



DEALING WITH ABUSE

Sporting environments and competitions evoke a lot of emotion and passion from those involved, including spectators. An official who has a pleasant style, smile and calm manner creates a positive environment, which can have a positive effect on participants, coaches and most spectators.

Spectators and others frequently disagree with officials' decisions and, from time to time, these decisions infuriate spectators and others to the point that they can become hostile towards officials. This risk in these situations can be minimised by the approach the official takes. It is important that the official does not engage with the spectators (for example, no eye contact or verbal response) as this can further incite the angry spectator.

Comments from spectators at sporting competitions are part of the officiating environment. As a group, spectators usually exhibit highly emotional responses and often take delight in antagonising officials. Their behaviour can be off-putting, not only to inexperienced officials.

There are a range of strategies officials can use to deal with the pressure created by spectators:

- Officials should ignore the comments as best they can by blocking them out. This can be achieved by focusing on key aspects of officiating, like positioning and what and where to observe. Generally speaking, the comments are not meant personally: the spectators' behaviour is highly irrational and emotive. Failing to ignore the comments can lead to lapses in concentration and an incorrect focus, often resulting in errors in officiating.
- Officials should remain calm. Be aware of the important officiating areas to focus on during a competition.
- Never respond to spectator abuse (much as you might like to!). Seeking the official's attention and distracting them is one of the aims of an abusive spectator.

Procedures for situations where spectator behaviour becomes serious and contravenes the rules of the sport

Sporting organisations usually have a range of procedures that the official is expected to follow in different situations, which can range from climate conditions to injured participants and to spectator behaviour. The official needs to be familiar with these procedures and the actions that are required in the event of spectator behaviour that is serious and needs to be acted upon.

Seeking support/counselling

There are occasions when spectator abuse starts to wear the official down. It can have a negative impact on the official and officiating. Being subjected to regular abuse reduces the enjoyment for officials and hence many officials retire because of the abuse they are subjected to. Officials who are concerned about abuse should seek support from others to assist them to deal with it. Speaking with experienced officials can help with learning additional strategies and a new approach to dealing with abuse. Officials, associations and sporting organisations can also provide support to officials. You might also like to contact your state department of sport and recreation for assistance.

Sports administrators also have a role to play in preventing abuse of officials, and a number of sporting organisations are starting to implement strategies to stop the abuse of officials. Abuse is well recognised as having a major impact on the retention of officials and, as a result, more is being done to address it.

