

The Dos and Don'ts of Conduct Reports (taken from NASO Locker Room)

Misconduct reports – sometimes referred to as incident reports – should be sent to proper authorities, even if it's not required. Report any ejection, flagrant foul, unsportsmanlike conduct or unruly fan behavior. By sending in a report, you're accomplishing two important things: You're taking the time to write down facts immediately after the incident and you're covering your bases by reporting it.

Sometimes, officials look at writing reports as a laborious chore. If the report never gets done, those officials risk forgetting key information if they're required to reconstruct an incident much later. Equally important, those officials are doing an injustice to other officials. If you don't identify a coach in a misconduct report, the proper authorities may not know Coach Smith is a problem.

For example, let's say Coach Smith received two unsportsmanlike fouls in two different games, neither of which was reported by officials. Later in the season, Coach Smith picks up a third unsportsmanlike foul. That time, however, the official did his job and reported it to the proper authorities. The governing body thinks that is Coach Smith's first incident, but it is actually his third. The proper authorities were not able to track Coach Smith's pattern of poor behavior because the officials failed to file reports. Those officials hurt themselves and others.

Game reports. Game reports are often treated differently from misconduct reports, but are equally important. In some conferences or leagues, game reports are required from officials after every contest. Those reports look for patterns of behavior and also are used to specify player injuries, etc.

Game reports don't always have to have a negative tone, either. Many high school state associations are encouraging officials to note positive experiences and good sportsmanship and send reports to their offices.

The specifics. There are a few givens that should appear in each report:

1. Date and time of the incident.
2. The game site.
3. The names of all the officials involved, plus the names of the teams and, if possible, the names of the head coaches.
4. Weather conditions (if played outdoors).
5. Field or court conditions.
6. Light conditions, especially if the game was played outdoors and light played a factor (for example, a softball game finishing at dusk).

7. Game situation at time of incident (for example, the inning or time left in the period).
8. Detailed description of incident or injury, including if medical attention was given and by whom.
9. If possible, names or numbers of players involved.
10. Additional notes or diagrams if necessary. You may want to include things that lead up to the incident, if you feel they are related.

Writing strategy. The tone you set in your report is very important. It speaks to your credibility. Stick to the facts. Don't make hyperbolic statements that can't possibly be proven; "He approached the player *with anger in his eyes* and punched him." Avoid those drastic conclusions and you'll gain credibility.

Avoid using vague terms. "The coach lost total control of himself." What does that mean? It's too vague and subject to interpretation and criticism. Only relate what you observe. Don't bring up hearsay or past experiences, unless they're directly related to the incident.

Don't speculate. "The players' actions are a direct result of the coach's lack of control." That's not only a bold statement, but how does an official know that the coach's actions lead directly to the players' actions? Those are dangerous speculations that usually can't be proven.

Avoid recommending courses of action, like, "The coach should be suspended for his actions." The official's job is to relate the facts, not pass judgment. Let the appropriate authorities handle the punishment. Also, don't threaten. "If someone doesn't stop this team from acting like it does, I'm not going to work any more of its games. Plus, I'll spread the word at my local officials' association and soon no one will work." By threatening, you're credibility dissolves. Keep in mind that what you're reporting is likely a bit outside of the norm during a game. There's no need to report on every cross word you have with a coach or player. When in doubt, however, file the report.

Jot down pertinent information as soon as possible after the game. Coordinate your thoughts with your partner(s). The incident is fresh; the more you wait the more you'll forget. Bring a note pad and pen to each game so you're ready if you need it. Tape recorders are also handy tools.

After you've written the report, let it sit for a while and think about something else. Consider having another respected official read it to provide input. Then, re-read the letter as if you were the person receiving it. Does it clearly convey what happened? Is it credible? Does it have the proper tone? If yes, you're ready to send it. If not, fix what's necessary. Keep a copy of your report. You may be later asked to clarify your statements or reconstruct the incident. Also, follow up with the governing body. You have a right to know what action was taken following an incident.