

Professionalism

Recently, the NAWGJ Association was under fire from the National Office because of an alarming number of complaints being lodged about judges and the lack of professional behavior being exhibited at various levels of competition. This issue was disturbing not only to officers within NAWGJ, but to the State Judging Directors across America who discussed the problem at the recent National Symposium.

Any official who accepts a NAWGJ contract has the inherent responsibility to perform their duties pursuant to the rules of that contract, and more importantly, to represent our organization and themselves in a professional and dignified manner.

Unfortunately, judges have become accustomed over the last few years to being overtly pampered with perks and special treatment. As a result, a portion of our judges nationwide are becoming increasingly demanding and somewhat arrogant over what they feel judges should receive as 'customary treatment'.

Inclusive in this growing expectation list are: helping themselves to food and beverages at meet sites without offering to pay, being highly critical about food served at multi-session competitions, unfair requests to meet directors regarding travel and hotel accommodations, rude behavior with competition timers, runners and event staff, and to an extent, arrogance with entry level officials.

Let's explore a few of these topics. Although it is certainly a very nice gesture to be offered a bottle of water, cup of coffee or snack plate during exceptionally long competitions, event hosts are not mandated to provide these amenities. It is not our place to make comments such as, 'could I get a cup of coffee' or 'I'm a judge, I don't pay' to the parents working at the food stand. Keep in mind that gymnastics clubs host competitions with the intent of selling food and novelties as fund raising activities. Every judge should offer to pay for that early morning cup of coffee, the can of soda, or handful of peanut butter cookies. If your host insists on offering the items at no charge, then it's your choice to accept the free offer or donate to their cause. As an aside to the lunch and dinner offerings provided at some competitions, we need to remember that Emeril isn't the chef of the day. Most clubs send a parent to the local restaurant with choices made by each judge in order to save time and eliminate the need for us to travel out to eat. When they return with our food, whining to them about, 'I didn't get my soup' or 'you forgot the mustard' accomplishes nothing. Since they're not professional servers, remember the old adage, "don't shoot the messenger"! Some undeserving parent is often corralled into cooking for all the judges and it's not an easy task for them to please everyone either. Unless there is a dietary concern or medical problem, let's try to be more accepting of what is offered.

Another main area of concern was the treatment of competition assistants. I have often overheard parents say things like, 'I'll never time beam again as long as I live' and 'I don't ever want to work with that nasty judge again'. As officials, we must remember that the parent sitting next to you is a volunteer, not a member of NAWGJ. It is our responsibility to thoroughly explain the timing processes for routines, warm-ups and falls, score flashing and where to run the judging slips. Be patient and helpful with all event assistants. Ask yourself this simple question. If you were asked to volunteer at a major competition as a judging assistant, what's the one task you would do anything to get out of? Be honest - timer! We all hate timing. If we would be nervous about calling time during a fall on a 'known' competitor, how do you think that parent feels about doing it? A quality timer that you have confidence in makes your event run smoothly and allows you the opportunity to perform your judging duties more effectively. Also remember the golden rule - take the time to thank the assistants at your event at the conclusion of the competition for their help. We were paid to be there, they volunteered! Lastly, be careful about the comments you make about gymnasts and coaches while judging because you never know if the person sitting next to you is related to the comment you just made!

The final point to discuss about professionalism pertains to manners. There will always be a handful of judges who could use a good etiquette lesson, but it's no longer acceptable to excuse rude and arrogant behavior as simply, 'that's her/his personality'. We are professionals and should act that way. What kind of example are we portraying to our athletes, parents and coaches, when we openly argue and demean each other on the competition floor? It has become far too easy to belittle a coach over minor infractions, blame a volunteer for mistakes, chastise meet directors and gymnasts, or simply launch into an argument with someone, rather than calmly rectify our differences. What we demand of athletes and coaches, we must demand of each other.

It would be a travesty to allow the actions and behavior of these 'misrepresenting few' to diminish the longstanding reputation, dignity and respect of our organization. We are NAWGJ and it is something to be very proud of. I guess that's why they require us to maintain a 'Professional Membership'!

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