

# CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

# CIAC COACHES UPDATE

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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2014 

January 2014 Volume IV Issue I Dr. Bob Lehr, Editor

Belated best wishes from the CIAC Staff for a healthy and prosperous 2014! We hope the new year brings a sense of hope and renewed spirit, and a few more W's for you and your team.

This month's "Update" was written by Fred Balsamo, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors. It was originally published in the NIAAA publication "Interscholastic Athletic Administration". The article gives solid information about an issue facing every high school coach and every high school director - electronic media and how it can be managed to avoid the problems that can arise with its improper use. Please take a few minutes and read it. I am certain that several of our coaches have experienced difficult issues with one of the media formats; hopefully this article will be a benefit to them as well as our other high school and middle school coaches.



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*This year's Michael H. Savage Spirit of Sport winner is **Tyler Mauriello** of Branford High School. Tyler will be honored at the CIAC Scholar-Athlete banquet in May.*

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**Bob Lehr - Editor**

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# ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATORS SHOULD CAUTION COACHES WHEN UTILIZING ELECTRONIC MEDIA

by Fred Balsamo, CMAA



There are still those of us that resist the electronic invasion and struggle sending a simple text message but for the modern coach the use electronic media to communicate has become standard practice. Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Skype and many other similar programs have all found their way into our athletic programs across the country. The uses of these mediums can easily become a double edged sword for a coach. On one hand the ability for coaches to instantly communicate with the players and parents on their teams can be a tremendous benefit but it can also be a nightmare. The use of electronic media without some caution can make coaches too easily accessible, can expose coaches to student behaviors they may not want to know about and can have coaches caught up in accusations of inappropriate behavior. The information highway works both ways. While it's a convenience for coaches to be able to contact parents and athletes it also works in reverse and allows those same student-athletes and any unreasonable parents easy access to the coach. Coaches who have students added to their social media site as a "friend" can be exposed to activity they are morally and legally bound to report, even if it is not one of their athletes. More importantly, students that are considered "friends" on a coach's social media site can be exposed to actions and pictures which may seem harmless and could easily be deemed inappropriate. It would be prudent for Athletic Directors to take some time in a pre-season meeting to find out exactly which coaches on their staff already utilize electronic media and to discuss the following appropriate methods for their use.

## Texting, Emailing, Etc.

A coach should not be communicating to any student-athlete one on one. Sending out a text or email blitz to everyone on the team is a great way to instantly communicate with the team but coaches should refrain from engaging in a one on one discussion via text or on the computer. It is recommended that someone of authority, such as the athletic director or another coach, be copied on all responses or communications to an individual student-athlete. This insures that someone else is seeing both sides of the communication and nothing can be taken out of context.



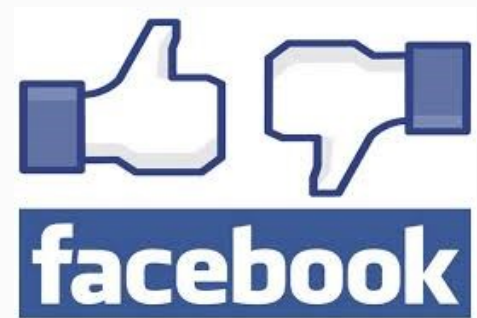
## Cell Phone Use by Student Athletes

The cell phone is a very powerful and useful tool in communication. Just about everyone has a cell phone and most cell phones have a variety of options which makes them all portable computers as well as a camera. Athletic departments should establish guidelines for the use of cell phones by students. At minimal athletic departments should ban cell phone usage in the locker room and during practice. We would never allow anyone to bring a camera into our locker rooms and we should hold that same standard here. Cell phones at practice can be a distraction and can be disruptive to the harmony of the team. Parents and student-athletes should understand that restrictions on cell phones are for their own safety and protection.

## Using Social Media Sites (Facebook)

Before we explore the use of social media sites it is important we understand how a person's first amendment rights may come into play. Coaches and athletes may think their right to free speech provides them with a blanket protection on what they do on their own personal page on their own time. Everyone is afforded protection under the first amendment, however, when a coach is communicating with the students-athletes they are subject to oversight by the school district even if the communication is done on their own personal time. School districts can regulate the use of social & electronic media by employees, including personal use of media when such use:

- Interferes with the work of the district,
- is used to harass coworkers,
- creates a hostile environment,
- breaches confidentiality of employees,
- disrupts the work of the district,
- harms the reputation of the school,
- violates the law or board of education policy.



These following “best practices” should be established by school districts and should be utilized by coaches to help guide them in using social media sites such as Facebook:

1. *If any coach seeks to use electronic or social media sites as an educational tool or in relation to extracurricular activities or programs of the school district, the coach must seek and obtain the permission of his/her supervisor prior to setting up the site.*
2. *If a coach wishes to use Facebook or other similar social media sites to communicate*

meetings, activities, games, responsibilities, announcements, etc., for a school-based club or an official sports team, the coach must also comply with the following rules:

- a. The coach must set up the team as a group list which will be “closed and moderated”.
  - b. Members will NOT be established as “friends”, but as members of the group list.  
**NEVER add a student to your personal page.**
  - c. Anyone who has access to the communications conveyed through the site may only gain access by the permission of the coach. Persons desiring to access the page may join only after the coach invites them and allows them to join.
  - d. Parents shall be permitted to access any site that their child has been invited to join.
  - e. Access to the site may only be permitted for educational purposes related to the club, activity, organization or team.
  - f. The coach responsible for the site will monitor it regularly.
  - g. The coaches supervisor shall be permitted access to any site established by the employee for a school-related purpose.
  - h. Coaches are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in the establishment and maintenance of all such district-sponsored social media activity.
3. Coaches are required to use appropriately respectful speech in their social media posts on district-sponsored sites and to refrain from harassing, defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, threatening or other inappropriate communications.
4. Coaches are required to comply with all school policies and procedures and all applicable laws with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks, or devices when accessing district-sponsored social media sites.
5. The school will reserve the right to monitor all employee use of district computers and other electronic devices, including employee blogging and social networking activity. An employee should have no expectation of personal privacy in any communication or post made through social media while using district computers, cellular telephones or other data devices.
6. All posts on district-sponsored social media must comply with the school policies concerning confidentiality, including the confidentiality of student information. If any coach is unsure about the confidential nature of information, the coach is considering posting, the coach shall consult with his/her supervisor prior to making the post.
7. A coach may not link a district-sponsored social media site or webpage to any personal social media sites or sites not sponsored by the school district.

8. A coach may not use district-sponsored social media communications for private financial gain, political, commercial, advertisement, and proselytizing or solicitation purpose.
9. A coach may not use direct-sponsored social media communications in a manner that misrepresents personal views as those of the school district, or in a manner that could be construed as such.

In summary, the world of electronic media has been thrust upon us with great speed and enthusiasm. We have been so busy learning how to use it and keep up with its newer and faster methods that we have not taken the time to learn how to use it correctly. Electronic media can be a great tool but it can also be used as a weapon if not used correctly. Like any other new trend that has come our way we need to get ahead of it and begin a discussion with our coaches about the potential hazards that exist and perhaps educate them on how best to stay out of harm's way.

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3. Woodland Regional School District Board of Education Policy 4118.51(a).
4. Connecticut Coaching Education Program Module 16, "Appropriate Use of Electronic Media by Coaches©", (2011)

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