



## MOA Social Media Policy

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The integrity of high school athletics depends heavily on the character, professionalism, and impartiality of its officials. This policy defines types of conduct considered unacceptable and establishes that violations may lead to disciplinary action

**Prohibited Conduct - "Conduct Unbecoming"** The following constitute violations of this policy when committed by an official that is an active participant in the Montana Officials Association.

1. Misuse of Social Media, Public Communication, or Electronic Forums. Posting or sharing content that criticizes, mocks, or undermines the integrity of the MOA, MHSAA membership schools, school administration, coach, player, spectator, or a fellow official.
2. Disclosing sensitive or confidential information, including internal or private matters, through public or unauthorized channels.
3. Using social media or electronic communications in any way to solicit or give the appearance of solicitation for post season assignments.
4. Officials will maintain an ethical approach while participating in forums, chat rooms and all forms of social media.
5. Officials shall remain mindful that their conduct influences the respect that student athletes, coaches and the public hold for the profession.
6. Use appropriate and professional communication methods and be mindful that written communication may be publicly accessible.

**Penalty** - Any MOA official determined to be in violation due to misconduct shall be subject to discipline as determined by the MOA Regional Directors Board and the MOA Commissioner.



## **Social Media Guidelines & Best Practices**

Social media such as Facebook, SnapChat, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter can be great tools for reconnecting with old friends, staying in touch with family and even networking with colleagues. While there is so much positive that can come out of these sites, we also must be mindful of their very public nature. Here are some guidelines for sports officials who use social media (chat rooms, forums and social media pages). Always consider social media communications as public even if created with private intentions. If you are going to use social media in any form, consider your communication may be read by anyone at any time.

### **DO'S**

- 1) Do use social media as a means for sharing information with members of your local association. Some local groups in Montana have created Association pages and have their group members on their friend lists. This can be a great mechanism for information dissemination and can also be a page for recognition of group members and to give potential new members a first look at becoming an official.
- 2) Do use social media as a recruitment tool. Given the median age of most users of social media, it can be a great means of getting new members into the avocation. Many pools have created a social media page to recruit, so appreciate their officials and use it to inform their pools of meetings, etc.
- 3) Remember to maintain a positive tone when posting on public platforms. General comments about positive experiences are appropriate; however, avoid sharing specific details such as schedules or other sensitive information. If you come home from a game wherein everything went smoothly, it is okay to generically post about it. For example, you could say, "I had a great softball game tonight. Both teams displayed great sportsmanship.
- 4) Do be aware that posts on social media are visible to the public.

### **DON'TS**

- 1) Do not post any disparaging comments about players, coaches, schools, fans or fellow officials online. Someone will see what you said, and you will only cause problems for yourself.
- 2) Do not advertise where you are officiating at any time. We appreciate the pride that you have in being an official, but we discourage you from saying where you are officiating and when (i.e., Joe Official is excited to be officiating tonight between School A and School B). If everyone knows where you are working, it opens the door for undue influence and perceptions that undue influence existed. If you post about your games after the fact, pictures are fine and recognizing your crew is fine but do not talk specifically about the teams and/or coaches involved in the contest. DON'T post anything relating to the schools you have worked for or will work. It calls your objectivity into question.

- 3) Do not be a “cheerleader” for any school, team, coach or player on these sites. Remember that perceptions of bias are dangerous as officials. We are a small state and many of us have friendships with coaches and/or have relatives to participate. If you post a picture of yourself wearing the shirt of your alma mater online and then call a game for that school the following week, you may be setting the stage for allegations of bias by that school’s opponent. Many officials are good about this, but it would be hard if so many of our officials have family that are a part of a school as an athlete, coach, teacher, etc.
- 4) Do not post specifics about games, whether good or bad. If you want to give kudos to a team, send the information to the MHSA office so we can properly commend them. If you post something about a team or a coach by name, it can again lead to perceptions of favoritism toward or bias against that team in future games. We have had officials post comments about poor conduct by coaches and players (by name) and have had to deal with the repercussions of these comments. If you feel like what you are going to say may be inappropriate, it probably is.
- 5) Do not start posting online after you have had a rough game. Emotions may start to flow a little too much and it is better to cool off before you start venting your frustrations online. If you have had a rough game, talk to your spouse, call a friend, call your mentor or call our office.
- 6) Do not use social media to criticize state or local association policies, assigning practices, etc.