



## Northern California Officials Association

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November 5, 2005

Mr. Tom Murphy  
Executive Secretary  
Northern California Officials Association  
491 Wyngate Road  
Sacramento, CA 95864

Dear Tom:

I wanted to thank you for requesting my input regarding the approaching negotiations with the Sacramento Section over 2007 – 2009 game fees for Baseball Umpires.

On Thursday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, I convened a meeting of several senior officials who will be playing key roles in the leadership of our Group in the upcoming year. Among the topics discussed at this meeting were game fees. We found, however, that game fees could not be adequately considered without first analyzing several key trends affecting our Group's ability to attract and retain qualified officials. We hope that the following discussion will provide you with some insight into our concerns about the continuing success of the NCOA Baseball Group.

Since the inception of NCOA, the goal in all of our sports groups has been to recruit, train, and retain superior officials to provide the best experience for all Student Athletes.

In the Baseball Group, we have continually sought out raw talent, as well as established, experienced Umpires to carry out this mission. We have developed a training program that is unequalled in the area, and have gained a reputation for having some of the most respected Umpires in Northern California.

Yet, despite these successes, we continue to face a shortage of qualified officials.

This shortage is certainly not unique to our Group or to NCOA. In 2001 the National Association of Sports Officials ("NASO") issued a special report based on an extensive national survey of state high school association officiating leaders. What had long been suspected was finally confirmed by these professionals: "There are not enough officials to cover the ever-increasing number of high school games played in this country" (Arehart 31).

Further, seventy-nine percent of the state association leaders indicated that they had a shortage of Baseball officials (Sabaini 16). This placed Baseball behind only Soccer (86%) and Field Hockey (81%) in the ranking of sports in which association leaders experienced officiating shortages (NASO).

NASO polled these leaders further in an attempt to identify the key reasons why officials left officiating. The most common reasons cited, in order, among all sports were: career/job demands; poor sportsmanship; and, low game fees. Baseball officials, however, cited low game fees as the number two reason for not re-registering to umpire (Arehart 34).

And while these factors contributed to the lack of retention of established officials, seventy-one percent of the leaders felt that the lack of new officiating recruits was a larger problem than retaining existing officials (NASO). Among the sub-set of officials with less than one year of experience, NASO found that the second most common reason new officials cited for not continuing, behind career/job demands, were the costs associated with obtaining and maintaining a license, and purchasing the necessary equipment to officiate (Arehart 34).

Our leadership committee agrees that the results of this survey by NASO are consistent with both the personal experiences of our senior officials, and the anecdotal feedback obtained from officials that have left our Group in the past few years.

Among the key factors and concerns we have identified, independent of the NASO survey, which we believe are contributing to the shortage of Baseball Umpires in our Group are:

- **Afternoon game times** which prevent many qualified officials from working because of conflicts with their primary employment.
- **College-level umpiring opportunities** with much higher game fees which siphons off many of our veteran Umpires who are valuable mentors for new officials.
- **Recreational league umpiring opportunities** with later game times which have become an attractive alternative for many of our experienced umpires, as well as new umpiring candidates. This is an especially important consideration as the game fees for these contests are very comparable to high school rates, and the travel associated with these assignments is usually minimal.
- **Sub-Varsity competitions are assigned only one Umpire who is paid the same rate as an Umpire working with a partner in a Varsity-level competition.** Because of this, few Varsity-level umpires are willing to accept Sub-Varsity assignments. This results in fewer Varsity-level assignments being available for advancing Umpires, therefore slowing the rate at which new Umpires can gain valuable Varsity-level experience with a veteran partner/mentor.
- **The lack of suitable facilities for Baseball Umpires at game sites.** Unlike the other major sports where facilities for pre-game and post-game meetings, and private dressing areas and restroom facilities are made available, Baseball Umpires, most of whom are coming directly from their primary employment, are forced to meet and dress in parking lots where they have no privacy and no separation from spectators and participants. Here we must note that most recreational leagues provide at minimum an “umpires’ room” where officials can meet in privacy to discuss pre-game mechanics and review performance after games. (It should also be noted that the lack of private dressing facilities has led to complaints against officials for indecency in the past as they changed into their protective equipment and uniform in parking

lots. The potential for civil or criminal complaints against officials or school administration is a constantly present liability.)

We recognize that some of these factors, such as the need to play afternoon games and the lack of suitable facilities for officials, are challenges that will be difficult to address for complicated logistical reasons. Nevertheless, we can not ignore the impact that these factors are having on our recruiting and retention success.

Ultimately, this is a case of supply and demand. Sac-Joaquin has increased the demand for qualified officials for student athletic programs, but our Group has not been able to grow the supply correspondingly. If we are to be successful, we must make the opportunity to officiate high school programs more attractive to current and potential officials.

We therefore propose the following items for consideration during negotiations for the 2006 – 2009 game fees schedule:

1. **Increase game fees aggressively in all categories to overcome supply challenges.** We believe that the previous method of determining games fees, namely a nominal increase over prior year rates, will not accomplish the goal of growing the number of qualified Umpires in our Group due to the challenges we have identified above. We believe that it will be necessary to provide a significant first-year increase, followed by cost-of-living adjustments in following contract years, to bring game fees to a competitive level. Ideally these increases would take effect immediately; however we recognize that this is not possible for many reasons. This only adds to the urgency for increasing the game fees in 2006-07 as we will fall one year further behind in achieving parity with other officiating opportunities in the current year.
2. **Consolidate the game fee for Single Umpires at all levels.** We believe that there is no reasonable justification for requiring an official to receive a discounted game fee when working alone simply because the contest is sub-varsity level. It is important to recognize that officiating any baseball game alone is difficult, but often it is even more difficult at the sub-varsity level. At these younger levels the players tend to be less refined both athletically and behaviorally, requiring more interaction and intervention by the official. And of course we recognize that the field is no smaller, and the parents and spectators are no less vocal at these contests. Therefore, we believe that it is important to make the game fees for all levels of competition consistent in the coming contract period.
3. **Provide that all Section Playoff games shall be officiated by three Umpires.** Currently the Section provides for three umpires for only the Section Championship contests. We believe that the Student Athletes that have achieved success and qualified for the playoffs deserve the best environment that can be provided in their battle for the Championship. While the two-umpire system is adequate, it is widely recognized that the three-umpire system provides improved coverage, and as a result radically reduces the opportunity for questionable calls. Certainly it is the goal of both the Sac-Joaquin Section and the NCOA leaders to provide the most level playing field for all contests, but in Playoff contests where life-time memories are made for Students, Parents, and Coaches, we believe that it is important to afford the added level of officiating coverage that is provided by three-umpire crews.

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Given these points of emphasis, we have attached a schedule of **Proposed Game Fees for 2006 – 2009**. We feel very strongly that these fees are the first step in allowing us to fulfill our goal of providing the best quality Umpires, in the quantities needed, to meet the demands of the Sac-Joaquin Section.

Tom, I look forward to discussing this topic with you further in the near future. This is a critical time for our Group. We know that you will represent our Member-Officials well in these negotiations. If there is anything we can do to make your meetings with Sac-Joaquin more successful please do not hesitate to call.

Cordially,

Dan Peters  
NCOA Baseball Group Leader

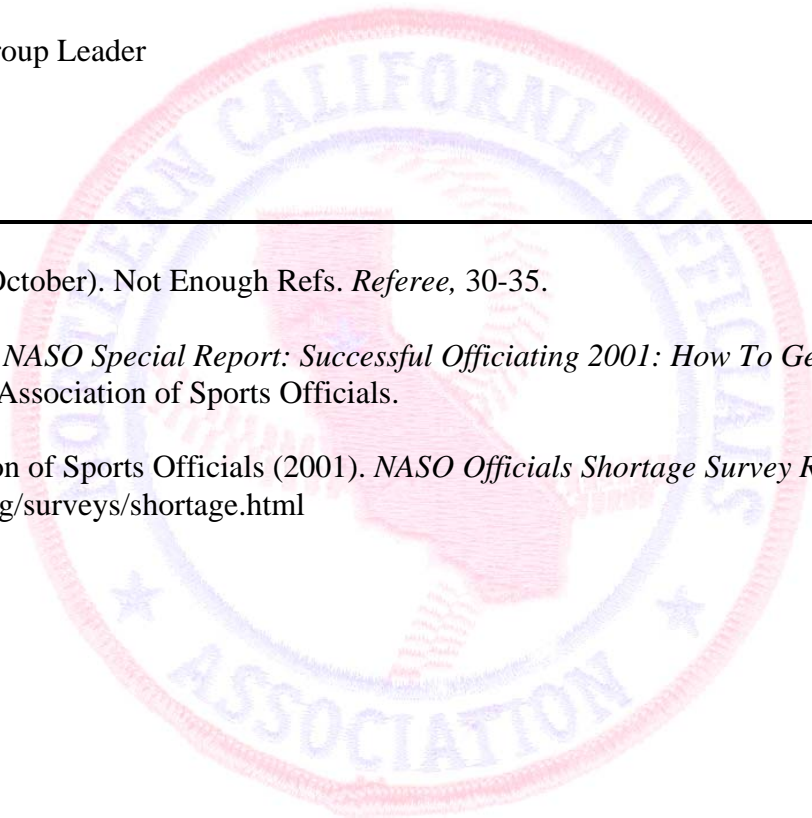
Attachment

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Arehart, J. (2001, October). Not Enough Refs. *Referee*, 30-35.

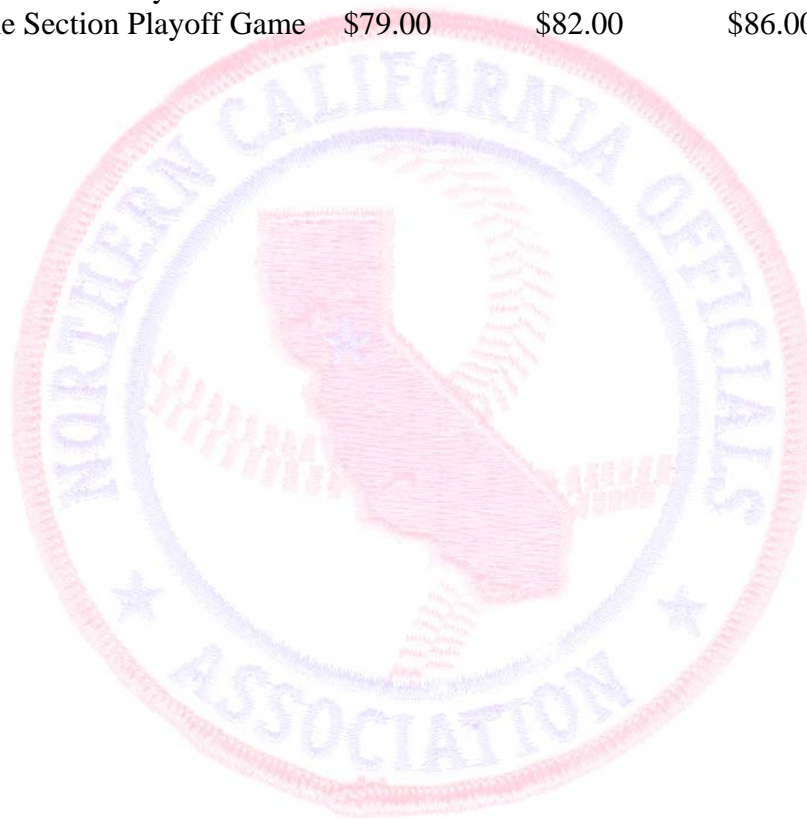
Sabaini, D. (2001). *NASO Special Report: Successful Officiating 2001: How To Get and Keep Officials*. National Association of Sports Officials.

National Association of Sports Officials (2001). *NASO Officials Shortage Survey Result*.  
<http://www.naso.org/surveys/shortage.html>



## PROPOSED GAME FEES FOR 2006 – 2009

	<u>2006-07</u>	<u>2007-08</u>	<u>2008-09</u>
Two Officials, One Varsity Game	\$66.00	\$69.00	\$72.00
Two Officials, One Sub-Varsity Game	\$55.00	\$58.00	\$61.00
One Official, One Game (All Levels)	\$77.00	\$80.00	\$85.00
Two Officials, One Section Playoff Game	\$79.00	\$82.00	\$86.00
Three Officials, One Section Playoff Game	\$79.00	\$82.00	\$86.00



## 2006 Official Fees

2 Officials, 1 varsity .....	\$55.00
2 Officials, 2 varsity Games .....	\$108.00
2 Officials, 1 FR/Soph game .....	\$42.00
2 Officials, 2 FR/Soph game .....	\$66.00
2 Officials, Section Playoff .....	\$66.00
3 Officials, Section Playoff .....	\$66.00
1 Official, 1 varsity.....	\$73.00
1 Official, 1 FR/Soph game.....	\$55.00
1 Official, 2 FR/Soph games .....	\$83.00

### Travel Time

1. Officials shall be paid travel time at the rate of 15 cents a mile, round trip up to 150 miles.
2. Minimum travel time - \$3.50
3. Maximum travel time - \$22.50

varsity Games

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