

"THE COACH DOTHT PROTEST TOO MUCH, ME THINKS....."

by
Don Crabtree

These slightly paraphrased words from Shakespeare's immortal *Hamlet* were reflected at the NW Rose National Tournament.

The purpose of this article is not to imply that protests are not warranted—merely that a grievable protest must meet certain criteria and be implemented in an orderly, professional and timely manner.

Many of the protests were based on incorrect information. *Please* read the manual before initiating your concern. For example, three protests centered around the issue that a student(s) was using more than one poem in their supplemental event. Another protest argued that two students in duo interp were touching. Both of these protests were easily solved by simply reading the manual. In poetry, a student may do more than one poem; in duo, no rule exists against touching. In these particular cases the protests were *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Another vital issue regarding a protest is timelines. The NFL Manual states that a protest must be made in a "timely" manner. A "timely" manner is not justified when a young person breaks to the top 60 and a person was aware of the grievance in round one but simply chose to "wait and see." If the infraction is grievable, it is grievable at the time it occurred, not just because the student broke into out rounds! Once the protest is filed, it takes a great deal of time to find the coach, look at the material in question and adjudicate. By waiting until you see whether the student has done well could extend this tournament into a *Twelfth Night*! Please file in a timely matter—*immediately* after the infraction is noticed.

Furthermore, the issue of state rules vs NFL rules posits many problems. Some states allow singing; some states allow 150

words of material to be added to the interp selection (including the introduction); some states have a very specific penalty for going overtime. Please remember and advise your students that **only** NFL rules apply at the NFL Tournament. *As You Like It* in your state does not apply at the NFL level.

I, and the entire NFL Executive Council, firmly believe in an even playing field for all contestants! However, rules for our Championships are in the NFL Manual and take precedence over any state rules—*Measure for Measure!*

In a few situations this year, there were grievable issues. Please follow the protest procedure. A detailed form is available in the Ombudsmen's Office. It is to be completed in its entirety by the coach (not a student) making the protest.

Three very critical parts of this form are:

- (1) What rule was specifically violated?
- (2) When (exact time/date) was this rule violated and
- (3) Recommended solutions/actions to the infraction.

The protest is then given to Mr. Copeland, NFL Executive Secretary, for his ruling. This ruling may be appealed to the Ombudsmen. The final appeal in this due process is to request a meeting of the NFL Executive Council *En Banc*. Their ruling is final! On several occasions, students were penalized for their infractions and thus, *Love's Labours were Lost!*

Nothing is more painful to me than to tell a coach and a student that they have been disqualified or ranked last for their infraction. It is painful because it should have never been allowed to happen. **Read** the rules! **Follow** the rules! In interp for example, have your *original* material *immediately* available if challenged. Have your cutting

xeroxed and be sure that your presentation is highlighted. Any words used for transitional purposes must be clearly indicated. If your selection isn't published, then why take the risk! If you don't like the script, find a new one, don't re-write it! If you find the script tired/old, don't add new material to "jazz" it up!

The protest concept is in place to protect the legitimacy of the tournament and to insure that we are all on the same page—and those pages are in the NFL Manual! Thanks to Mr. Copeland's and President Tate's work with the sponsors, we have numerous scholarships available. We must protect the integrity of those awards.

Overall, the protest process works. There are those coaches who suggest that our rules are too vague. They will argue that if there is no rule against it, it must be OK—perhaps, but **YOU** are the people who can suggest changes and revisions to these rules. Simply write the NFL office and your input will be seriously considered at the next NFL Executive meeting.

In summary, I met some great coaches and outstanding students this year in the Ombudsmen's room. I admired and appreciated their professionalism and dignity. I hope you were treated likewise. If we *all* carefully read the NFL Manual and follow these rules we can certainly avoid *The Tempest* of protests seen this year.

Perhaps Shakespeare again said it best, *All's Well that Ends Well!*

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