

Social media such as Facebook, SnapChat, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter can be great tools for reconnecting with old friends, staying in touch with family and even networking with colleagues. While there is so much positive that can come out of these sites, we also have to be mindful of their very public nature. Here are some guidelines for sports officials who use social media (chat rooms, forums and social media pages):

DO'S

- 1) Do use social media as a means for sharing information with members of your local association. Some local groups in New Mexico have created Association pages and have their group members on their friend lists. This can be a great mechanism for information dissemination and can also be a page for recognition of group members and to give potential new members a first look at becoming an official.
- 2) Do use social media as a recruitment tool. Given the median age of most users of social media, it can be a great means of getting new members into the avocation.
- 3) Do remember to keep things positive if you post information on these sites. If you come home from a game wherein everything went smoothly, it is okay to generically post about it. For example, you could say, "I had a great softball game tonight. Both teams displayed great sportsmanship. Reminds me why I umpire." Try to avoid posting specifics about your schedule.
- 4) Do be aware that posts on social media are visible to the general public. Even if you limit access to your page to friends, it is likely that your post will be viewed by someone beyond the circle of people you intended to see it.

DON'TS

- 1) Do not post any disparaging comments about players, coaches, schools, fans or fellow officials online. Someone will see what you said and you will only cause problems for yourself. I have already spoken with several officials who have said less-than-positive things about coaches, players, assignors and colleagues and I continue to advise against those practices. In a state the size of ours, even if the person at whom your remark is intended doesn't read it, someone who knows him/her will. You can't un-ring the bell. Once it is in writing, it can and will come back to haunt you.
- 2) Do not advertise where you are officiating at any time. We appreciate the pride that you have being an official but we discourage you from saying where you are officiating and when (i.e., "I'm excited to be officiating tonight between School A and School B). If everyone knows where you are working, it opens the door for undue influence and perceptions that undue influence existed. If you post about your games after the fact, pictures are fine and recognizing your crew is fine but do not talk specifics about the teams and/or coaches involved in the contest.
- 3) DON'T post anything relating to the schools you have worked or will work. It calls your objectivity into question.
- 4) Do not be a "cheerleader" for any school, team, coach or player on these sites. Remember that perceptions of bias are dangerous as officials. We are a small state and many of us have friendships with coaches and/or have relatives to participate. If you post a picture of yourself wearing the shirt of your alma mater online and then call a game for that school the following week, you may be setting the stage for allegations of bias by that school's opponent.
- 5) Do not post specifics about games, whether good or bad. If you want to give kudos to a team, send the information to the NMAA office so we can properly commend them. If you post something about a team or a coach by name, it can again lead to perceptions of favoritism toward or bias against that team in future games. We have had officials post comments about poor conduct by coaches and players (by name) and have had to deal with the repercussions of these comments. If you feel like what you are going to say may be inappropriate, it probably is.
- 6) Do not start posting online after you have had a rough game. Emotions may start to flow a little too much and it is better to cool off before you start venting your frustrations online. If you have had a rough game, talk to your spouse, call a friend, call your mentor or call our office. Don't let it all out on your Facebook page.
- 7) Do not use social media to criticize state or local association policies, assigning practices, etc.

Take a common sense approach to posting information on these sites and always be mindful that what you post in a public arena, whether positive or negative, is out in cyberspace for the world to see. Conduct yourself in the same ethical manner that you would in any other venue and remember that you are representing yourself, your local association and the NMOA.

NOTE: Any violation of the NMOA Social Media Policy will fall under the Level II Fines/Sanctions in the NMOA Constitution and By-Laws (unprofessional conduct or unethical conduct and practices) and the offending official will be subject to a \$50 fine and/or possible suspension, as determined by the Commissioner of Officials.