

Sparks-A-Rama and Awana Games

THE MINISTRY OF SPARKS-A-RAMA AND AWANA GAMES OFFICIATING

The first thing a Sparks-a-Rama/Awana Games official must realize is that there is more to officiating than just making the right judgment calls, as important as that is. There is the myriad of details and important set up work that accompanies these events. Then there is the ministry a Sparks-A-Rama / Awana games official has to the coach and clubbers

That's right! A Spark-A-Rama/Awana Games official is actually a spiritual leader out there on the floor. So just how does an official "lead" a coach?

First of all, you as an official must know what your job is and what you hope to accomplish. You must be very familiar with the objectives of the Awana Games and Sparks-A-Rama, as outlined in the rulebooks, as well as the details of the rules. Once a strong base for your leadership has been established, you are ready to lead others. Let's take the priorities of leadership and apply them to the official-coach relationship. The four priorities are:

1. Understand
2. Maintain communication
3. Delegate responsibility....
4. Motivate your coaches...

Understand your Coach

At the beginning of the Meet, become acquainted with your coach. Learn his/her name and shake hands if it is appropriate. Be sure that you and your Circle Director have explained to the coaches the chain of command so the coach is well aware of how the leadership will operate on the circle. It is, of course, a fine line as to when an Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama official is becoming too friendly with his coach. It is valuable to have rapport with a coach, but no to become in any way involved with the coaching of the team members. In official-coach relationships, "helpful" is the key word.

Try to put yourself in the place of the coach. **Do not bristle or take offense yourself when a coach complains or asks a question.** If you have ever been a coach, you will find you may have a more sympathetic ear. **Always try to concentrate on what the coach is saying, and try to divorce that from any feelings or emotions you may have toward the coach, and from any facial expressions and gestures he or she may be using.** **Listen to facts** and concentrate on them. Give **information pertaining to facts**, not reactions to your feelings or emotions.

Always remain calm and non-argumentative in a situation. Remember that you are a leader to whom the coach is looking. This is much more easily said than done, but if you keep in mind the point that was made in the last paragraph (i.e. concentrate on the **CONTENT** of the complain, comments, etc.) you will find it easier to remain objective. If the coach persists, or requests it, or if you are in doubt, always take the matter to your Circle Director. Doing so is **NOT** sign of weakness. It is always good to have a rulebook at the meet. If the question has to do with a rule, it can be quickly settled by consulting the book. (It is good for Circle Directors and Judges to review potential explosive situations prior to the Meet.)

If the question concerns a judgment call, the Circle Director and Judges will make the decision with the Circle Director having the final decision.

Again, don't look at your job as an Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama official as one of being against the coaches or fighting them in any way to come out on top in a decision. Always remain professional, friendly and helpful. Do not become emotionally involved. Your job is one of leadership and perhaps even one of counseling the coach in his or her behavior.

Maintain Communication

Always be sure to communicate with your coach anything that is necessary. This begins before the start of the Meet as mentioned above, and as appropriate. However, whenever a rerun is called for, or first or second place points are not awarded to the clubbers who actually grabbed the pin or the bean bag, or in any other irregular situations, **be sure to explain fully to your coach what has taken place. If you ever have to disqualify your team, always be sure to explain to the coach the exact infraction of the rules.**

Keeping up communication lines between you and the coach in this way during the Meet will help to prevent complaints and problems before they come up.

Delegate Responsibility

This point is harder to apply to the official-coach situation than the others; however, there is one main point we may bring out here. Remember that in this situation the coach is a leader of the clubbers. In general, **you should not be giving instructions to the team members as they line up for a game.** This is the responsibility that you have delegated to the coach, so to speak. **Most reminders, corrections, or other comments that YOU have to make** about the team members as the line up for a game **should be made to that coach.** Once the event has begun, ALL instructions to either clubbers or coaches must cease (i.e. no officials should ever count laps verbally for a clubber).

Motivate

The point to be made here is that you as an official should be actually motivating your coach to cooperate with you. This can be done first of all by following the previous three points: Understand the position of the coach, be sure to maintain communication at all times and keep in mind the limits of your position and the responsibilities of the coach. **Smiling and having an overall friendly attitude toward the clubbers can also facilitate these actions.** Some officials feel that they must be “Mr. Stoneface” in order to show objectivity. However, in the Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama **we want to show our clubbers that we care about them and we should treat them a people.** When clubbers are all tensed up, ready to start an event and the other circle is not ready, **a friendly word telling the clubber to “relax”** can go a long way in putting a clubber at ease. Coaches will also subconsciously pick up this humanness in you, and this may assist in their reaction to one of your future calls!

After the Meet is completely over, it **is good to have a few words with your coaches and simply tell them that they did a good job, or find some specific items on which to compliment them and their teams.** This type of interaction can give the coach a very positive attitude for future Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama Meets, not withstanding the outcome of the present one!

YOUR OBJECTIVES AS A GAMES OFFICIAL

Your first objective as an Event Official is to correctly judge the team assigned to you along with your ministry to that coach and team as discussed previously.

Your second objective is to do your part to see that the overall running of the Meet goes smoothly. If you are a **Circle Director**, this means not only **to be alert to things pertaining to the operation of your own circle**, but to always **have your eyes moving to check out the other Circle Directors, the starter, and the person directing the Meet.** Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama is times to reach the unsaved moms and dads. This outreach ministry is done not only through the message, but through the overall testimony of the fine organization, discipline and smoother operation of the Meets. Therefore, as convenient as it would be, we as officials **cannot be oblivious to all that is happening around us.** We must always be on the lookout to hurry our team along to the starting line, keep discussions and questions to a minimum when it at all possible, and do anything else we can to keep the Meet running smoothly.

Your third objective as an official is to **assist in any behind-the-scenes way to get the Meet started on time or to help clean up when it is over.** As an Official, you may be needed **as early as one hour** before a Meet starts and stay that much later for cleanup

when the Meet is over. Because of this, you should not plan on traveling with your team. One thing that can detract from the overall testimony of the Meet is having it start late. Even if you are not assigned a particular duty, be alert to how you can help in that last half-hour to forty-five minutes prior to the beginning of the Meet. Perhaps some teams could use directions as to where they are to go or on which line they are to be seated. Perhaps you note a crowd of people at the door backing up others who are coming in. Perhaps you could assist in telling these folks on which circle and or line their church will be participating so they could be seated more quickly. These are just a few examples. There are many situations that come up at the last minute that need a level headed adult to step in without being told and take care of the situation.

Clean up is becoming an increasingly important function of an Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama official. We should be thankful to the church or school for graciously hosting the event. It is our desire to leave the facilities even better than we found them and a large crew of clean up people who leave the gym and locker rooms sparkling clean usually helps in a custodian's recommendation to the administration of the church/school to have the Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama there again. This old but true adage that many hands make light work is certainly true after an Awana Games/Sparks-A-Rama Meet. Ask those who have been a part of a skeleton crew after having officiated Meets all day and they will tell you how true it is!

Thank you for being a part of our officiating team. Our events certainly could not function without you. We appreciate your willingness to serve the Lord in this way. Please be praying for a great day as we have these fun filled and exciting events.