

Did You Really Write That?

What Officials Need to Know About Report Writing

By Tim Sloan

“Methinks he does protest too much.” That’s a classic line from Shakespeare that a lot of officiating leaders cite when it comes to the subject of coaching their membership on what or what not to include when writing incident reports.

We usually tell people, when relating a story on why they gave someone the boot, not to embellish it with irrelevant facts or emotions but simply say what happened and let the chips fall where they may. The standard retort is that when they do that, the perps get away with less than what they deserve because the disciplinary body can’t discern between lack of words and lack of a case.

On the other hand, if we coach them to state in ample detail *the facts* of the case, the disciplinary people interpret that as the official trying too hard to

make it stick; hence, the Shakespearean quote.

Here’s the problem — or, at least, the beginning of it: Shakespeare never wrote those words. The actual quote, from *Hamlet*, was spoken by Queen Gertrude and reads, “The lady protests too much, methinks.” Over the centuries, the wording has been twisted around, conveying much the same sentiment to mean that someone who tries too hard to make a point may have an ulterior motive.

Twisting words may have worked for Shakespeare but it doesn’t work for officials. In the refereeing business these days, that usually is taken to be a sign of some sort of vendetta or disingenuousness, whether that is the case or not. If I stood up in front of The Shakespeare Club at my college and stated the popularized quote, the

people who knew the real quote would blow me off if I then tried to make any other point about the bard: Once they catch you out on a detail, where should they begin taking any of what you say seriously?

I have coached association members to write whatever they want to describe a situation and their actions in a game report, but do it as if the reader were hiding behind a tree, witnessing exactly the same event: If it didn’t happen, don’t include it. If it did happen, say how it happened. If something happened that might not make the writer look good, include it anyway if it’s pertinent. If there was emotion involved, let someone else justify it; most people understand disciplinary incidents are seldom sterile, peaceful events. Let’s look at these points.

(See “*Report Writing*” p.6)

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If you would like the rest of your board to get an electronic copy, please list each board member and their email address and send them to cludwin@naso.org. They’ll start to get their copy the very next month.



The Right Location

By Bob Masucci

Chances are good that you already have an established location for your local association meetings. Chances are equally good that while it’s OK, it might still not be everything you’re looking for to host your meetings. Too big ... too small ... not close enough ... etc. So what’s the right place? What should you be looking for? And while you likely have locations for your regularly meetings, what about that big meeting you have coming up where you’re inviting other local associations to participate in a large-scale meeting? Both your local meeting and the big meeting venue will have to meet your needs. How should you decide where to meet?

These criteria are recommended by meetings.org.

Location

By far the primary consideration when setting out meeting plans is location. Some questions you need to answer are:

- From how wide a geographic area do your members come?
- Is one site enough or should you be thinking about “distributing” your meetings across several sites on different dates?
- How many members will likely be attending any one meeting?

(See “*Location*” p.5)

Why You Need Up-to-Date Bylaws

By Todd Korth

Non-profit sports officials associations live and die by their bylaws. It is important to ensure that these bylaws are up to date, reflect the organization and keep it out of legal troubles.

An association's bylaws provide the framework for how it operates. The bylaws help direct membership meetings, the topics of meetings, and how to conduct board meetings. Bylaws set the foundation for important policies and procedures of the organization.

Members must have direction and guidelines for what is accepted behavior within the particular organization. If the boundaries of an organization are defined, but the function is not, problems like conflict of interest, misdirection of focus or lack of productive activity will occur. That

scenario is similar to having a parking lot with no painted lines. Everyone understands that it is used for parking cars, but which direction, what pattern and how the cars exit can lead to confusion (if not serious accidents). The parking lot lines direct drivers how to park orderly, where to park, determine the driving pattern within the area and explain how to exit orderly when leaving the area.

It's important that organizations define their boundaries and operations, or paint their parking lines, in order to avoid situations that can get sticky without bylaws in place. Here are some basic examples of why you need direction.

A non-public setting

An officials association may need to be careful if it is filming at a camp or clinic as such performances may not be public. Associations can use their bylaws to address that problem with their members. Associations can also consult a local attorney to develop a photo release for use when they film camp participants, coaches or teams in a non-public setting.

Disciplining members

Illegal acts, unethical activities or a variety of improper conduct by a

member official are good reasons for an association's board of directors to suspend or even terminate the membership of that referee.

In some cases, once the discipline is imposed, that official will cry foul. A good way for an officials association to avoid any kind of argument before it even starts is to include a line in the group's bylaws that specifies the association may take any action to discipline any official when the official's actions are "not in the best interests" of the association. That simple clause allows your association the greatest legal latitude for taking care of problem members.

To take it a step further, an association should get more specific than just "best interests" and specify the actions that may be cause for termination of a member or an officer.

Protect limited liability protection

One of the reasons to form an entity as an association is to have personal limited liability from the potential business debts and judgments against the association.

If an association does not have bylaws and is sued, a plaintiff could try to claim that the association should not be provided with the shield of limited

(See "Bylaws" p.4)

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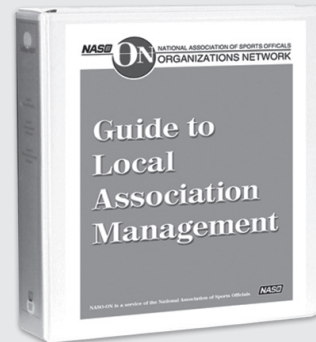
On Your Side

Guide to Local Association Management Whenever You Need It

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The problem is that physical copies tend to either wear out or get misplaced over the years. Your association shouldn't be without this great benefit, however. That's why we've made the whole thing downloadable from the members-only section of NASO-ON.org.

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Summit Attracts Leaders in the Northwest

More than 350 officials and officiating leaders attended the milestone 30th annual NASO Sports Officiating Summit, which took place at the Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront hotel from July 29-31. Those three days were filled with prominent speakers and pertinent topics from officiating insurance to film breakdown. The theme "Taking Care of Business: Reliability & Results in Officiating" was a focus throughout.

The Summit followed the Oregon School Athletic Association (OSAA) one-day conference. Officiate

Oregon Day, co-sponsored by the OSAA and the Oregon Athletic Officials Association, attracted more than 750 officials from around the state.

Former NBA referee Steve Javie served as host for the Summit Opening. OSAA Executive Director Tom Welter, Senator Peter Courtney, ArbiterSports CEO Claire Roberts, NASO Chair Steve Shaw and NASO President Barry Mano all shared remarked to kick off the premier event in sports officiating on July 29. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell was featured in a video welcome.

Shaw advised attendees, "If you engage in this Summit, you have my personal guarantee that you'll be more effective in 'taking care of business.'"

Day two of the Summit kicked off with an introduction to the hosts for the duration of the program — NCAA National Coordinator of Volleyball Officials Joan Powell and ArbiterSports Vice President Dave Yeast. NFL referee Jeff Triplett led off the educational sessions on July 30 with "Improve the ROI" in which he shared the importance of standards in officiating training.

Between the opening and the Celebrate Officiating Gala, which is the closing event for the Summit, attendees were able to hear from many leaders in the industry, including FoxSports officiating analyst Mike Pereira, Pac-12 Deputy Commissioner Kevin Weiberg,

Executive Director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association Jack Roberts, NCAA men's basketball referee John Higgins, attorney Alan Goldberger, NHL Director of Officiating Terry Gregson, NFL Director of Officiating David Coleman, NBA referee Monty McCutchen, NHL referee Dennis LaRue, NFL referee Laird Hayes, college football officials Sarah Thomas and Bryan Greenwood, Professional



Association of Volleyball Officials Executive Director Marcia Alterman and Midwest Football Officials Alliance

Coordinator of Football Officials Bill Carollo.

Attendees were also given the opportunity to attend one of seven different sport breakout sessions as well as lunch workshops. Those workshops included a NASO-ON-sponsored workshop of fiduciary responsibilities of boards, covering finance and legal requirements.

"The 2012 NASO Summit certainly served as a spring board for officials from all sports and all levels as they embark on another year of officiating," Powell said. "From the Summit's Grand Opening with the powerful message from General Colin Powell, to all of the educational sessions, with the culminating event — the Celebrate Officiating Gala — where we witnessed the honoring of noteworthy individuals — the participants were filled with many emotions as they prepare to 'take care of business' back home."

"Portland was a fabulous venue, the people were so hospitable and the Marriott staff was outstanding at every turn."

The 31st Sports Officiating Summit is scheduled for July 28-30 in Grand Rapids, Mich. The theme for the 2013 event is "Officiating Assignments: Right People, Right Place, Right Time — The Right Way." For more information, call 262-632-5448. □

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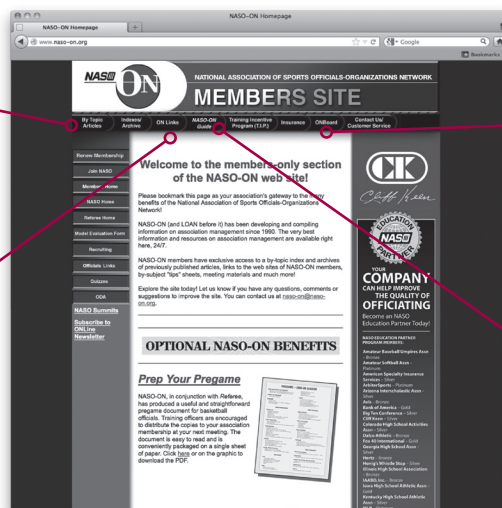
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Visit the By-Topic and Index sections to find association articles on topics such as assigning, bylaws, finances, leadership, meetings, recruiting, training, technology and more.

Check out links to other local officials associations from across the country. By visiting the websites of other groups, your association can get ideas for your website as well as ideas for training, bylaws and communication.



Send the current *ONBoard* or past issues to your members. Maybe there's a great article in one of the issues of the *ONBoard* newsletter that is applicable to your entire association. You can feel free to send an issue to your members for educational purposes.

Download the *Guide to Local Association Management*. Available for your association's reference, you can download chapters of the book covering assigning, meeting management, contracts, mentoring, your association's future and fundraising.

Bylaws Continued from page 2

liability protection because its leaders did not follow formalities. The plaintiff could evaluate a number of factors to determine if the association is legitimate, including whether it has the proper documents and records. Without bylaws, the association is risking not being provided limited liability protection if it is sued.

Set up a bank account

If the association wants to open a business account, banks will often require a copy of its bylaws. In addition, insurance companies may require the association to provide a copy of the association's bylaws before providing certain types of policies, like NASO limited liability insurance.

Definition of officers, duties

An association's bylaws should clearly define officers and/or board members in the organization, the description of the positions and responsibilities of those officers. The standard operating procedure/policies and procedures (SOP/PAP) should define the duties of each person and as part of the bylaws,

describing the limitations of the officers as well. Some organizations have moved to very specific job descriptions for officers, which are included in the SOP/PAP of the bylaws.

As an example, it is assumed that the president or chair of an organization can or should accept the duties of other officers' in their absence. That is a limitation that should be clearly communicated through the SOP/PAP. If the organization does not want that to happen, then the SOP/PAP is the document to ensure proper responsibilities are carried out.

Leaving the operating procedures to one individual to remember and implement can be disastrous. It is not in the best interest of the group to allow one individual to interpret the operating procedures. The best way to ensure that consistency and equality is maintained is to have written documents.

Election procedures

You don't want a member to contest an election and argue that the process wasn't fair. You should include the requirements and procedures for

elections in your bylaws so members are familiar with them and know what to expect when their votes are counted.

Bylaws are out of date

While most associations have bylaws, too often they haven't reviewed them for years and years. Few organizations can afford to remain static over the years and often find themselves with different needs than they had at their founding.

It is important that associations of all levels have bylaws that are up to date and responsive to the organization's current constituents and needs. Organizations that never review their bylaws sometimes end up burdened with antiquated bylaws that no longer reflect the organization's mission, needs or direction. Don't fall in that trap. Make it an agenda item at your next meeting.

Bylaws should be recognized for what they are — one of the wisest investments that an association can make to ensure its long-term effectiveness.

How much does your association's future mean to you?

Todd Korth is a Referee associate editor. □

Location Continued from page 1

- Are the potential sites easy to get to for your members? Especially if your association is in an urban area, take into account traffic patterns, particularly if your meetings are around the evening rush hour.

Suitability

Another consideration is if a potential location is in keeping with your association's mission and image. For an organization whose focus is likely centered on school sports which are intended to be an extension of the classroom, a location consistent with that mission is a must. Remember that perception is reality. Be sure that no one can attach any negative inference if they should happen to see you at a less than savory meeting site. And of course, don't fail to consider whether your members will find it suitable.

Availability

Once you find suitable candidate locations for your meetings, the next step is to check whether or not those places are available on the days you need. For maximum flexibility, be sure to have multiple dates for those meetings in your plan. Conversely, check with facilities about their flexibility in case you need to change the date of your meeting. And don't just ensure the availability of a venue. Also, be sure about the availability on any required equipment. Make sure that if you need a laptop projector, one is available.

Size

So, how big a facility do you need? A small meeting room, or a large auditorium? In addition to pure size, make sure that wherever the center of attention is during the meeting — speaker at a podium or demonstration in the center of the room — each attendee has a good view of the "action" with no obstructions. If the meeting is intended to be a lengthy affair, be sure that the venue allows for people to move about easily with no bottlenecks.

Facilities

Once you've narrowed down to a set of potential locations, you'll need to ensure that those locations have the facilities necessary to conduct your meeting. Some things to consider:

- Does the facility have breakout rooms where small groups can gather to work?
- Are restrooms adequate and nearby?
- Does the facility have sufficient whiteboards, projectors, etc.?
- How about wi-fi access? Is it available?
- Can the facility supply a meal?
- Is the facility well ventilated and climate controlled? Air-conditioning?

Cost

For your standard association meetings, you're probably looking for no-cost facilities. Most groups try to meet at a school, a church's meeting hall or maybe a local fraternal association meeting house. But for a special meeting, a clinic perhaps, the topic of cost and budget looms large. Most obviously, the location you choose must fall within budget. Some things you might want to explore: Do they offer discounts? Can you negotiate the price? Are there hidden costs? Read the small print!

You might also want to determine when payment is due. Is it one-time after the event? Or is it on installment, half in a deposit immediately, and half when the event concludes? Those kinds of things won't affect your overall budget, but can dramatically impact your cash flow. And finally, find out what the location's cancellation policy is. If you need to cancel, how much advance notice is required and will you receive a full or partial refund?

Most of the above questions can be answered with a little bit of research, legwork and maybe by a visit to the location's website. For a special meeting, before you sign on the dotted line, you might want ask the opinion of other groups that have held meetings there to get their opinion. And especially if you've never used a particular facility before, you might wish to visit personally to get a first-hand impression of the layout, suitability and, very importantly, the attitude of the staff.

When all is said and done you want to ensure that you and your membership get the most out of your meeting and that the venue you choose has the potential to add to rather than detract from the experience of those attending. Take the time to do your homework and choose carefully.

Bob Masucci is an official from Clinton Township, N.J., with 30 years of officiating experience. □

► How to . . .

Integrate New Officials

It isn't easy these days to find new officials. So when you get rookies in your group, the last thing you want to do is alienate them or make them feel adrift by themselves. Here are some tips to ensure you keep newcomers coming back for more.

Step 1 — Welcome them to the group

If a new member is attending his or her first meeting, make sure you greet that individual as soon as possible at arrival. Introduce the new member to other members as well. Make sure the individual feels as included as possible. Related to that, make sure the newbie is given a copy of the association's constitution and bylaws, as well as a directory of the association.

New officials should also be informed about registering with the state and taking required exams. New members should be provided a list of assigning authorities and be told the necessary steps for being assigned to games.

Step 2 — Keep the material simple

Many groups have separate training sessions for first- or second-year officials. As a result, the material isn't over their heads and they become more comfortable with the basics of officiating. It also give them an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable asking questions. If your association isn't big enough to provide a completely separate training session, give new members time following the normal session to get together and ask questions to a designated veteran.

Step 3 — Offer mentoring

A formal mentoring program is a great benefit associations can provide to new officials. Even if your association doesn't have a formal program in place, veterans in your group can take newcomers under their wings in their first year. Assign a veteran to a new official on day one. It should be someone who is willing to watch the official work and possibly even work a game or two with the newer officials. The veteran should be available to the new official any time for guidance and support.

Step 4 — Give them opportunities

Depending on your assigning procedures, you may have an opportunity to get the rookie onto the court or field for a scrimmage or two. Whenever possible, find opportunities for the newcomers to apply what they have learned. It is important, however, to have veterans on hand either working with the rookies or observing so they aren't flying without a safety net. Mentors or observers must provide feedback to the new officials. Keep it as positive as possible but don't fail to point out what areas need attention.

The Pulse
Local Association News Nationwide

Saginaw Umpires Work All-Star Game

Four members of the Saginaw Athletic Officials Association umpired Michigan's best high school baseball players as they competed in the July 3 Michigan High School Baseball Coaches Association All-Star game. Scott Helmka, Luke Schiege, Dennis Wildey and Monte Stewart, all of Saginaw, worked the game. The West team won, 16-6.

Umpires Association Presents Sportsmanship Award

The Nassau County Umpires Association honored Coach Rich Smith and the Garden City (N.Y.) varsity baseball team with its annual Sportsmanship Award in June at its awards banquet. The award is voted upon by approximately 250 umpires.

Umpires Association President Recognized by AHSAA

Bruce Mathews, who serves as the president of the Southeast Alabama Baseball Umpires Association, was recognized as the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) Official of the Year at the Aug. 5 AHSAA Officials Awards Banquet at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel.

"I am very humbled by it," Mathews, who has been officiating baseball games for 15 years said. "I am honored. I've been (officiating) a long time, I love it."

Mathews was also selected as the Southeast District Baseball Official of the Year, which put him in the running for the state award.

Fulmer Inducted into AOA Hall of Fame

Tommy Fulmer, Greenbrier, Ark., was inducted posthumously into the Arkansas Officials Association (AOA) Hall of Fame during a banquet July 14 held in conjunction with the Arkansas High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

He was a member of the Arkansas Activities Association, AOA, NFHS, NASO and the Gulf South Conference. He worked numerous high school basketball and football all-star games as well as regional and state championships. He later advanced to the collegiate level with the Gulf South Conference and professional level with Arena Football 2 and the Arena Football League.

SOURCES: THE SAGINAW (MICH.) NEWS, GARDEN CITY PATCH, TROY (ALA.) MESSENGER, LOG CABIN DEMOCRAT

ON . . . Timely Meetings

Association leaders are often urged to start meetings on time. A way to assure people show up on time is to open with the "meat" of an agenda. If people come late and find that they've missed a vital element, they are more likely to be on time afterward.

Report Writing Continued from page 1

If it didn't happen, don't include it.

Fundamentally, that's simple enough — don't lie. Once an official is made out to be a prevaricator, he or she will never make dog catcher after that. But let's adjust the scenario to something more likely. If the official has been working a soccer match, felt an object hit the back of his head and turned around to see only number 7 standing there, he doesn't have to pussyfoot: OK, he doesn't know for a fact number 7 hit him, but the description in the report can lead circumstantially to, "Who else could it have been?" That's OK to say, but some officials wrongly believe they have to produce the bullet and not the smoking gun, as it were.

If it did happen, say how it happened.

Context is everything. I like to tell the story of another soccer referee I worked with who sent off a captain for saying, "It's a f***ing beautiful day today, isn't it?" at the coin toss. The incident report said, "Number 7 was sent off before the match started for directing a profanity at me." OK, the fellow was from a culture where swearing was never justified, so we can see his side. But the reader of the report has to understand the situation before making a judgment, and will do one of two things in a case like that: Investigate what he or she's reading, if something doesn't seem to add up, or reject the report if it seems unlikely. It's possible to write a report in enough detail so that the reader can make sense of it, without putting in so much detail that it crosses the line into hyperbole or renders the reader unconscious.

If something happened that might not make the writer look good, include it anyway if it's pertinent.

I don't think you ever want to write, "I was fighting the strike zone all afternoon, I admit, but I still felt I had to eject number 12 for asking if I was related to Stevie Wonder." Most readers will get the drift from the second part of the sentence and understand that number 12 didn't speak up merely because he was late for dinner. That's never an excuse for what he said. On the flip side, if you've warned a

manager or coach previously that you won't stand for him whistling *I Just Called to Say I Love You* every time you call a borderline strike at the knees, it might take more than to just write, "I ejected number 12 for whistling." If there's a progressive situation, make sure the reader understands it, in order to illustrate the cause.

If there was emotion involved, let someone else justify it.

In court, a judge doesn't have to like/dislike a defendant; merely assure that justice is done. If an official is getting a tough time from the visitors' bench, most people understand it's fairly common these days. I always have to a laugh when every catch/no catch call is responded to with, "I'm going to send the video to the state!" by the disenfranchised.

Like the judge, the report writer has to place him- or herself above the fray and let the facts speak for themselves. "I ejected the Tech head coach for a second unsportsmanlike conduct penalty," is often all anyone needs to know. Leave them wondering what Coach didn't understand after he got the first flag rather than why the official made him so mad as to get the second.

Most of all, advise report writers to clearly describe what rule was broken and by whom. No matter how eloquently that is accomplished, there will still be times when the report is rejected and we just have to move on. We should never advise our members to push the case but, if a league develops a pattern of not doing what's right, we always have the option to stop working for them. Before it comes to that, you might consider it practical to offer to proofread reports before members submit them. That way, you can avoid nasty word choices — or worse — that help nobody with a striped shirt look good.

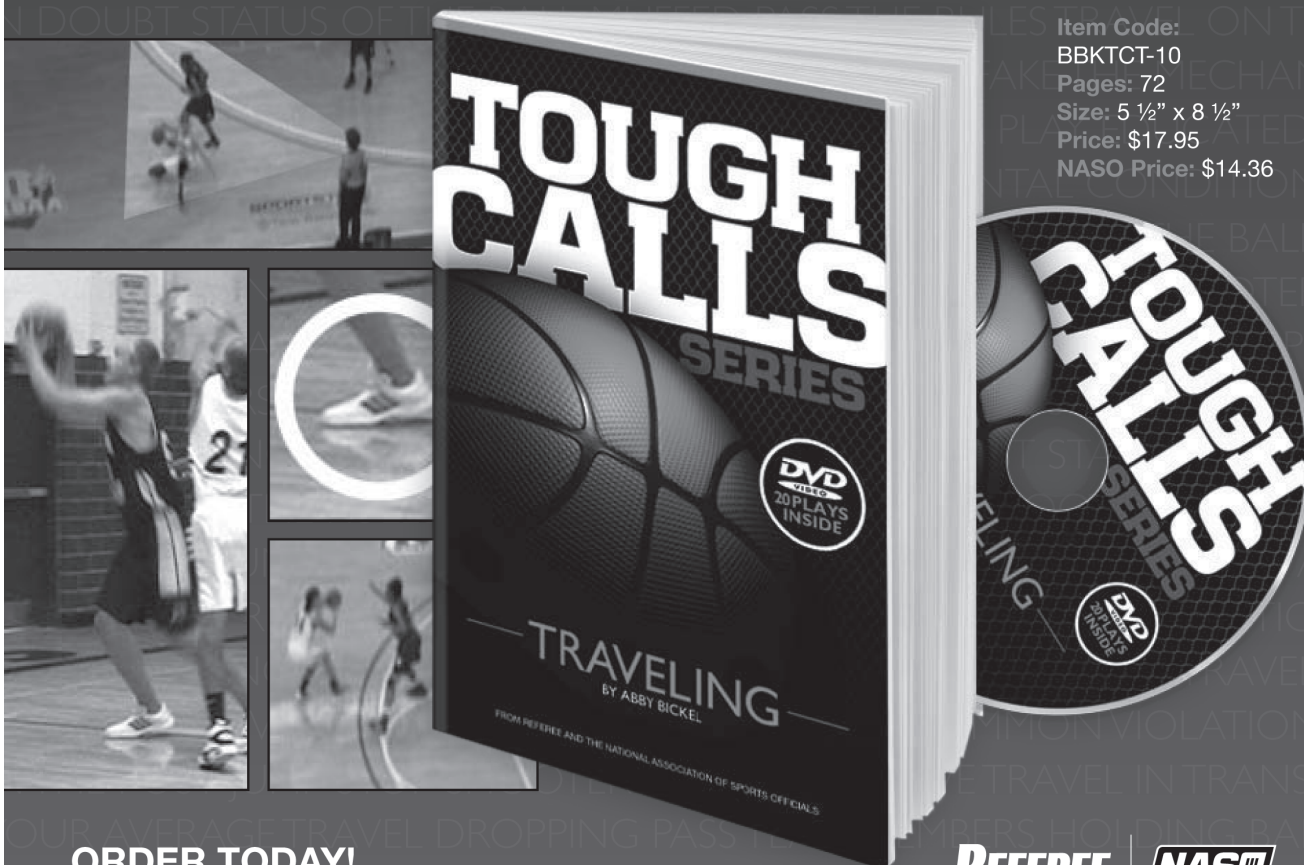
Stick with what happened rather than what you want to have happen and report writing will have many happy endings.

Tim Sloan, Davenport, Iowa, officiates high school football, basketball and volleyball. He is a former college football and soccer official. □

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Your Rights and Responsibilities

How Can We Remove an Officer?

By Patrick Rosenow

Q: The president of our association has broken the group's bylaws and has agreed to a suspension from officiating, per our disciplinary procedures. However, the rest of the board would like him to step down from his leadership position in the association as well, but he refuses. Our bylaws don't cover removing an officer. How should we move forward?

A: The good news is that you do have bylaws that apparently include a member disciplinary process. The bad news is they don't include officer removal procedures. (That's something you'll want to fix when your crisis is over.) You could try taking one more look in the bylaws to make sure there isn't a way to make the argument that he can no longer remain as president. For example, are officers required to be "members in good standing"? If so, you might consider making the argument that suspended officials are not "in good standing" and he is ineligible to be an officer of the association.

However, if that's not the case and you're sure there's nothing in the

bylaws that would allow you to take the position that he automatically lost the presidency with his suspension, you need to decide how badly you want to have him removed. Since the bylaws apparently are simply silent on the subject and don't specifically permit or prohibit the removal of an officer for cause, you'll need to look at any state law that may apply. That means consulting with an attorney with some competency in the area of private association law.

In the absence of specific bylaws on the subject, some states allow for an officer or member to be removed by a vote of the same group that elected him. In fact, many states actually limit the power to remove an officer to the same group that elected him or her in the first place. Assuming that the entire membership was involved in electing the president, the entire membership would need to vote for his removal.

That may not be a very attractive option, particularly given the reason for his removal. Depending on his term length and your meeting schedule, it

member information [micp] consultation program

NASO members who have questions concerning situations pertaining to their officiating now have access to the Member Information and Consultation Program (MICP). MICP provides members with articles or information on specific topics. NASO can also put members in touch with an expert to discuss officiating-related information up to three times a year through MICP.

might be easier to ride out the storm. On the other hand, if he understands that the option is a recall election during which his suspension and the reasons for it will be discussed, perhaps he'll agree to step down. If that's not the case, you've got a tough choice to make. If you do go that route, make sure you get with an attorney, because he sounds like he'd be inclined to get one of his own and that's not going to be good for anyone except the lawyers!

Patrick Rosenow, Mandeville, La., is a retired Air Force judge who now sits as a federal labor administrative judge. He has officiated basketball at the high school, college and international levels. This article is for informational purposes and is not legal advice. □

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