

Strategies to deal with abuse of officials

The following best-practice examples were presented at the Our Sporting Future forum held in Sydney in March 2005, organised by the Australian Sports Commission.

Basketball Australia

Michael Haynes, General Manager — Community Basketball

Retaining officials is as much, if not more, of a challenge for sporting associations as attracting them in the first place. With the support of the Australian Sports Commission, Basketball Australia undertook a number of initiatives during the Year of the Official aimed at the retention of officials.

The introduction of fair play awards at our national championships was very successful and has been adopted by a number of state and local associations. During the championships each team was assessed for its fair play — this included the coaches, players and spectators. The team rated as 'fairest' was presented with the award at the closing ceremony. These awards focus on rewarding the 'good' rather than penalising the 'bad' and make a clear statement that officials (referees, score table and statisticians) are valued in our sport.



Even though some officials get paid, that is not a retention strategy. Tangibly valuing them and acknowledging their important role is a much more potent retention strategy. Some elements of this strategy were:

- making announcements during national championships (hourly) of the importance of officials and that abuse of them would not be tolerated
- preparing guidelines on how to approach spectators whose behaviour towards officials was inappropriate
- ensuring a safe place in the association for officials to change, relax, leave their gear and so on
- identifying learning referees (some associations put 'L' plates on their uniform). The theory behind this is that we are generally conditioned to be more tolerant of people we know are still learning
- introducing the 'sit-down' rule, prohibiting coaches from speaking to officials during the game
- presenting referees of finals with a medal.

The most important message is that it does not end now that the Year of the Official is over. Officials are as necessary to our game as the ball and the hoop, and demonstrating that they are valued goes a long way towards attracting and keeping them.

Australian Football League

Adrian Panazzo, National Umpiring Development Manager

From the Australian Football League's perspective we are supporting the development of the game and umpiring on a number of fronts. The two programs look at both the environment in which umpires officiate and the quality of instruction they get access to during the critical stages of their early development.

Development staff and umpires who present coach education courses have historically focused on the laws and interpretations of the game. Now, in a deliberate move, the central theme in coach education courses is, 'coaches make better umpires'. We discuss the role of the coach in setting the right environment and establishing the proper values that support the umpire and their development. We say that the coach is the most influential person in the sporting club, and that they have a



broader responsibility to the game than simply winning.

We also canvass the coaches for strategies and ideas that we can use to improve umpire development. Ultimately we ask them to reflect on their role as coach and how they can support the umpires that officiate matches. No umpire has actually ever improved their performance as a result of abuse or poor treatment by coaches and clubs. Like any athlete, they rely on confidence and quality feedback to properly develop.

The Umpire Mentoring Program is an umpire education and development program that aims to use experienced umpires to mentor new and inexperienced umpires.

The program connects these new and inexperienced umpires with an umpiring mentor to assist them with their early development. New and inexperienced umpires wear a coloured shirt as a signal to coaches, players and supporters that they are learning their craft and are being supported by a mentor, and should be supported and encouraged.

With its origins in Barossa (South Australia), Bendigo (Victoria) and Northside Juniors (New South Wales) this program was launched nationally in 2004. Over 300 trained mentors and 1000 young and inexperienced umpires are involved in the program in 2005.