

This is a delicate subject and one I've been hesitant to delve into. However, today's world means that the situation will get worse if we don't address it now.

Simply put, as difficult as it may be, officiating activities are topics that should NOT be a part of social media postings – Twitter, Facebook, and the like.

I know that the authors of the vast majority of these posts are not intending to be problematic. For most of those posts, the tricky part is in looking at what was not said at that time or what was not said at another time. If you're "delighted to be in Dallas" to work Junior Nationals, does that mean when you don't post about being in Louisville for a qualifier that you're not delighted to be there and are not looking forward to working? Officials should blend into the woodwork, but social media posts call attention to us.

On the collegiate side of the house, I suspect most assigners would not be happy with a proclamation about working at XYZ school or the opportunity to work a match between two conference rivals; you need to just show up and do your job (well and professionally) and leave without calling attention to yourself or other officials.

Remember a few things:

- It isn't what is said or what is meant to be said that matters, it is how the words could be interpreted. With social media, you have no control over how other people interpret and pass along your posts; the larger the circle of people you share with, the less control you have over the process.
- As an official, your profile is raised beyond "a fan" or "just a person in the crowd." It may be painful and you may not like it, but when you're an official, the volleyball community expects a higher level of professionalism from you. Territory that should be avoided

includes publicly or semi-publicly saying things about another official, coach, team, club, institution, tournament director, etc.

I can hear the hue and cry now:

- “It’s private and between friends!”
- “I’m not saying anything bad.”
- “It’s my right. Freedom of speech.”

“It’s private”

Well, it’s not.

If you think such posts are, you’re mistaken. It’s on the web and conversations are open to friends of friends. Further, it’s all too easy to forward web pages, copy and paste into email, etc.

“I’m not saying anything bad”

Really? Are you sure?

How would you feel about having these comments and/or conversations occur courtside, and not just to one person but EVERYONE?

“Volleyball tournament in Big City. These parents are ridiculous. The fire marshal has told us that the aisles have to be kept open so no chairs can be set up there. Do these parents listen? NO. Wish the fire marshal would come down and tell them himself.

MY COMMENT: How would it play if this post was seen by the fire marshal or convention center personnel? What kind of light would it place on the tournament? Think it would

help the tournament organizers' negotiations in the future?

“Talking about the BigU match? Well that was a nightmare match... I stunk!”

MY COMMENT: Would you like to have a coach see that before you worked your next match? How about a prospective assigner? How about a partner you've never worked with before?

“Officiated a great game last night at PowerhouseU.”

MY COMMENT: Great that you feel good about it, but doesn't it open the door for a comment from someone who disagrees? What happened to officials being anonymous? What does that say about any other match you worked where you DIDN'T pat yourself on the back?

“Long weekend of reffing volleyball. Am tired. Why do I do this to myself? Glad I was offered to work from home today.”

Friend: I saw you reffing this weekend. Wish I had you on my daughter's matches. You're definitely one of the better ones out there.”

MY COMMENT: A great example of a seemingly innocuous post that opens the door to posts from others that may take things down a dangerous path. What does it say about the other officials who were there that didn't earn that praise?

“Tonight was not fun, first time ever I did not enjoy volleyball.

“Sometimes this vb reffing gig is just not fun.”

Friend: “Static from a coach?”

Original author: “Not the coach”

MY COMMENT: Again, do you want that known pre-match? Further, the author's indication that it wasn't the coach could

have meant the author was unhappy with him/herself. Then again, it could be dissatisfaction with his/her partner. Bottom line, not material that should be in the public/semipublic domain.

“Working the 18's today, much better level of play.”

MY COMMENT: What does that say about the official's opinion of the previous days or the next day, when the assignment is 14s or 15s? If you were a 15s coach and saw him/her coming, how would you feel? It also sends the message to other officials that the only “good level” is 18s.

A few years ago, a collegiate assigner told me of a situation where an official made disparaging comments about a university's volleyball program to a friend while they were at a dry cleaners. Unfortunately for the official, the dry cleaner also happened to be the athletic director's dry cleaner and the comments made their way back to the coach. How do you think that worked out for the official?

Are these social media posts significantly different? I don't think so.

“It's my right to post what I'd like”

You certainly may. But, just like the real world, when your private life is no longer private and spills over into your business or public life, there may be consequences that are not pleasing. College kids of yesterday are regretting posting those compromising photos from the frat/sorority bender, as employers choose to pass on hiring them. It IS your right to post, but your reputation and opportunities may take a hit.

If you find yourself wondering, “Is this okay?” – It's probably not.

Thanks for reading and considering,

Steve

Steven Webster
NERVA Officials chair
steve@srwebster.com