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ARTICLE: AN "INSIDER'S" GUIDE TO THE LEGAL LIABILITY OF SPORTS CONTEST OFFICIALS

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Ten Suggestions for Sports Contest Officials (SCO)

The following specific guidelines are offered as suggestions to the SCO in carrying out his or her responsibilities:

(1) Know the rules - especially those that deal with the safety of participants and basic game control. There is no substitute for a thorough and complete knowledge of all rules that relate to player safety! Frequent reviews must be undertaken by individual officials and officials' associations in order to ensure that SCOs are well-versed in the areas of player safety, sportsmanship, and game control.

(2) Know the specific responsibilities of game officials regarding player equipment, situs inspection, and any special circumstances (lightening, rain, thunderstorms, deteriorating field conditions, provisions if a fight breaks out on the field, and aspects of crowd control) during a contest. Carry out pre-game responsibilities (checking equipment and the field) with precision and care and in full view of responsible parties. Have any problems corrected prior to the start of the contest. Let everyone know that you are safety conscious and that safety of the participants is your first priority.

(3) Carry out a physical checklist of what you are supposed to be looking for and perform your duties carefully according to that schedule. For example: check helmets; check bats; check for jewelry; check shoes for the proper length of studs; check lacrosse sticks for the proper length; check boxing gloves for hardness or sharp projections. As an SCO, you need to be specifically aware of the specialized safety issues involved in your sport.

(4) During the actual contest or event, be watchful regarding issues of player safety - especially the condition of equipment specifically designed for safety (baseball and football helmets; mouth protectors; shin guards and pads; etc.).

(5) Do not let players participate who have failed to meet safety requirements. Improper or missing equipment means "no participation." Period! Do not play matches or games on or in venues that fail to meet safety requirements.

(6) If an injury should take place during a contest, generally do not take steps to treat any injury yourself. The responsibility for diagnosing, moving, transporting, and treating an injured player is that of a competent medical professional, under the direction of or with the cooperation of the coach, athletic director, or designated athletic trainer. Insist that competent medical help be called in to deal with an injury, and insist that a player not be moved in any close case, except by professional medical help or by members of a qualified athletic training staff. Simply remember: No good deed goes unpunished!

(7) Make careful personal note of the injury for yourself immediately after the contest, preferably at the contest site, and secure the input of any fellow official(s). If an injury requires 'outside' medical attention or a significant stoppage of time, you may wish to inform a designated individual in your officials' association of the basic facts - but avoid any personal characterizations or commentary!

(8) Do not speak to parents or make any public statements to the press in case of a serious injury.

(9) Encourage your officials' associations to discuss and treat the issues of safety and injury seriously at meetings, seminars, discussions, etc.

(10) If possible, insist that your officials' associations carry a general malpractice insurance policy and that each official be covered by a personal malpractice insurance policy that will protect the organization and the individual official from personal liability in case of a negligence or professional malpractice suit.