing my ability to communicate with my officials. It has also been a good means of advertising clinics, camps, deadlines or other pertinent information to officials and to potential officials. At the high school level, these types of web sites can even be used as a way to recruit officials and is a valuable medium through which we can disseminate information.

While there are so many positives that can come with these sites, we also have to be mindful of their very public nature. Here are some tips for sports officials who use social media:

DO'S

1. Do use social media as a means for sharing information with members of your local association. Some local groups in various states across the country have created association pages and have their group members on their friend lists. This can be a great mechanism for information dissemination and can also be a page for recognition of group members and to give potential new members a first look at becoming an official.
2. Do use social media as a recruitment tool. Given the median age of most users of social media, it can be a great means of getting new members into the avocation.
3. Do remember to keep things positive if you post information on these sites. If you come home from a game wherein everything went smoothly, it is okay to generically post about it. For example, you could say, “I had a great softball game tonight. Both teams displayed great sportsmanship. Reminds me why I umpire.” Avoid posting specifics about your schedule.

DON'TS

1. Do not post any disparaging comments about players, coaches, schools, fans or fellow officials online. Someone will see what you said and you will only cause problems for you. I have already spoken with several officials who have said less-than-positive things about coaches, players, assignors and colleagues and I continue to advise against those practices. Keep in mind that even if the person at whom your remark is intended doesn't directly see it, someone who knows him/her will. You can't unring the bell. Once it is in writing and online, it can and will come back to haunt you.
2. Do not advertise where you are officiating at any time. The pride that you have for being an official is appreciated but you are discouraged from saying where you are officiating and when (i.e., "Joe Official is excited to be officiating tonight between School A and School B). If everyone knows where you are working, it opens the door for undue influence and perceptions that undue influence existed.
3. Do not be a "cheerleader" for any school, team, coach or player on these sites. Remember that perceptions of bias are dangerous as officials. If you post a picture of yourself wearing the shirt of your alma mater online and then call a game for that school the following week, you may be setting the stage for allegations of bias by that school's opponent.
4. Do not post specifics about games, whether good or bad. If you want to give kudos to a team, send the information to your state office so we can properly commend them. If you post something about a team or a coach by name, it can again lead to perceptions of favoritism toward or bias against that team in future games. If you feel like what you are going to say may be inappropriate, it probably is.
5. Do not start posting online after you have had a rough game. Emotions may start to flow a little too much and it is better to cool off before you start venting your frustrations online. If you have had a rough game, talk to your spouse, call a friend, call your mentor or call your state office. Don't let it all out on your Facebook page.

These are just some very basic hints for officials who use social media. Take a common sense approach to posting information on these sites and always be mindful that what you post in a public arena, whether positive or negative, is out in cyberspace for the world to see. Conduct yourself in the same ethical manner that you would in any other venue and remember that you are representing yourself, your local association, your state association and the officiating community as a whole.