



## Raising Awareness Among the Sports Officials Community about Dispute Prevention

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Sports officials have been rarely involved in disputes before the SDRCC, and that is a good thing. But is it because there are no disputes at all, or because the officiating community is efficient in solving them internally, or is it perhaps because officials do not know about the SDRCC? The interest generated by the presence of SDRCC staff at the Sports Officials of Canada's annual conference, held in Calgary in May 2008, is quite telling. Officials are very much aware of the need for better policy-making around the officiating component of the sport system. In addition to having a display and handing out relevant print materials, the SDRCC presented a workshop on the prevention of disputes relating to the selection of officials for national and international competitions.

At this workshop, Marie-Claude Asselin and Fredy Iuni presented the results of an exploratory survey conducted among the officiating chairs of all NSOs affiliated with Sports Officials of Canada. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the way in which officials are selected for competitions and to identify the areas of officials' selection processes where there was a higher risk of disputes. A response rate of 23% enables to draw the following conclusions.

In Canada, 71% of NSOs have input, of varying degrees, in the selection of officials for national competitions and 93% do so in the appointment of officials to international competitions. This confirms that the vast majority of the NSOs are responsible for determining the process and the criteria to be used in the selection of officials.

On the positive side, all NSOs who responded to the survey consulted their officials in the development of their selection policies. This constitutes an excellent strategy to get buy-in from the officials concerned and to ensure that the policies are clear and understandable, hence reducing the risks of disputes.



Also, the majority of them (86%) published the policy in writing. However it is troubling to think that officials in the remaining 14% of NSOs are still being appointed to national and international competitions without the existence of a written policy. This fact has been identified as a high-risk situation.

Several cases heard at the SDRCC are caused by inadequate communication between the parties. NSOs are therefore encouraged to publish their policies as widely as possible. In the survey at hand, 43% of NSOs used only one method to communicate the selection policies to their officials (either email, website, mail, or in person). Clearly, it is desirable to combine multiple methods of communication to ensure a wide and thorough distribution.

Finally and not surprisingly, the survey showed that all NSOs use subjective criteria in the performance evaluation of officials. While there is nothing wrong in using subjective criteria, there are some safeguards recommended to reduce the risk of disputes arising from it, including: to ensure the independence of the decision-makers, to avoid conflict of interests or appearance thereof, and to apply a transparent process.



Based on the feedback and comments received from participants at its conference, Sports Officials of Canada has already extended an invitation to SDRCC to offer another workshop on dispute prevention at its next conference, and SDRCC looks forward to take part in this event planned for the fall of 2009. Meanwhile, NSOs and officials are welcome to contact SDRCC if they wish to obtain guidance in the development of policies relating to officials. ■