

Do You Need a Chief Report Officer?

By Brent Killackey

High school sports officials usually get all sorts of training on rules and mechanics. But when it comes to filling out game reports on ejections, injuries and other game incidents, they're often flying blind.

Filling out game reports falls among the defined duties for sports officials, and it's a significant one given the impact the reports can have for not only an official's future assignments, but also for their potential for legal liability.

"You have to be aware that these reports are very frequently utilized in litigation and other proceedings where the official or the association, or both, could get hurt," said Alan Goldberger, an attorney and former sports official from Clifton, N.J., who wrote the book *Sports Officiating: A Legal Guide*.

With such importance, it behooves officials associations to make sure members know best practices for filling out game reports. Additionally, it's a good idea to designate a chief report officer, someone

who can review game reports when that's permitted and serve as a resource to members.

In a basketball association that Goldberger belongs to, the secretary reviews all game reports before they're submitted. What's the rule of thumb for what should be included? "The key is that you give only the information that is required by the report," Goldberger said.

The report should state the facts related to the specific ejection, injury or incident and leave out speculation, sarcasm and personal commentary. Additionally, except in cases where a sport's rules call for warnings — such as a sideline warning in football — any references to "warnings" or matters that didn't rise to the point of resulting in a foul, don't belong in a game report. Those "warnings" can be misconstrued as an official failing to take appropriate action earlier in the game and contributing to the situation that ultimately prompted the report.

"We don't want to indicate ever in a report how we saw a foul committed and we gave a warning instead of calling the foul," Goldberger said. "That's no good."

In addition to guarding against excessive, unnecessary comments in a game report, officials should make sure to include enough factual details. For example, if an official wrote, "No. 20 was ejected for cursing," the report would fall short. "You need to spit out the words that were used," Goldberger said.

A game report officer can be helpful to officials as a friendly point of review — someone making sure a game report includes everything it should and nothing it shouldn't.

If there's ever a question about the content of a game report, the game report officer should get outside help.

"The officer who does this, if he or she has any doubt, needs to pick up the phone and get legal help," Goldberger said.

Ultimately, the game report officer doesn't make changes to the reports. Rather, it's about having a conversation with the official about what items should be included and what may be extraneous, Goldberger said. It's still the official's report; he or she is still the signatory.

Goldberger said all game reports should be screened if the rules of the group permit it. He recognizes that's not always possible. Some states require officials fill out the report before leaving the game site.

"There was no opportunity for screening there, unless you were smart enough to get someone on the phone," Goldberger said.

In those cases where a game report officer can review all reports, it helps protect the individual and the association.

"If you're not screening your reports and you're not getting legal help when you need it, you're not really protecting your people and you're not really protecting your association," Goldberger said.

Brent Killackey is a Referee assistant editor and high school baseball umpire. ☐

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A GAME REPORT

Any high school game report should include the following essential elements:

- » The game site, date and time of the incident.
- » The names of the major parties involved (you, your partners, the schools involved and the head coaches).
- » The game situation at the time of the incident, such as the time left in the game, the score, etc.
- » A detailed description of the incident itself, including the names and numbers of everyone involved in the actual incident. Player numbers are essential for fight situations. If it was an injury incident, make sure you get the names of anyone administering medical aid.
- » Any unusual conditions at the game, such as the weather and light conditions if it was an outdoor game and the field or court conditions. Those notations are especially important in game postponements and injury situations.

The report should not include:

- » Vague statements (instead, include the relevant, specific details)
- » Speculation (stick with the known facts; don't guess, either — if discrepancies are revealed later, it can call into question other elements of the report)
- » Sarcasm, accusations, opinions on deserved punishments, etc. (leave it out; the report shouldn't be about the official, it should focus on the incident.)
- » Past experiences with the team, coach or player (stick to the incident in that particular game.)
- » Earlier incidents in the game that did not warrant a foul or action (again, stick with the details of the specific incident that prompted completion of a game report.)