



How to Address Harassment of Sports Officials

Officials are important for all sports as they ensure that matches are played correctly and fairly, based on the assessment of technical aspects, including time, score, and the rules of the game. Officials are a vital component of sport, as it is part of their role to make certain that the spirit of the game is upheld.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics released data in January 2002 indicating that between 1997 and 2001 there had been a 26% decline in the number of officials participating in sport. Research conducted in March 2002 indicated that lack of respect for and abuse of officials significantly contributed to this decline.

2003 was the Year of the Official and was the springboard for a campaign aimed at getting the sport industry to work together to address the issues that have contributed to the decline.

Although 'officials' are the object of the abuse they cannot drive reform, nor should they be expected to. Together with the national sporting organisations, who are assisted by their state affiliates, individuals associated with a particular sport can influence the experience of officials and contribute to their retention. The sporting club, coaches, players, parents, and spectators can all play a part.

One of the main priorities is the development and fostering of a sporting environment that will have a positive influence on the behaviour of participants and spectators.

Consider the following ideas for ways to influence how an official approaches a match, and the nature of their experience.

SUPPORT OF OFFICIALS

How clubs can support officials:

- Club management taking a stance that harassment is not acceptable and will not be tolerated;
- Implementing club policies on abusive behaviour and appointing a ground monitor to be the focal point for concerns that may arise at an event;
- Providing senior officials at matches to mentor less experienced officials and mingle with spectators to provide guidance on the rules;
- Involving officials in the training/coaching of players;
- Educating parents/players/coaches on the rules of the game and on officiating;
- Fining teams for abusive behaviour, including that from players, coaches and parents; and/or
- Publicly addressing abusive people. Consider removing from a match the child of a repeatably abusive parent so the parent has to take responsibility for his/her actions.

How spectators/parents/coaches/players can support officials:

- Publicly thanking officials after the game;
- Making an effort to meet the officials either at the game or by attending workshops/ seminars;
- Voting for an official of the round/season; and/or
- Discouraging abusive behaviour when you see it happening.

officiating

EDUCATION OF OFFICIALS

How clubs can educate officials:

- Providing or promoting access to personal development seminars e.g. communication skills, behaviour management and conflict resolution;
- Providing or promoting access to technical skill development programs;
- Providing quality feedback to officials on their performances; and/or
- Developing an officials' network that meets regularly to discuss key issues.

How clubs can educate players/coaches/parents/spectators:

- Providing all club members, including parents, with a Code of Conduct which must be read and signed prior to registration;
- Providing information on the rules at workshops, seminars and officiating courses;
- Briefing players and coaches before competitions on current rule interpretations and acceptable behaviours to reduce conflict;
- Involving players in refereeing to increase awareness on the role of officials;
- Involving abusive parents in refereeing and volunteer work;
- Putting the emphasis on participation and fun, not the outcome, in junior sport;
- Running quiz nights based around knowledge of the rules of playing and officiating; and/or
- Educating the media, so they can educate the public.

PROMOTION OF OFFICIALS

How clubs can promote support for officials:

- Promote positive behaviour by rewarding good sportsmanship;
- Include officials in social events to break down any "them and us" attitude;
- Include positive stories about officials in club newsletters, etc.; and/or
- Acknowledge an Official of the Year.

THE CHALLENGE

If recruitment, training and retention of officials are problems that face sport across Australia, the challenge is to do something about it. **Are you going to be part of the problem or part of the solution?**

REFERENCES

Glenlyon Sports Development (2003) Administrator Education Program Canberra: ASC

Feedback Worksheets from DSR Officials Breakfast, June 2003

Information

For further information refer to the Department of Sport and Recreation website www.dsr.wa.gov.au or contact the Officiating Consultant on (08) 9387 9700.

SPORTS OFFICIALS ...

Respect the Role. Respect the Person.

Most officials are volunteers who do it for the love of the event

Officials deserve your respect and support

Abusing an official won't change the outcome of the event

Officials can see things you can't because they watch the event from a different angle

Officials aren't perfect; they do make mistakes, just like players

Without Officials there would be no event