**Social Media Policies and Guidelines**

The following information is from resources, such as but not limited to, Oregon, North Carolina, Texas, New Mexico State Associations, West Coast Association and some suggested guidelines developed by the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO). It is our hope this information will help you with your decisions and involvement with social media. Should your board decide to develop a social media policy or guidelines for your officials, this information should help you.

Social media includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort via digital applications or on the Internet, including any social network, blog, podcast, journal or diary, personal web site, web bulletin board or a chat room, as well as any other form of electronic communication. The most common forms of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Social networking sites can be wonderful communications tools. But there can be unintended consequences if they are used improperly. Because of their unique standing, officials need to be particularly careful when using those sites. Here are some reminders and guidelines:

* Any public comments about coaches, teams, players, and other game officials is prohibited. We believe that following this policy will work in the best interest of the official by limiting opportunities to put oneself in unflattering situations.
* Always consider social media communications as general public—even if created with private intentions. If you are going to use social media in any form, consider your communication may be read by anyone at any time. Communications among officials for learning purposes should be done privately and not through the use of social media.
* Think twice before you post. If there is anything in your post that could be construed as a criticism of officials, of officials' decisions/calls (whatever the level), or of schools, coaches or athletes...it's better left unsent.
* Don’t post details about other people's assignments, to playoff games for instance, until that information has been officially released.
* Do not engage in specific play and or ruling evaluation/commentary, whether it be of a game you worked, one that you witnessed or in general about the impact of officials in any sporting event.
* Don’t post anything relating to the schools you have worked or will work. It calls your objectivity into question.
* It is unprofessional for officials to offer rules clarifications, rules interpretations, evaluations or commentaries through these medium without the expressed directive from their respective boards or the state high school association. This includes games you worked, witnessed or heard about.
* You are solely responsible for what you post online.
* Never misrepresent yourself or SDCFOA by making false or misleading comments or posts. All statements must be true and accurate.
* Social Media “connections” with coaches, athletic directors, players, sports media, or any other participants in the sport in which you officiate shall be avoided. Current connections that potentially violate the SDCFOA Conflict of Interest should be reconsidered.
* Do resist the temptation to "defend" individual officials, or the officiating avocation in general. Rarely are these discussions productive and even more rarely do people change their minds about opinions they’ve delivered via social media. There is very little potential value in these discussions, and often they lead to even further negativity.
* Don’t initiate contact with players, coaches or administrators over social media, even a compliment about exemplary sportsmanship, for example, could be misconstrued end impact your perceived impartiality. More importantly: initiating contact with high school age student athletes may be interpreted the wrong way, regardless of your intentions, it is reasonable (and courteous) to acknowledge comments that are initiated by someone else, but responses should be brief and professional.

Accountability and integrity should always be our guiding principles. Jeopardizing your impartiality or professionalism should never be a part of your actions or posts.

Don’t operate under the false pretense that the First Amendment or "what I do on social media is my business" will protect you. While that may be your legal defense in a court of law it neither will protect you from consequences to your officiating career that arise from making bad social media choices. If inappropriate use or abuse is brought to our attention, we will have to deal with each of these as individual disciplinary reviews.

**Consequences of Violating the SDCFOA Social Media Policy:**

SDCFOA respects the right of its members to participate in social networking sites and does not discourage self-publishing or self-expression. Members are expected to follow these guidelines and policies to protect SDCFOA, yourself and your privacy. Inappropriate activity that is in conflict with this document’s guidelines may result in disciplinary action in accordance with SDCFOA by-laws.