



## Dispute Resolution for Coaches

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Coaches, as do many other professionals and volunteers, occasionally stumble into the unpleasant world of dealing with a dispute. Disputes become distractions that take too much time and energy, and can end up affecting athlete training and development. They may be as simple as a disagreement with an athlete or parent, or as complex as an issue involving legal matters. Regardless of the perceived or real degree of the dispute, it is critically important that the coach pursue a resolution in order to move past the issue and get on with the business of coaching.

Resolving simple disputes may be as easy as following established protocols learned through coach training programs: the twenty-four hour rule, the two-deep rule, fair and unbiased evaluation of the situation, etc.

The twenty-four hour rule is often difficult to observe when a situation presents itself at a competition or a training session, because the coach's instinct is to deal with the situation now and get on with the business of coaching. The premise, however, is a good one: convene a meeting a day or so later when all parties have had an opportunity to cool down! This will lead to more productive discussion and hopefully a quick resolution.

It is wise that coaches never pursue disputes one on one with the athlete, parent or person with whom the dispute has occurred. Ensure that there is at least a third party involved in the discussion, preferably someone with which both parties feel comfortable and can assist by keeping the discussion to the point and working towards a solution. It is also wise to document the discussion, including the resolution, and provide a copy of the documentation to those involved. Also provide a copy to your employer or sport governing body for their records.

Fair and unbiased evaluation of a conflict can be achieved by following the steps outlined above, but it is very important that all participants know these expectations at the beginning of the coach's relationship with the principles. At your initial meeting with the athlete and related parties, you should describe your dispute resolution process and put it in writing along with the rest of the documentation for this meeting.

"Experienced coaches learn to recognize the early signs of conflict and take action in order to avoid overt conflict", adds Steven Sugar, ChPC, President of Coaches of Canada and a professional figure skating coach. "They are very sensitive to body language, tone of voice and the 'sub text' of any conversation, as early signs of pending conflict."

In more extreme situations, it is important for coaches to be aware of all avenues of support. A coach facing a serious dispute may choose to employ legal counsel. There are also alternative dispute resolution services offered by the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada.

Coaches of Canada members can receive legal advice as part of their current membership. This service is free and is simply a matter of contacting our national office in Toronto (416.426.7023 or [info@coachesofcanada.com](mailto:info@coachesofcanada.com)). You will receive a case number and be put in



touch with a legal professional that can provide guidance with respect to pursuing a quick resolution.

Gail Donohue, ChPC, vice president of Coaches of Canada and chair of the Membership Committee feels that members are highly respected in the sport community because they must meet high experience/education standards, agree to abide by the Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics, undergo a successful police record check, and be a person of “good character” as acknowledged by peers in the coaching community. Without minimizing the importance of dealing with disputes, and with this support behind the coach, it is likely that most frivolous disputes will never evolve. “Membership with Coaches of Canada provides the coach access to support and tools as well as propels them to the top of the class in the sport community”, adds Gail.

Conflict can be like cancer. It starts small but can spread rapidly - insidiously - eventually overwhelming the host. It is critical that the coach plan in advance for dispute resolution and communicate the expectations to all stakeholders at the beginning of the relationship.