

## **OAOA Social Media Guidelines Supplemental 2015**

**By James Squires and Darin Rutledge, OAOA Regional Representatives**

TASK: Provide concrete examples of DO's and Dont's for officials to clarify expectations.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKING DO's and DON'TS FOR CONTEST OFFICIALS**

**\*\*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, guidelines and examples of acceptable use of social media/networking.**

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 exercise caution about who you "friend," "like" or "follow" on social media. Your association with student athletes, coaches and/or administrators could be misconstrued, regardless of your relationship with them outside of officiating.

DO limit your interaction with social media discussions related to rules or mechanics. Regardless of your individual mastery of these topics, those who are not officials should get interpretations through formal channels such as the local association or state rules interpreter. First and foremost, this promotes consistency among all parties involved.. (Note that it is encouraged for officials to engage in rules- and/or mechanics-related discussions with peers in a forum intended for that purpose as a way to exercise your knowledge. This is simply a caution against doing so publicly, and with an audience that typically has a different context than officials).

DO resist the temptation to "defend" individual officials, or the officiating avocation in general. Rarely are these discussions productive, and even more rarely do people change their minds about opinions they've delivered via social media. There is very little potential value in these discussions, and often they lead to even further negativity.

DO get involved with social media accounts that are managed by your association. This is a great way to recruit, promote officiating as an avocation, and interact with local sports fans. Also, they eliminate much of the risk that is inherent with individual officials communicating through social media.

DO keep in mind that social media users are naturally curious, and are likely to poke around at your profile and past activity. If either contain content that is objectionable, the perception of you, your local association, and officiating in general may be negatively impacted.

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. Lastly, accountability and integrity should always be our guiding principles. Jeopardizing your impartiality or professionalism should never be a part of your actions or posts.

DON'T initiate contact with players, coaches or administrators over social media. Even a compliment about exemplary sportsmanship, for example, could be misconstrued and impact your perceived impartiality. More importantly, initiating contact with high school age student athletes may be interpreted the wrong way, regardless of your intentions. It is reasonable (and courteous) to acknowledge comments that are initiated by someone else, but responses should be brief and professional.

DON'T participate in brackets, predictions, etc., regardless of whether or not there is money involved. This is particularly discouraged for current/aspiring college officials, where most conferences have zero tolerance policies for this type of activity.

DON'T operate under the false pretense that the First Amendment or "what I do on social media is my business" will protect you. While that may be your legal defense in a court of law, neither will protect you from consequences to your officiating career that arise from making bad social media choices..

#### ACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES:

"Had a great time officiating high school basketball tonight with my friend JOE SMITH. Can't wait for my next game."

"Road trip with my friend JOE SMITH for softball. I'm looking forward to an afternoon in the sun."

"Volleyball season starts today. I can't wait to be back on the court officiating a fun game. We are always looking for officials in our group. If you are interested, send me a private message and I'll get you in touch with the right person."

"Here's a link to a great article about officiating from NASO."

[In response to rules discussions] "The applicable rule is 2-16-2-h. If there are questions about whether it was applied properly, the coach or AD should contact the local officials association."

NOT ACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES:

"I had to officiate at the worst school in the state. They never give us locker rooms and there is no hot shower. Ugghh."

"My partner was terrible tonight. I had to do all the work in our game."

"I never want to work at \*\*\*\*\* High School again. Their fans are the worst!"

"Hey, [team member's name]. You guys played a great game tonight!"

"Five yellow cards in my game this afternoon. Why can't coaches and administrators get this under control?"

[In response to rules discussions] "Clearly holding. I would have called that touchdown back."

"My season is over, but I have some friends working the tournament. I think Westside high school is going to win it all."

"If you're so smart, maybe you should grab a whistle. It isn't as straightforward as you all think it is."



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