

2014 Vice-President High School AGM Report

Some things change and others just remain the same.

In 2005 when I was in my first term as VP the football season was shut down for three weeks from Oct 7-28 due to a strike by the BCTF (teachers union). In 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 was a season of unprecedented chaos. Games were allocated, then cancelled and then reassigned. About half of the games were cancelled in September and many more games in in October were scheduled, cancelled and rescheduled as teams scrambled to find opponents in order to qualify for a revised playoff criterion.

Here is a summary of the goals that I started the year with and the results of our efforts.

Let's improve the education program:

After a number of years of unsatisfactory results, change was needed. In February 2014 I appointed Len DeJulius as High School Education Coordinator and we began the task of recruiting an Education Committee. The members changed over time but consisted of long term BCFOA members Lee Brien, Thomas Straley, Greg Byron, Ted Baranyai, Jamie Graham, Ben Eskeldsen, Al Sleightholme and metro allocator Myke Westman.

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 new recruits and veteran officials
- Create clinic content available to all regions of the province
- Continue to stress the importance of recruitment
- Provide evaluation/observation to as many members as possible

The first hurdle to gain acceptance for high school football mechanics was to understand that a standard for mechanics for working high school football is important and needs to be supported and accepted by all officials working on a high school football field. No more mixing mechanics with excuses that two sets are too hard to remember or that it is OK to work my own way as long as I can make the right call. It was clear for some time that the NFHS manual although providing a good framework for mechanics would never be detailed or current enough to serve our needs in the light of changes to the way the game was being coached and played. In order to gain the respect that officiating the high school game deserves, we needed a made in BC mechanics manual that we can develop use and modify as we see the need for officials in BC. Importantly, a made in BC manual should be a document we can

all be proud of!

So the committee worked on and completed a 1st version, posted it this on the web site, distributed electronically to all high school officials and used it exclusively in evaluating and observing high school officials. Next season the manual will be revised and improved. The goal is to eventually produce a document that can be professionally printed and distributed to our membership. A BC mechanics manual to be proud of!

In order to help create an environment conducive to education rather than simple allocation and ball spotting we had to begin to change the culture and tradition of spring scrimmages. Coaches bought into the proposal of providing an educational opportunity as long as we assured them it would not cost them more than the traditional cost of ball spotters. Officials on the other hand needed to accept the concept that spring scrimmages would provide an educational/training environment and a game fee was not needed. Spring scrimmages were then set up as educational clinics with members of the committee providing observation and suggestions to the on field officials. Over 45 officials took advantage of the opportunity to participate in an environment of practicing mechanics in a low stress setting. Where else could we find the opportunity of 80 plays with no coaches yelling about holding or worse after every play?

In the early months the committee met frequently to determine a number of educational priorities and began collaborative work in developing a series of clinics. Eventually because of how busy everyone was with other priorities Len took over development of the clinic content. Our intention was and is to eventually have these clinics made available across the province via our web site. However given the huge amount of work required to produce such a work it was just not going to happen this year. I had previously committed to bring clinics to the regions to spread the word about our new mechanics manual. As a result I travelled to Prince George and Al Sleightholme and I visited Nanaimo to conduct high school official's clinics. We were able to spread the high school message to about 30 members in the regions. Unfortunately, try as I might, I could not get a clinic scheduled in the interior. Big thanks to Grant Renton, Richard Bundock, and Dagan Ducharme for organizing the regional clinics.

Eventually high school clinics were presented locally at Holy Cross high school in a series of 6 sessions through August and September. There were about 30 members attending each clinic. At the last clinic before playoffs started there were 42 members present.

In several appeals to BCFOA members I stressed the need and asked for support in continuing to recruit new officials. As a result BCFOA was able to recruit over 15 new officials. Most came from other sports. An apprentice booklet was created, essentially containing all the info required for an apprentice get prepared to officiate in his first year, including uniform, equipment, common terms used by officials, pre and post snap responsibilities, the importance of sideline management, and penalty administration focused primarily on wing officials. Several of the new recruits were sidelined by injuries either prior to or during the spring scrimmage season. Lee Brien and Myke Westman took on the primary role of training our new recruits conducting weekly clinics well into the season. By the end of the season the BCFOA had benefited greatly by the energetic work ethic displayed by six of our new recruits. Almost all

of the apprentices including those sidelined have already committed to participation next season. We look forward to their continuing involvement.

This year observations/evaluations were a big priority especially early in the season and then as playoff time approached. I am sure that many of you have had the opportunity to have an observer assigned to a game you were on and also got some feedback. All feedback was intended to be based on “approved high school football mechanics” which has been posted to the web site for many months. With only a few exceptions I am aware of, we stuck to providing feedback on approved mechanics only and fairly well accomplished our goal.

The BCFOA concussion policy was modified extensively and for the first time ever included a new component, concussion awareness training. In partnership with NFHS over 60 concussion awareness courses were distributed to high school officials in BC. Those who completed the course reported that it was simple to do and provided new knowledge about concussions.

QUESTION? If you received a concussion course did you take the time to redeem and take the course to increase your knowledge?

Unfortunately there were several goals that we were not able to realize and will have to wait, hopefully only until next year:

I wanted to start a referee group for all those wanting or already wearing the white hat. Just did not seem to get to the top of the list.

Video of clinic presentations distributed across the province. This is a lofty goal and will require some expertise in the area of production, editing as well as a more solid format for presentation of clinic content.

Do video our own officials to be used for future education. We got it into the budget and a video guy was hired but scheduling/allocation became an obstacle and it did not happen due to conflicting schedules. Hopefully we can get the help needed to make this a reality.

I had hoped for much more from the web site but it came up short. We got a basic redesign done and it looks pretty but functionality is lacking and I had trouble getting the follow through assistance needed to get it right. Hopefully someone with expertise can step forward ASAP and make a commitment.

Lastly and most importantly I am disappointed with how the playoff assignments were handled yet again. I advertised changed criteria for selection right from the beginning and thought there was buy in from most committee members.

Here are the criteria in case you don't recall:

On field performance during regular season games as evidenced by observation/evaluation and word of mouth from evaluators/observers

Demonstrated ability to work approved high school mechanics

Attendance and participation at regional education clinics

Demonstrated knowledge of NFHS rules/mechanics as evidenced by NFHS Exam completion
Results of observations during playoff assignments
Demonstrated ability to manage availability on Arbiter
Participation in online quizzes/discussions
Availability to travel

There is always the goal of having the best officials work in the playoffs. Obviously being the best means how you work on the field but doesn't it also mean how you do all the other stuff on the list? Do you participate, cooperate with others, and communicate in a helpful manner, help others get stuff done by managing your own performance and responsibilities?

At meetings, we discussed over and over how to ensure that our members could feel that there was objectivity and fairness to the process. It was generally agreed on one point, that the people in positions of influence ie: the Allocator, the President, the Vice President, and perhaps the Education Coordinator should consider not working the AA or AAA final games. One new member of the committee told me he did not care if he worked on the final day, he just wanted to help in any way he could.

In the end the criteria turned out to be nothing more than who the majority of the members of the committee felt were the best on-field officials. It was pretty clear that those committee members felt that they were the best. Of the 7 original members, 2 had pulled themselves from consideration. Of the remaining 5 members everyone got either the AAA or AA assignment, 4 on the AAA final and the last on the AA final. In the final moment another of those five pulled out of the AAA game.

Like I said, some things change and other things just remain the same.

As much as I tried to find a reasonable and workable solution that included on field officials on the playoff committee, I firmly believe now that unless we find a way to have playoff spots decided by people who will not be wanting to work on the final day we will never have a system that will be seen as fair and objective. Regionalizing membership on the committee is not going to get it done. Assigning officials by address is not going to work. Leaving it to the people who want to work on the final day is not going to get it done. Obviously we want the best to work. We need to ensure we train more of the best. We also need to define what is "best" and then stick to that definition. Many officials worked playoff games in their regions and were non-starters for the finals Saturday. It is the final Saturday when the system broke down. With that many committee members working the last two games there cannot ever be a perception of fairness and objectivity.

This off season, I want to hear concrete ideas on how to fix this mess. No doubt education, observation and evaluation will be keys to the success of any process.

In closing I want to thank all the members of the Education and Playoff Committees, the Member Services Directors who helped out when needed, the observers and evaluators who contributed numerous hours to the benefit of high school officiating and all the members who came to clinics and worked to refine their own mechanics and rule knowledge for the benefit of the game.

I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I am looking forward to how we can continue to improve our product next season.

Tim Lederman
Vice-President High School Football