

The CIAC Officials' Association and You: Part 1

A formal affiliation between high school sports officials and the CIAC – the governing body of Connecticut state high school sports – was established during the 2005-06 season and became known as the CIAC Officials' Association. However, except for the membership card officials can use for free admission to high school sporting events, it is unlikely that most officials really know or appreciate what this Association does or how they benefit us as officials. To find out, Bd10.COMmuniqué interviewed Joe Tonelli, the Director of the CIAC Officials' Association. Joe Tonelli is well known to Board 10 as the long time (now retired) Athletic Director as well as former basketball coach at Notre Dame High School of West Haven. He has been inducted into the Connecticut High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame and is the recipient of Board 10's Sportsmanship Award as well as the Babe Amendola Award. We covered so many topics with Joe that we had to divide the interview into two parts. The second part will be published in the December issue of Bd10.COMmuniqué.

Q: Why was the CIAC Officials' Association formed?

A: Our mission statement reads, in part: "The CIAC Officials' Association exists to work in concert with school administrators, athletic directors, coaches and the CIAC to advance the best



Joe Tonelli, Director, CIAC Officials' Association.

interest of high school athletics." Well, in order to truly advance the best interests of high school athletics, you need to have all the necessary constituencies on board, and for many years, the missing ingredient was officials. Officials have their own autonomous organizations, and they serve a valuable purpose. But now, we have officials as well as coaches, athletic directors and administrators of member schools on our various committees and it really opens up the lines of communication so we can all serve the best interest of high school athletics. The rest of our mission statement says that the Association also exists to serve the best interest of "...all member officials and their respective organizations, to promote ethical standards, sportsmanship, professionalism, and high quality officiat-

ing." All worthy goals.

Q: How do we, as basketball officials, benefit from being part of the CIAC Officials' Association?

A: I see it as the best of both worlds for you. On the one hand, you still have your own autonomous organization and can do what you think is in the best interests of your fellow officials and the sport that you officiate. On the other hand, you now have the full support of the state association behind you and can use all of our resources for mutual benefit. I think it's safe to say that, whether you are an official, coach, or athletic director, it's a much tougher job now in 2007 than it was twenty years ago. Parents and fans are more involved. There's much more scrutiny and pressure. Today, if I were to go onto a court as an official, I know my partner is on my side. But now, I also know that the state organization that runs high school sports is on my side and has the power and authority to hold member schools and their coaches, A.D.'s and other participants accountable for following the rules, regulations and codes of conduct that are in force. For example, if you eject a coach or disqualify a player and the school complains, we're going to support you, and the CIAC carries a fair amount of clout. If you have a problem with a particular school, an administrator or A.D., for example, about insufficient security or lack of proper changing facilities and you send them a complaint letter and also copy the CIAC, they will see (cont. on p. 3)

CIAC Officials Association and You: Part 1...(cont. from p. 2)

that you have "cc-ed" the CIAC and, believe me, that gets their attention. Also, by having representation on our sports committees, you collectively have a say in key policies and procedures that affect your sport.

Another concrete benefit is the fee structure for officiating. You've surely noticed that your fees go up every year. How and why does that happen? Well, before the CIAC Officials'

Association was created, the CIAC committee that dealt with officiating used to have to negotiate with each officials' group separately and try to come to some agreement between those groups and our member schools. Some committee members, along with Mike Savage, a former high school principal and long time Executive Director of the CIAC, and officials' committee chairman

Dr. Jerome Auclair, joined me in the idea that instead of all these separate negotiations, why not set up a fee structure with built-in automatic raises each year without having to constantly re-negotiate. Some of our constituents thought we were giving away the store, so we proposed three conditions to this arrangements, two of which favored the officials. The first of those two is the granting of automatic raises. The second is an exclusivity clause. As long as your local and state officials' boards can service the members schools, those schools must use your officials. The third condition protects the member schools in that you can't refuse to service any particular member school. The fact that you are now affiliated with the CIAC gives this arrangement more support, clout, and credibility.

Granted, good officials are not in it for the money. But, the fact is, Connecticut high school sports officiating fees are among the highest in the nation. And, whatever you're getting per game this year, that fee will be higher next year, and each year after that.

Q: This season the CIAC created a form for reporting the disqualification of a player or ejection

of a coach, and we're all supposed to use that form when reporting to our commissioner. Why did the CIAC do this?

A: In addition to providing a format for hopefully ensuring that incident reports are factual, accurate, timely, and to the point, the use of this form and the reporting system that goes with it has some concrete value. If you report promptly to your commissioner and your commissioner does the same with us, we're in a better position to notify the affected schools immediately of the consequences of any ejection of disqualification. But, beyond that, having such a reporting system gives us a better picture of which schools may have some issues. Suppose we get a complaint from an A.D., for example, who says,

"We've never had a problem with officials. And all of a sudden this guy gets trigger happy and throws out our coach and our star player." Well, we can call up data from our reporting system and we might see that this same coach got ejected the week before and has accumulated several technical fouls over the course of the season. That gives us a valid argument to diffuse the complaint. It also gives us a barometer of sportsmanship at our member schools.

Editor's note: In the second installment of this interview, which will appear in the December issue of Bd10.COMmuniqué, Joe Tonelli talks about the "Sportsmanship Week" that will be coming up later in the season. He'll also cover such topics as how the CIAC Officials' Association is aiding the effort to recruit more and better officials in all sports, as well as some of the other work the CIAC Officials' Association is doing to promote the welfare of sports officiating and the member schools serviced by our officials.

For more information, log on to:

<http://www.casciac.org/ciacofficials.shtml>

