

Soccer Disqualification Commentary – July 21, 2010  
Dr. Robert A. Lombardi – PIAA Associate Executive Director

We have experienced 4175 disqualifications (hard red cards) in soccer in the past 11 year period. The overwhelming number of these disqualifications have been in two areas; verbal dissent (foul language) and fighting or striking an opponent. We, as officials, have an obligation to all involved in interscholastic soccer to give our best efforts to assist in reducing these numbers by having discussion on various facets of this issue.

Some items for discussion are the following:

1. After giving the sportsmanship message, please meet with captains of each team, get their undivided attention and speak to them regarding today's contest expectations. Inform captains that we as a team of officials are going to solicit your assistance in having the game played in a fair and sportsmanlike manner.
2. Communicate with players and coaches. Do not explain every call, however, do explain items of confusion or issues that have developed that are of concern to the coach. If coaching staffs are professional, respectful, give them the same professionalism and respect. Do not disrespect those who are handling teams no matter how bad their actions are. Keep above the fray.
3. Never talk with cards. Speak to players and coaches in a professional voice and vocabulary. Make your best efforts to diffuse conflict and potential problems before they boil over. Do not be unprofessional in your handling of coaches.
4. If a card is merited, issue the card and move on. It is not a death sentence, it is not murder. You must get by it. Do not hold a grudge, move on with the contest and continue working the contest to ensure fair play for all, including anyone that you have carded.
5. After issuing a card, expect some "push back" from the offending side. Do not place yourself in a position to "ramp up the card" to a more restrictive, more severe enforcement due to minimal "push back" and grumbling from the teams and spectators.

The use of cards are intended to be a tool to assist in the control of the contest as well as handle those type of behaviors that are not in the ideals of good sportsmanship. We must understand that the issuance of a yellow card sends a message that this type of action is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Too many officials are going right to a red card on actions that may be construed as a lesser penalty and we are putting young people in a position where they are out the remainder of the contest and the next contest. Be judicious in the use of cards. Use other communication techniques to assist you in getting your message across to players and coaching staffs.

This commentary does not indicate in any way to look away from fouls that are obvious carding situations. The intent here is too many officials are placing themselves in precarious judgment decisions by attempting to enforce a strict interpretation of a written rule without properly applying the rule to the situation, emotion and participation of young people playing a game.

Please remember the contest is a learning experience that is an extension of the classroom and above all, we as referees, are the "game instructors of fair play". We must keep the focus on fair play within the context of a highly spirited, emotionally charged classroom environment. Use the rules book as a guide to fairly and consistently enforce the rules of the contest in the spirit and intent of which they were written.

Do not ever let your intentions override good common sense in applying a rule to a game situation. We need to apply the rules properly as they were intended and not in the strict written, personal, individual interpretation that some officials want to believe. It is not their game. The game is for all of us, referees, players, coaches, school administrators and spectators.