



## SOCIAL NETWORKING

Officials:

Recently we have had to deal with issues relating to officials making comments on chat rooms that have raised concerns of school administrators, coaches, officials, and the general public. Additionally, we were involved in cases of officials contacting student athletes via Facebook/Twitter accounts. Many school systems have as their policy and procedure that social media contacts, i.e. Facebook friends with students, is expressly prohibited. As independent contractors, we won't recommend a comprehensive mandate to you at this time. Our view at the NCHSAA is that: Any public comments about coaches, teams, players, and other game officials is prohibited. We believe that following this policy will work in the best interest of the official by limiting opportunities to put oneself in unflattering situations. Please realize, if inappropriate use or abuse is brought to our attention, we will have to deal with each of these as individual disciplinary reviews.

In doing some research, I found the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) publication Rights, Requirements, Risks – The Shared Responsibility of Officiating. One of the sections dealt with social media, so I am sharing that information to you for your review and consideration.

**AVOID POST PERILS**

Social networking sites can be wonderful communications tools. But there can be unintended consequences if they are used improperly. Because of their unique standing, officials need to be particularly careful when using those sites. Here are some reminders and guidelines:

**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's 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 assignments, to playoff games for instance, until that information has been officially released. 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 or Twitter is a no-no.

Remember, accountability and integrity should always be our guiding principles. Jeopardizing your impartiality or professionalism should never be a part of your actions or posts. It is my hope this information will help you with your decisions and involvement with social media.

Mark Dreibelbis  
Supervisor of Officials

