

Safe Sport Policy Manual - Speaking Notes for Officials Town Hall, Nov 3, 2020

Introduction

- I would like to take a few minutes to introduce you to our new Safe Sport Policy Manual and to highlight a few aspects of it.
- Posted on the AO web site October 7.
- As we said in the AO newsletter that evening, during the last two years, the AO Board of Directors and staff have been focused on strengthening the safe sport environment for Athletics in Ontario. At the core of these initiatives is a robust new safe sport policy framework. We want all Athletics Ontario athletes, coaches, parents, officials and volunteers to feel safe and trust the sport system.
- The new Safe Sport Policy Manual gathers together nine policies that form an important part of the initiatives we have been taking to foster and maintain a safe sport environment. AO has had many of the components of these various policies for some time, but we have updated the policies and procedures and consolidated all of them into a single and easier to follow manual, written in plain English.
- The Safe Sport Policy Manual outlines expected standards of behaviour that are designed to create a safe sport environment by preventing, as much as possible, inappropriate behaviour from occurring in the first place, and it contains policies and procedures to provide for consistent, timely, appropriate and meaningful action should any issues arise.

Details about some of the Policies

- I would like to highlight some of the aspects of the updated and new policies, particularly the Code of Conduct
- While we certainly recommend that everyone familiarize themselves with the Safe Sport Manual, the only thing in the Manual that you have to confirm you have read, when you renew your AO membership, is the Code of Conduct. This is, of course, in addition to the other things referenced in the Membership Policy, such as the release, etc.
- While the Manual is some 53 pages in total (including a detailed table of contents that should help you find your way around in the Manual), the Code of Conduct is only 6 ½ pages.
- I will try to highlight what I think may be particularly relevant to you in your capacity as Officials.

The Code of Conduct

- In a nutshell, the Code outlines expected standards of behaviour that are designed to prevent, as much as possible, inappropriate behaviour from occurring in the first place.
- The Code is something of an educational piece, describing the types of behaviours that are positive and constructive and describing the types of behaviours that are not acceptable.
- There are two sections that you as Officials should note in particular - the section on the responsibilities of all Participants and the section on the additional responsibilities of Officials.
- Please also pay attention to the other sections that deal with the additional responsibilities of coaches, athletes, and parents/guardians and spectators. Why? Because as Officials you are around

the track and the field a lot. You are familiar with the sport environment. You may see things going on that should not be going on. You may be able to help or protect another Participant by bringing an example of misconduct to the attention of those who can do something about it. Or you may be an important witness in an investigation.

- As I am sure you are aware, there has been an issue of “bystanders”, of people not speaking up when vulnerable people need someone to speak up.
- The Code of Conduct and the Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy are not asking you to be police. But as respected, knowledgeable and observant Participants, Athletics Ontario needs you to be part of the process of fostering and maintaining a safe sport environment.

Organization of the Code

- **Definitions** - please read them. There is a lot of information there. But we have tried to use the plain English meaning of words as much as possible and not get bogged down with defining things that are self-evident.
- The definitions are also key to understanding the scope and application of the Code.
- For example - let’s look at the definitions of “Participants” and “Sport Environment”. “Participants” is purposely broad, and includes more than just AO members. Example - it includes the member of another PSO misbehaving at an AO meet. And while Sport Environment is limited to any place where AO’s business or activities are conducted, and s. 3 states that the Code applies to a Participant’s conduct in AO’s Sport Environment, s. 6 provides that it also applies to a Participant’s conduct outside AO’s Sport Environment when such conduct adversely affects relationships within AO and its Sport Environment and is detrimental to the image and reputation of Athletics Ontario. Example - AO member athletes/coaches getting into a fight or hurling insults at a high school meet. Could give rise to a complaint and disciplinary action.
- **Responsibilities** - after setting out some defined terms and describing its scope and application, the Code then sets out specific responsibilities, first for all Participants, and then additional responsibilities that are specific to AO’s Directors, Officers and Committee Members, to Coaches, to Athletes, to Officials and to parents/guardians and spectators.
- **Additional responsibilities - Officials** - I don’t think any of these will surprise you. Of course you know you have the responsibility to be fair, equitable, considerate, independent, honest, and impartial in all dealings with others.
- But I think it is worthwhile for our Code of Conduct to set out these responsibilities and it is worthwhile to remind oneself about them periodically.
- Please remember there is a need to respect the confidentiality required by issues of a sensitive nature, which may include ejections, discipline processes, specific information about Participants, etc.
- There is also a responsibility to assist with the development of less-experienced Officials.

Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy.

- The substance of this Policy used to be spread over at least three different policies, including a “harassment” policy. We know that there are many other forms of inappropriate behaviours and maltreatment than harassment, and it was time to bring together the important keystones of safe sport policies in one policy.
- There is no use in having a Code of Conduct unless there is a simple and safe way for people to be able to bring breaches of the Code to the attention of people who will do something about it.
- With the Safe Sport Officers and clear procedures, we hope we have created a clear and useful way to address all forms of misconduct.
- Note that this Policy and the new **Whistleblower Policy** also anticipate the possibility of making an anonymous complaint. While these complaints can be difficult to investigate and resolve, I hope that these policies demonstrate that we recognize how difficult it can be to come forward and that we do not want issues to be left unattended to or unresolved.
- The actual procedures for dealing with a complaint may seem a little complex, but the goal is to have a fair way to deal with complaints.
- Note that confidentiality is very important and that retaliation and false allegations will not be tolerated.
- As Officials, you should think about talking to one of AO’s Safe Sport Officers if you witness or are yourself subjected to any form of misconduct that may be a breach of the Code of Conduct. The Safe Sport Officer will assist you in determining whether a formal complaint should be made.

Event Discipline Procedure

- This is a very short but important policy that probably involves the type of process and discipline with which you may be most familiar.
- This policy deals with misconduct during events and an expedited procedure to determine if immediate discipline at the event is appropriate.
- You are probably familiar with the process of a meet director convening a jury of one or three people to quickly investigate an incident, talk to any officials or others who may have witnessed the incident, and decide on a penalty that will apply at the event.
- It is important to note that action under this policy does not prohibit a Participant from reporting the same incident to Athletics Ontario to be dealt with under the Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy.

Conclusion

- These policies, including the updated Screening Policy as well as the obligations outlined in our Membership Policy, represent an integrated, concerted and proactive effort by Athletics Ontario to prevent problems before they occur. AO is committed to preventative measures but also to severe penalties for those who choose to breach our Code of Conduct or other policies.
- The new Safe Sport Policy Manual is just a part of the continued effort to foster and maintain a safe sport environment. Other critical aspects include the training of coaches, members of club

management and Officials. Safe Sport requires everyone in positions of authority to help to create a culture of mutual respect and safety, where people can feel safe questioning behaviours they perceive as inappropriate and reporting misconduct. It is a continuous and ongoing process, and the changes we are making will continue to be reviewed, questioned, tested and improved.