

GET SMART ABOUT



SOCIAL MEDIA



FIBA

We Are Basketball

BY DOUG DAY

As a quick Internet search will prove, a single post on social media can get you fired. Words can be misinterpreted, used out of context or simply rub someone the wrong way and lead to a firestorm that is impossible to extinguish. In an avocation in which integrity is essential, social media can be a minefield for sports officials — both in the words they post and what others post about them.

The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) saw how the growth of social media has been changing the environment and issued guidelines for its referees in January. “If referees fail to carefully monitor their social media activity, it could affect them from a professional standpoint,” says Carl Jungebrand, the head of refereeing for FIBA. “They could unfairly be accused of bias or of being influenced in their decisions if they don’t carefully think about their posts and interactions. The guidelines are there to help referees make good use of social media and to protect them from consequences.”

With a few clicks, a video of a questionable call can be seen around the world within minutes. Once the video is out there, it’s there forever. The same holds true for the words you post. Even in closed or private groups, it doesn’t take much to copy a post and put it out for everyone to see.

An association of national organizations that

governs international basketball competition, FIBA was formed as the world governing body for basketball in 1932. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has regional offices in Cote d’Ivoire (Africa), Puerto Rico, Lebanon, Germany and Australia. It has more than 1,050 certified basketball officials around the world.

There were no incidents within FIBA that prompted development of the guidelines. It was, instead, a proactive approach in response to the growth of social media.

“FIBA’s Refereeing Department initiated the project and started by looking at ways to limit the use of social media,” says Jungebrand, who admits that he wasn’t very familiar with social media. “FIBA’s Communications department provided the necessary insight into social media that will instead help people use social media in a positive way. Rather than regulating social media itself, these recommendations were developed with the intention of helping referees in their daily use of social media. FIBA wanted to establish appropriate policies to warn and protect itself as well as national federations and referees from the potential consequences of possible misuse.”

Social media can be a valuable tool. Its broad reach and simplicity make it easy to provide information about rule changes, points

of emphasis, mechanics and rule questions. It's great for sharing video, which is so important in training and developing consistency in officiating. It's also a powerful recruitment tool, providing insight into the many benefits of getting back into the game and contributing in another way.

It also helps referees connect with others who share their passion. "Social media allows referees to easily connect and stay in touch, without being limited by geographical or language barriers, and find instant information on basketball and refereeing worldwide," Jungebrand says.

But anyone who regularly participates in officiating groups on social media has probably seen how conversations can quickly devolve into arguments. Easy access to video from the "big game" of the day often gets uploaded before conclusion of play and prompts both discussion of the rule and, too often, criticism of the officials' judgment.

But then, that's not unusual. Get more than one sports official in a room for any length of time and we start talking about good and bad calls; it is one of the most popular and entertaining things we do. We also like to complain, often centered on how the people complaining about us don't understand the game, don't know the rules, or worse.

Officials are often warned about holding such discussions in places where they might be overheard. It's pretty obvious that the locker room or local watering hole are places where a coach, player or fan could easily eavesdrop. What we may fail to appreciate is that posting comments from the comfort of your couch onto social media is essentially the same as making a pronouncement in public for all to hear.

The FIBA guidelines have been published in four languages: English, Spanish, French and Arabic. As he's been traveling the world since they came out, Jungebrand says the reaction has been nothing but positive. "Referees can benefit from these guideline by avoiding common social media mistakes and protecting themselves from the negative reaction from any and all parties involved in a

basketball game."

If nothing else, they should remind officials that that social media is a public place and that they can't just act in ways other people can. "Referees are not normal people," stresses Jungebrand. "They are held to a higher standard and should

understand that, especially in social media, you cannot simply do the same things as other people. It is for the integrity of the game."

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FIBA'S SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR BASKETBALL REFEREES



Participation in online social networks affects your personal, social and professional areas:

- Any FIBA member is entitled to express himself on social media
- Transparency: the organisation must be presented in a realistic and natural fashion
- Service Basketball



Protect your privacy and confidential information:

- Never share your private phone or email address
- Protect your professional environment and do not risk your reputation
- It is recommended not to use personal email addresses to create personal accounts (the recommendation explicitly applies to Twitter and Facebook)
- Keep in mind that all internet activity is stored indefinitely and is accessible to any user, who might take it out of context. Don't interact with potentially dangerous persons
- Carefully choose your online friends and do not accept unknown friend requests
- Be careful with friends' messages links, as well as with other sites friend requests



Shared opinions on any social media profile are personal and do not in any way reflect those of FIBA:

- Referees are free to express their point of view about any subject they might consider appropriate
- However, they should never forget that their job consists of applying justice through officiating, and that no one has the right to think that decisions on court are influenced by something different than pure judgment
- FIBA strongly recommend referees not post and comments about clubs, national teams, National Federations, leagues, referees or any other potential basketball entity, to avoid any suspicion of biased judgment
- Social norms as well as the terms of use of each social network must be respected at all times
- **Always take a moment and think before posting on social media while you're officiating in a competition.**
- Carefully select the information and images you publish



Publications must be dignified and in good taste and must not contain disrespectful or obscene words or images:

- No insults or offensive comments can be published on the Internet
- Do not post any content that is threatening, obscene, or injurious to the reputation or interests of National Federations, clubs, national teams, other referees, players, etc.
- Inappropriate communications may disrupt FIBA's liability and the integrity of the game itself.