**Report to 2015 Coaches AGM from Vice President BCFOA**

BCFOA has the contractual responsibility to provide officials to all high school football games in the Province of British Columbia. BCSSFA is also the largest client of BCFOA by far. The Executive of BCFOA acknowledges the importance of high school football in BC and strives to provide the best experience possible to all participants. I feel genuinely privileged to have been a part of this relationship.

Over the years I recall there have been a number of challenges some more significant than others. The 2014 season however I think will go down in the record books as the most challenging one ever. I’d like to give you some information about this season from the BCFOA perspective.

In 2005 when I was in my first term as Vice President the football season was shut down for three weeks from Oct 7-28 due to a strike by the BCTF (teachers union). Fast forward to 2014. There was also a three week strike by the BCTF. The difference is that in the first strike the league was shut down completely whereas during the strike of 2014 about 80% of the teams vowed to play regardless. Some were successful and others were not. Much controversy ensued. The result for BCFOA was a season of unprecedented chaos. Games were allocated, then cancelled and then reassigned. About half of the games in the lower mainland region were cancelled in September and the Interior was basically shut down. In October many games were scheduled, cancelled then rescheduled or cancelled as teams scrambled to find opponents in order to qualify for a revised playoff criterion.

The allocator reported to me that in the 10 week regular season, which I think was extended to 11 weeks, there were 762 changes made to the schedule and a total of 87 games cancelled outright. Since most of those games were cancelled at the last minute he was forced to assign officials and then cancel them when either one or both teams could not play. One game was moved three times (from Saturday to Monday to Wednesday) and had to be re-assigned on each occasion.

The playoffs provided just as much chaos, as there were 82 changes to sites, times, dates and opponents. That was in the first week alone. Two playoff games were cancelled altogether when teams were unable to field enough players. As we progressed through the playoffs the games became more predictable but no one could say they felt comfortable with the process. In the end everyone persevered to get through it.

So what is my point in telling you all of this information? The point is that everyone for the most part understood that many issues were beyond individual control and we all just got the job done with cooperation patience and understanding.

To me this was a testament to the good relationship between BCSSFA and BCFOA.

With a new BCTF contract in place I am looking forward to a number of years of stability where we can truly find ways to provide better service to high school football.

**Education**

Even with high school football being BCFOA’s largest and most important client, we need to understand what this means for a high school football official. The analogy one could make is that 4 down high school football games are played on an island in the midst of a vast sea of 3 down ball. Unless you are in the lower mainland the majority of games played in your region are of the 3 down variety. Because of this fact, and given the huge geographical areas it is challenging to ensure that all officials on high school games know and follow high school mechanics. and even more importantly, that they understand how to administer penalties in the game. Moving forward I believe that it is important to find ways to get a better focus on the 4 down game to better ensure that officials use high school football mechanics and understand the administration of the game.

This year an education committee was created to plan and implement a program focusing specifically on high school football. The goal was to create a structure for education that could be relied on from year to year rather than having to recreate a program every time personnel change.

In February 2014 I appointed Len Dejulius as High School Education Coordinator and we began the task of recruiting an Education Committee. The committee ultimately consisted of the vice president (Tim Lederman) allocator (Mike Westman), member services director for metro (Al Sleightholme), and at various times a number of our most experienced and dedicated high school officials, Lee Brien, Jamie Graham, Thomas Straley, Greg Byron, and Ted Baranyai.

The Education Committee agreed on a number of priorities including:

* Create and distribute a made in BC mechanics manual
* Prioritize spring leagues/scrimmages to be an educational opportunity for BCFOA members
* Continue to emphasize the importance of safety of high school football athletes
* Create clinic content available to all regions of the province
* Continue to stress the importance of recruitment as a responsibility for all involved
* Provide evaluation/feedback on approved mechanics to as many members as possible

For years BCFOA has adopted the NFHS official’s manual as our mechanics manual. The problem with that has been that the manual is only printed every 2 years and is rudimentary at best. Many high school only officials wanted to use more up to date, widely accepted mechanics used in the USA. This had created conflict and some confusion amongst BCFOA officials. The committee decided that to eliminate this problem and send a clear message to our officials as to accepted mechanics are would be to create our own made in BC high school football officials manual. The committee completed the first draft of a BC high school football Mechanics manual which was made available to all members on the BCFOA web site.

In the spring of 2014 and with the approval and cooperation of many coaches we were able to redesign spring scrimmages from simple ball spotting exercises to become educational opportunity of great value. Where else could we get 80 plays to just concentrate on mechanics with no coaches yelling! About 45 of our members took advantage of this great opportunity.

On the issue of safety for the first time BCFOA made the NFHS on-line concussion course available to 80 members as a way to help increase awareness of the danger of concussions to the high school football athlete. We also modified our concussion protocol to more clearly identify the official’s role on the field.

Regional clinics with the newly approved content were held in Nanaimo and Prince George prior to the start of the regular season. Six weekly clinics were held at Holy Cross high school during the season with an average attendance of 27 members. The last meeting before playoffs had 42 attendees.

Recruitment will always be at the top of the list and we believe is a shared responsibility of all parties. At the beginning of 2014, 17 new recruits were attracted to become high school football officials. By season’s end due to injuries and other commitments 8 were still on the field with most that left are committing to come back next season. Mike Westman and Lee Brien conducted weekly apprentice clinics from late August thru September. A comprehensive Apprentice Manual was developed and currently available on the BCFOA web site.

Approximately 67 observations/evaluations were conducted with high school mechanics and rule knowledge as the only criteria.

Survey:

The other way that we can seek information to become better as officials and as an organization is to get feedback from our clients. So for the 2nd year we are distributing the coach’s survey for you to complete. We will use the information you provide to us through that survey to find ways to better serve high school football.

Lastly:

BCFOA has provided information to coaches at various times and locations over the years about how to successfully prepare for high school football games. We felt it would be important to have that information all in one place so we created a Game Day Manual for coaches. This manual contains all of the criteria and tasks that you need as coaches to successfully run a high school football game from the perspective of the official. This manual is also available for every coach on the BCFOA web site and I encourage you to go there and download it.

In conclusion:

I have provided a number of recommendations to the executive which you can view if you take the time to read this document later.

**Recommendations:**

1. All schedules should be resolved prior to the last day of school.
2. In the interests of safety BCSSFA should consider reverting to the former mercy rule.
3. All coaches need to communicate game changes first to the allocator.
4. If playoff games need to be scheduled in an outdoor venue then consideration be given to ensure adequate lighting at the field.
5. If playoff games need to be scheduled in an outdoor venue then adequate resources need to be provided to ensure that the field is in playable condition should weather become an issue. Only shoveling the lines when the field is covered in snow is not an effective solution.
6. Playoff game locations should be in a central location to permit reasonable travel time.