

South Dakota Cross Country/Track & Field Officials Association (SDCCTFOA)

Newsletter, Fall 2026

Consistency in Officiating: The Cornerstone of Fair Competition

By Julie Cochran, NFHS Director of Sports and Middle Schools

In track and field, precision is everything. We measure performances down to fractions of a second and centimeters in distance, and athletes dedicate countless hours refining their technique in pursuit of these margins. Yet, amid this pursuit of measurable excellence, one factor remains less tangible but equally critical: consistency in officiating.

Consistency is the foundation of fairness. Athletes, coaches, and spectators all expect that rules will be applied uniformly regardless of the event, the level of competition, or the individuals involved. When officiating is consistent, it builds trust in the system. When it is not, it introduces doubt, frustration, and, ultimately, diminishes the integrity of the sport.

At its core, consistency ensures that every competitor is judged by the same standard. Whether it's determining a false start, ruling on a foul in the horizontal jumps, or enforcing uniform regulations, athletes must feel confident that decisions are not arbitrary.

Inconsistent officiating can have real consequences:

- It can alter competition outcomes.
- It can create confusion among athletes and coaches.
- It can erode confidence in officials and governing bodies.

Conversely, consistent officiating reinforces credibility. Even when athletes disagree with a call, they are far more likely to accept it if they believe it aligns with how similar situations have been handled.

Consistency does not happen by accident; it is the result of preparation, communication, and continual learning.

1. **Know the Rules Thoroughly** A deep understanding of the rulebook is essential. Officials should regularly review updates and interpretations to ensure they are applying the most current standards.
2. **Pre-Meet Communication** Officiating crews should meet before competition begins to discuss expectations, clarify rule interpretations, and align on how specific situations will be handled. This is especially important for judgment calls.
3. **Positioning and Mechanics** Proper positioning allows officials to make accurate and repeatable decisions. Consistent mechanics—such as signaling and communication—also help ensure clarity for athletes and fellow officials.
4. **Use of Judgment** Many officiating decisions involve an element of judgment. Consistency here means applying the same threshold throughout the competition. If a certain level of contact, delay, or movement is deemed acceptable early on, that standard should hold.
5. **Learning from Experience** Post-meet reviews and discussions can highlight inconsistencies and provide opportunities for growth. Constructive feedback within officiating teams strengthens overall performance.

Officials are human, and perfection is not the expectation. What matters is the commitment to fairness and the effort to apply rules as evenly as possible. Consistency does not mean rigidity—it allows for context and judgment—but it does require discipline and awareness.

Consistency is not solely the responsibility of individual officials; it is a collective effort. Mentorship, training programs, and clear guidance from governing organizations all play a role in establishing uniform standards across meets and regions.

Veteran officials set the tone by modeling best practices, while newer officials contribute by asking questions and seeking clarity. Together, this collaboration builds a culture where consistency becomes the norm rather than the exception.

In a sport defined by exactness, consistent officiating is essential to preserving fairness and integrity. Every call, every signal, and every decision contributes to the athlete's experience and the credibility of competition.

By prioritizing preparation, communication, and continuous improvement, officials ensure that the focus remains where it belongs—on the athletes and their performances.

South Dakota Cross Country & Track & Field Officials

Association Inaugural Hall of Fame Class – 2026

For years, South Dakota's high schools, colleges, and universities have hosted track and field and cross country meets. Behind every competition is a constant and steady presence: the dedicated, qualified official committed to ensuring fair, safe, and smooth competition.

To honor these individuals, the South Dakota Cross Country and Track & Field Officials Association (SDCCTFOA) established a Hall of Fame to recognize officials who truly represent the best of the best. Inductees have demonstrated a significant and sustained level of excellence in the following areas:

- Excellence and impact in officiating
- Mentorship and leadership
- Professional contributions to the sport
- Community engagement and representation
- Knowledge and application of rules

In 2026, the SDCCTFOA proudly inducted its inaugural Hall of Fame class, honoring three exceptional officials whose decades of service has left a lasting mark on track and field and cross country in South Dakota.

DEAN MANN, Sioux Falls

Dean's name is synonymous with excellence in track and field officiating across South Dakota and beyond. Beginning in 1953, Dean launched a remarkable career spanning more than six decades as a track starter and referee from 1958 to 2016. For 33 years, he served as referee of the South Dakota State Track Meet, where his steady voice on the start line became a familiar and trusted presence to generations of athletes. He was the starter for the NCAA Division II Indoor Track Championships for five years and worked 30 years of NCC Indoor and Outdoor Championships, beginning in 1962. Dean also served NCAA Division I—starting the Summit League Outdoor Championships in 2012 and refereeing Summit League Indoor and Cross Country Championships in the years that followed.

A nationally rated USA Track & Field official since 1990 and later a Master Starter, Dean was also a longtime SDHSAA rules interpreter and clinician. He was the first track official in South Dakota to complete the ASEP course in Officiating Track & Field and Cross Country. His dedication extended deeply to the Howard Wood Dakota Relays, where he devoted 65 years of service as an official, Assistant Meet Director, Meet Director, board member, and president. The Relays were truly a labor of love, and his commitment helped elevate the meet into one of the region's premier track events.

While track and field was his passion, Dean's life of service stretched far beyond. A graduate of Augustana University, he was a four-year letter winner in track, he went on to a 36-year career in education with the Sioux Falls Public Schools, including serving as Director of Athletics. He also served his country for 37 years in the South Dakota Army National Guard, retiring as a Brigadier

General. Dean will be best remembered for his humility, mentorship, and the genuine care he showed to athletes, coaches, and fellow officials.

STEVE CHARRON, Huron

For more than four decades, Steve Charron has been a steady and respected voice at the start line for South Dakota's biggest track and cross country meets. Since 1980, he has dedicated 46 years to officiating high school track and field and cross country, including 29 years as a starter at the SDHSAA State Track & Field Meet and 32 years as starter at the State Cross Country Championships. His impact extends beyond state borders, serving 17 years as a starter for the Heartland Region meet—overseeing races featuring more than 6,000 runners—and officiating NCAA and NAIA competitions in addition to high school events. Nationally certified through USA Track & Field and Safe Sport compliant, Steve's professionalism and commitment to athlete safety have set the standard for excellence.

A longtime leader within the South Dakota High School Activities Association, Steve served six years on the Track & Field Advisory Board and six years on the All-Sports Advisory Board, including one year as chair. He has been instrumental in building consistency and integrity in officiating across the state, helping develop statewide clinics, mentoring officials, and strengthening the South Dakota Cross Country and Track & Field Officials Association, where he served on the board.

In 2024, Steve received the prestigious NFHS Section 5 Active Official of the Year Award, representing officials from Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. He is also a past recipient of the SDHSAA Distinguished Service Award, the NFOA Official of the Year for South Dakota, and the ESD Award of Merit. Beyond track, Steve has served his community as a business leader in Huron, a former president of the Huron Chamber of Commerce and BID Board, and in leadership roles with the SD Lakes and Streams Association and other civic organizations.

RICHARD "ROCK" ROCKAFELLOW, Philip

For nearly half a century, Richard "Rock" Rockafellow has been a constant and respected presence in South Dakota track and field. Rock started his first track meet in Philip, in 1976, and by 1981 had become a starter in eastern South Dakota. Versatile and deeply knowledgeable, he served both as a starter and referee, working 28 state track meets and 25 Corn Palace Relays, along with countless conference, regional, and invitational meets across the state. Whether on the track or in the field, Rock could be counted on to step in wherever needed—always prepared, always professional, and always willing to volunteer.

Beyond the start line, Rock helped shape the profession of officiating in South Dakota serving two terms on the SDHSAA Track and Field Advisory Board and on the SDHSAA All Sports Board, and was part of the team hired by the SDHSAA to travel the state conducting rules meetings and workshops for coaches and officials. During his time on advisory committees, he

played a role in strengthening standards for officials, including registration requirements, rules testing, and uniforms—raising the bar for consistency and credibility statewide. In recognition of his service, he received the SDHSAA Distinguished Service Award in 1996.

Rock's commitment to athletics extends well beyond track and field. A member of the South Dakota Baseball Hall of Fame and the South Dakota Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame, he served 28 years as Umpire-in-Chief for the State Amateur Baseball Tournament and 28 years as Vice President of the SD Amateur Baseball Association. His professional life mirrored his service to sport—40 years in public education as a teacher, coach, principal, athletic director, and superintendent, including 21 years leading the Geddes School District. Still active at age 90, Rockafellow embodies dedication, humility, and service.

Back-to-School Season Guide for Cross Country Officials, **by Julie Cochran, NFHS**

Crisp morning air, wet grass, and the faint smell of damp turf — cross country season is officially back across the country. While student-athletes spent the summer logging base miles, officials play an equally vital role in ensuring the fall season runs safely, fairly, and smoothly. Whether you're a veteran starter or a first-year umpire or clerk, here is your essential guide to getting race-ready for the upcoming season:

1. Gear Up and Tech Check

Before you set foot on the course for your first early-bird invitational, take an hour to audit your kit. Showing up prepared sets a professional tone from the moment you step out of your car.

- **Rules & Documentation:** Download or pocket the latest NFHS Rules Book. Pay special attention to any point-of-emphasis updates for the 2026 year. Keep extra course maps, clipboards, pens and Ziplock bags (for the rain) handy.
- **Weather & Terrain Essentials:** Late August and September bring unpredictable weather. Pack sunscreen, bug spray, a brimmed hat, reliable rain gear, and extra socks. Comfortable, mud-resistant footwear is non-negotiable.
- **Safety & Signal Tools:** Test your starter pistol or electronic starting device, stock up on fresh blank ammunition or batteries, and double-check your whistles, air horns, and high visibility safety vests. Check with your state association to see if they have an officials uniform you must wear.

2. Early-Season Priority: Heat & Safety Management

Early-fall meets often feature some of the hottest conditions of the year. Cross country officials serve as a crucial second pair of eyes alongside athletic trainers and meet directors.

- **Monitor the Heat Index:** Review your state association's WetBulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) or heat index guidelines. Be prepared to discuss modified start times, shortened distances, or added water stations with meet management if temperatures soar.
- **Course Management:** Make sure you walk the course with the meet manager prior to the race or races. Determine if puddles need to be filled with dirt or mulch or if the course needs to be rerouted. If there is a coaches meeting, make sure you walk the course prior to the coaches meeting in case you need to communicate any issues on the course with the coaches.
- **Course Communications:** Ensure course monitors/umpires know exactly who to contact in a medical emergency.
- **Roving Eyes:** Remind marshals and chute judges to watch for athletes displaying signs of heat illness, disorientation, or distress near the finish line. Remember that the assessment of a downed competitor within the competition area by a health care professional designated by the games committee, for the purpose of determining the competitor's ability to continue without providing assistance, shall not be considered aid.

3. The Basics: Start Line, Course, and Finish Chute

Smooth mechanics build confidence among coaches and runners alike. Keep these core procedural reminders in mind during the opening weeks:

The Start Line

Keep your pre-race instructions clear, calm, and concise. Athletes are already brimming with adrenaline; extra-long speeches only heighten tension. Confirm uniform compliance early during clerking so athletes aren't scrambling minutes before the command. If there is no clerk step in your invitational, it is important that there is a step to make sure teams are easily identifiable and properly uniformed.

The start area should have a two-inch wide starting line marked at the beginning of the straightaway and long enough to accommodate all teams. It is recommended that boxes be numbered from left to right facing the running area.

Course Integrity

Courses must be clearly marked using natural or artificial markers. Boundary markers shall be continuous through the entire length of the course clearly designating the inside and outside boundaries. Ensure flag protocols and line markings are crystal clear. Remember that course flags take precedence:

- **Red Flags:** Turn left. Runners must stay on the right side of the flag.
- **Yellow Flags:** Turn right. Runners must stay on the left side of the flag.
- **Blue Flags:** Straight ahead or stay on course. Runners may run on either side of the flag.

Remind course monitors/umpires that their job is to guide athletes, maintain line integrity, and keep spectators clear of the running path.

The Finish Area

The finish area should have a straightaway of at least 150 yards (137 meters). The finish line should be at the mouth of the finish corral or chute. The finish chute is recommended for all races that do not use a transponder (chip) system and finish corral for all races utilizing this system. Examples of chutes and corrals can be found in the NFHS rules book.

Chute and Corral mechanics require fast, assertive management. Train your chute workers to keep runners moving, upright, and in order until they clear the tag-pull or timing mat area. Runners cannot be assisted across the finish line.

4.Setting a Positive Tone

Cross country is unique in its atmosphere; it's a high-intensity sport rooted in community and camaraderie.

- **Lead with Empathy:** Many runners on the line are competing in their very first race, especially if it is a middle school race. A calm, encouraging demeanor from officials helps lower anxiety and prevents false starts or chute panic.
- **Clear Coach Communications:** Hold a brief, thorough head coaches' meeting before the first race. Address course quirks, box assignments, timing system specifics, and protest procedures upfront to minimize misunderstandings later in the day. This can be done at any meet, not just large invitationals. Keep in mind some of these coaches may be first time coaches.
- **Collaborate with Timers:** Modern chip timing has made finish lines much faster, but technology isn't foolproof. Maintain a great working relationship with the timing crew and back them up with traditional manual backup sheets when necessary.

NFHS Cross Country Uniforms, by Julie Cochran, NFHS

The following interpretations are given on uniforms and equipment as cross country starts up across the country:

SITUATION: A competitor is seen using their watch listening to their coach give them updates on other athletes on the course. An official on the course sees this occurring and reports to the meet referee. The meet referee disqualifies the athlete.

RULING: Correct Procedure. **COMMENT:** The jewelry restriction was removed from the NFHS rules book in 2015. With this change came the ability for athletes to wear watches. However, electronic devices are still not legal to transmit/communicate to a competitor during a race. [Rule 4-6-5]

SITUATION: As the athletes line up at the start line, an official notices that a couple of athletes are wearing hijabs on their heads and asks the athletes to remove the head coverings or produce a letter from the state association.

RULING: Incorrect Procedure. **COMMENT:** Head coverings worn for religious reasons are permitted without approval from the state high school association. [Rule 4-3-1]

SITUATION: The officials are checking the starting boxes when the starter calls for the athletes to remove their sweats. One clerk notices that the kids are talking to an athlete about their glasses and they are showing them that they can record the race and light up at the nose piece. The official informs the runner that they may not wear any type of audio or video device to record, transmit or livestream the race.

RULING: Correct Procedure. [Rule 4-6-6]

SITUATION: It is discovered during the cross country race that competitors from Team A have different uniforms. A1-A5 are in blue shorts and yellow singlets, A6 is wearing yellow shorts and blue singlet, and A7 is wearing yellow shorts and white singlet. The school's colors are blue and yellow.

RULING: A warning is issued to the coach for A6 and A7 following the race. **COMMENT:** All cross country and relay team members must wear uniforms clearly indicating through predominant color, school logo and color combination of all outer garments worn as a uniform, that members are from the same team. A7's yellow and white uniform does not allow the competitor to be identified as being from Team A. A6's uniform, while the school colors, makes it difficult to identify that A6 is from the same team because the shorts and top colors are the reverse of the majority of team members. [Rule 4-3-2]

SITUATION: Team A arrives at their box to be clerked for the cross country invitational. The entire team is wearing watches. The clerk informs the athletes that they must remove their watches to participate in the race. The coach protests this removal to the meet referee.

RULING: Incorrect procedure by the clerk. **COMMENT:** The jewelry restriction was removed from the NFHS rules book in 2015. With this change came the ability for athletes to wear watches.

SITUATION: A1 reports to their starting box wearing compression shorts with a manufacturer's logo on the thigh just above the knee as well as around the entire waistband. The trademark around the leg is no larger than 2¼ square inches. A1 wins the race. After the completion of the race, the coach of Team B protests to the meet referee that A1's uniform shorts are illegal.

RULING: A1 uniform is legal. **COMMENT:** Bottoms may have manufacturer's logo/trademark/references larger than 2¼ square inches around the waistband. Additionally, there may be a logo on the thigh if it meets the 2¼ square inches requirement. [Rule 4-3-1b5]

SITUATION: At the start of a cross country race, team members of Team A appear at the starting line wearing headgear with fake antlers attached (the school's mascot being "the elks"). The referee directs the competitors to remove this headwear. The coach objects as the games committee did not prohibit headwear.

RULING: Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Although the wearing of headwear is not prohibited, the wearing of apparel demeaning to the sport should not be approved. It is helpful if the games committee specifies "headwear which is reasonable and not demeaning to the competition." This would apply to any item worn in excess of the school issued uniform. [Rule 3-2-4n]

SDCCTFOA 2027 Clinic Topics, Dates and Locations

Beginning with the 2024 Track & Field season, a clinic or jamboree is required for SDHSAA registered track and field and cross-country officials. A new official is required to attend a clinic in their first or second year, and current officials are required to attend a clinic every three years to maintain their registered status.

To fulfill this requirement, SDCCTFOA will again present track & field clinics before the track season. Those clinics are in-person presentations. Regional Representatives are responsible to host the meeting for the purpose of presenting a clinic in their respective area. Track coaches and athletic directors will be invited to the clinic.

The SDCCTFOA has endeavored to present locations in various locations over the entire state to assure officials a reasonable opportunity to attend one over the three year period. Clinics have been held in Tea, Pierre, Webster, Rapid City, Yankton, Huron, Aberdeen, Murdo, Mitchell and Watertown.

2027 will be the fourth year the SDCCTFOA has conducted clinics to fulfill this requirement. Several officials are in need of a clinic this upcoming year, or they will not be in compliance with SDHSAA requirements and will face sanctions

Clinic topics for 2027:

2027 Track and Field officiating clinics which will be held in February or early March.

Tentative Locations for 2027 SD track and field clinics:

- **Sioux Falls**
 - POC: Kevin Nelson, 605-751-9207, kevin.nelson@k12.sd.us
- **Webster**
 - POC: Robert Kwasniewski, 605-265-0008, rkwas1@abe.midco.net
- **Rapid City**
 - POC: Jim Aberle, 605-920-1449, jcaberle@rushmore.com
- **Huron**
 - POC: Tina Baum, 702-860-8462, TBaum00@aol.com

South Dakota Track & Field/Cross Country Officials

Receive Recognition

SDHSAA 2025-2026 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

The South Dakota High School Activities Association established a Distinguished Service Award program in 1976 with the first awards being presented at the state basketball tournaments in 1977. The purpose of the Distinguished Service Awards program is to recognize the individuals who have provided outstanding service to the youth of the state through their involvement with the various high school activities programs. The award recipients are recognized for their involvement in one or more of the five award categories.

Included in the 9 individuals honored with the “Distinguished Service Award” for 2025-2026 are two track & field/cross country officials:

- Harry Weller – Kadoka
- Tim Casper – Lake Preston

Harry Weller graduated from Eureka High School in 1966 and from Northern State University in 1971. He began his teaching career in 1972 with the Kadoka School District along with the love of his life, Nancy Weller. They married on June 1st, 1974, and have been married for 51 years. Together they taught in the Kadoka School District for 42 years.

Through his time at Kadoka Area School District, he served as assistant coach for: Football, Volleyball, Track & Field, and Middle School Boy’s and Girl’s Basketball. He also served as head coach in Cross Country for several years, during which Kadoka won the state cross country meet in Huron in 2007 and 2008. He’s officiated football, girls’ and boys’ basketball, and track and field for many years. He’s also served as a baseball umpire in Little League Teener Legion Baseball for several years. He was honored in 2025 for the South Dakota Highschool Activities Association’s 25-year coaching award, and has worked field events at the State Track Meet in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Harry helped kickoff the SDCCTFOA Hall of Fame with a \$500 donation for recognition of those inducted, and served on the committee charged with the selection of inductees the Hall. In addition, he currently serves on the South Dakota Municipal League Board of Directors (SDML) serving as president in 2024.

Tim Casper began his teaching and coaching career in 1985 at Andes Central as their computer teacher, head boys’ basketball coach, and jr. high football coach. He moved to Deuel for 16 years, 1986-2002, where he taught K-12 computers, physical education, and psychology, and was the head coach for boys’ basketball, boys’ and girls’ XC, boys’ and girls’ track/field, assistant coach for football and jr. high football and was the athletic director. In 2002, he took the position of 7-12 Principal and Superintendent in his hometown of Lake Preston and was there for

17 years, retiring in 2019. In addition to his administrative duties, he also filled many other positions, such as Special Education Director, transportation coordinator, and coaching as needed.

His officiating career began in 1991, dedicated to track and field and cross country, specifically Meet Referee. He is now officiating in his 35th year, and has worked the SDHSAA track and field meet for 21 years and Howard Wood Relays for 22 years. Tim has also worked many SDHSAA state cross country meets as Meet Referee. In 2006-2007, Tim was chosen as the NFOA-NFHS (National Federation Officials Association) Official of the Year. He has held several positions within the umbrella of the SDHSAA, such as President of the South Dakota Basketball Coaches' Association. Currently, Tim serves on the Track/Field/Cross Country Advisory Committee, and the Sports Officials' Council. He was one of the founding members in establishing the South Dakota Cross Country Track and Field Officials' Association (SDCCTFOA), where he serves as President.

Throughout his teaching, coaching, administrative duties, and officiating, Tim is thankful for his wife of 35 years, Treva, and his two sons, Chase and Cole.

National Federation of High Schools, Section 5 Active Official of the Year—Tim Casper

Nominees for the NFHS Active Official award for Section 5 are selected among all officials from Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. These nominees exemplify the highest standards of ethical conduct, moral character, and their significant long-term contributions to interscholastic officiating.

South Dakota's National Active Official for Section 5 is Tim Casper from Lake Preston.

If you competed in a high school cross country or track meet in South Dakota over the last few decades, chances are, Tim Casper has helped put on at least one of your meets. Casper has officiated track and field for 35 years and cross country for 20 years in the Mount Rushmore state. He previously served as head field judge at the state track and field meet for 11 years and as head meet referee for 10. He has served as head meet referee for state cross country for five years, worked the SDHSAA state track and field meet for 21 years, and Howard Wood Relays for 22 years. Tim has also worked many SDHSAA state cross country meets as Meet Referee.

Described as a “rules expert” by his nominator, Casper conducts the official's meetings held at the state track and field meet. Casper was one of the founding members in creating the South Dakota Track and Cross-Country Officials Association and serves as the organization's President. He also helped start his state's hall of fame for track and cross-country officials.

Casper facilitates track and field and cross-country clinics for officials, coaches, athletic directors, and meet directors across South Dakota each year. He also creates numerous instructional documents that the South Dakota High School Activities Association shares online

for member schools to use when hosting track meets and sends out rule's interpretations entitled "Casper's Clarifications" to officials and coaches.

50-YEAR OFFICIALS AWARD

Jim Aberle: Jim Aberle is a graduate of Lead High School where he participated as a multi-sport athlete in football, basketball, track and baseball. He began his officiating career in 1966, refereeing junior high school and high school intramural basketball games.

Jim attended the University of Notre Dame and earned a degree in accounting in 1972. During college, he participated in baseball and officiated in the school's intramural basketball program. After earning his degree, Jim served in the US Army for four years and upon his discharge as a Captain in 1976, he and his wife, Cathie, returned to Lead where he began an accounting career with Homestake Mining Company. Jim was the Controller and Chief Financial Officer for the operation when the mine closing was imminent. He has worked in various capacities since that time as a consultant, Real Estate Developer and was the Executive Director of the regional economic development group, Black Hills Vision. Jim and Cathie have been married for 52 years, and raised four daughters, and have fourteen grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Jim officiated football and basketball as an SDHSAA official for forty years from 1976 until 2015 and then served as an assigner and observer of high school officials. Jim began his track officiating career in the early 2000's and has worked several state track meets since.

In addition to officiating, Jim served as an assistant basketball coach at Lead High School from 1978-1985 and from 1997-2002. He was the Head Girl Coach from 1999-2003 and participated in two state tournaments.

During his fifty years of officiating, he worked many levels in both football and basketball, including high school, NAIA and NCAA Division II. He worked several State Football Championships and State Tournament basketball games. Jim was inducted into the South Dakota Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Shrine in 2017 and has received the SDHSAA Distinguished Service Award.

25-YEAR OFFICIALS AWARD

Darren Paulson: Darren Paulson was a teacher, coach and administrator for 30 years. He was the Activities Director at Lead-Deadwood High School and at Rapid City Central High School. During his tenure at Rapid City Central, Darren was the meet director/manager for five SDHSAA Track and Field Championships and four SDHSAA Cross Country Championships held in Rapid City. Along with track and field officiating, Darren runs the timing system through Dakota Timing for the majority of Track and Field and Cross Country meets in Western South Dakota. Darren was awarded the 2008 NFHS Citation Award and was inducted into the SDIAAA Hall of Fame in 2024, the Augustana University Athletic Hall of Fame in 2011, the Lead-

Deadwood High School Hall of Fame in 2009, and the Rapid City Sports Hall of Fame in 2018. Darren and his wife of 32 years, Lynn, live in Rapid City.

Track and Field Rules Changes – 2027

Every year the National Federation adds or edits track & field/cross country rules, based on input from officials, actual meet experience and new technology. This year the rule changes are minimal and outlined below.

3-2-3r (NEW): Allows the games committee flexibility in determining if reporting for a field event is by event or by flight.

Rationale: Offers flexibility to determine when an athlete must report for a field event by allowing at the beginning of the event or beginning of the flight. Previously, athletes were required to report to a field event prior to the beginning of the event. Under the new rule the games committee can determine if that still applies or whether it is only necessary to report just prior to the flight the athlete is assigned to

6-2-8 (NEW): Emphasizes safety in field event warm-ups by preventing backward-over-the-head or similar-style attempts.

Rationale: Warm-up attempts by athletes with their back to the sector are dangerous, as it destroys the vital sightline needed to verify the area is clear. This change maintains a clear line of sight to verify that the landing area is safe and clear before a thrower makes an attempt. Often times shot put athletes have stood with their back to the throwing sector and thrown the shot underhanded with both hands over their head. With this rule change, that will no longer be allowed.

6-2-15b (NEW): Prevents additional substances from being applied in throwing events and reorganizes the section for clarity.

Rationale: The change addresses the growing use of foreign substances on shoes in throwing events. The section has been reorganized to provide coaches and officials with clearer, more accessible guidance. This typically applies to substances applied to the shoes of athletes in throwing events. Such an activity can no longer be allowed.

6-8-6: In vertical jumps, offers officials flexibility in providing athletes warm-up at the height change if the 60 min mark already occurred or would occur during the height that is about to begin.

Rationale: To address instances where the 60-minute mark occurs mid-height before the athlete made their first attempt, this alternative rule change grants affected athletes the opportunity to warm up. It maintains the requirement that warm-ups take place during a height change while giving the contest official the flexibility to make a judgment call based on the situation.

2027 Points of Emphasis

1. Throws Safety – Shot Put, Discus and Javelin
2. Athlete Conduct
3. Preventive Officiating

Are smart glasses legal to wear during competition?



Smart glasses are continuing to get harder and harder to tell apart from normal glasses, and they are getting smarter and smarter. Did you know that the most current smart glasses can do more than record? Many of these glasses have gone beyond recording and are able to communicate. Smart glasses can now take calls, text, send voice messages, receive AI assistance, and post directly to Instagram. It is all about the hits! With all of this going on, are they legal to use during competition? Let's take a look at what the rule book states:

NFHS Rule 4-6-6c defines what assistance is to an athlete during competition. This rule states that "No athlete shall wear audio (microphone) or video (camera) device during a race or trial in restricted areas."

This means the use of smart glasses during competition or in competition areas is illegal. With these glasses being hands free, use of these devices is difficult to detect. Other than the recording light, we don't have a way to detect if they are being used or not. If noted, the referee is to notify the athlete that the glasses are illegal and their use is grounds for disqualification. So, let's try to use preventative officiating and have them remove these glasses prior to competition.

Remember this applies in field events as well, although viewing attempts that are recorded by someone else outside of the competition area is permitted in an unrestricted area or a designated coaches' box.

Interested in being at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028?

You can submit your application as a volunteer to support the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles starting July 14. There are a wide variety of "Games-Time" volunteer roles available. **These are not officiating positions.**



Games-Time volunteers will join a group of approximately 60,000 people who will keep things running smoothly for everyone at the Games.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

You must be at least 18 years old and be available for a minimum of ten non-consecutive shifts of approximately eight hours each. [Follow this link](#) and sign up for volunteer updates. Those who sign up for updates will receive information about the application process and available volunteer roles. The application process to select Olympic track and field officials is expected to begin in the fall of 2027.

The Aging Track & Field Official: Staying Sharp, Safe, & Effective

Alex Schauss USATF Arizona Certification Chair

Track and field meets depend on officials who can make accurate judgments, manage events smoothly, and maintain safety. Many officials remain extremely effective well into later adulthood, bringing years of judgment, rule knowledge, calm presence, and event management experience. At the same time, aging can affect the physical, sensory, and cognitive demands that officiating places on a person. Recognizing those changes is not about pushing experienced officials aside; it is about helping them stay active, confident, and well supported.

Physical Demands

Denial is not just a river in Egypt. Although track and field officials are not the ones competing, they often spend long hours standing, walking between venues, bending to inspect equipment, reacting quickly to throws or jumps, and working in heat, cold, wind, or rain. With age, endurance, balance, flexibility, and recovery time may change. An official who once handled a full day on the field without strain may now need more deliberate hydration, shade, breaks, or event assignments that match current physical capacity. Mark Twain once said, “Aging is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” But it does matter when athletes, spectators, and crew depend on your physical and mental capacities to perform.

Sensory and Cognitive Factors

Officiating also requires fast visual tracking, clear hearing, attention to detail, and sound judgment under pressure. Aging may affect vision, hearing, reaction speed, and the ability to process multiple cues at once. These changes can matter in roles such as 1 watching exchange zones, judging lane violations, monitoring takeoff boards, observing sector lines, or communicating audible or inaudible signals. However, experience can offset some of these challenges. Veteran officials often anticipate likely problems, understand event flow,

communicate clearly, and recognize unusual situations before they become serious, based on years of experience.

Supporting Officials as They Age

USATF Associations, meet directors, and official coordinators can help by fostering a culture in which officials can speak honestly about limitations without fear of embarrassment. Practical steps include rotating assignments, pairing newer officials with veterans, offering seated or lower-mobility roles when appropriate, encouraging regular vision and hearing checks, and building in rest periods during long meets. Training can also emphasize positioning, communication, teamwork, and the use of technology so that officials do not rely solely on stamina or quick reaction time. For example, having the ability to measure heights in the high jump using a laser or precision measuring stick, compared to bending over to read the distance of a discus throw using a steel tape.

A Balanced Perspective

Aging does not automatically reduce an official's value. In many cases, it increases it. The challenge is to match responsibilities with current abilities while preserving the wisdom, mentorship, and steadiness that experienced officials provide. Track and field needs officials of all ages. By planning thoughtfully, assigning respectfully, and supporting health and safety, the sport can keep its most experienced officials involved for many years.

New Officials

Do you know someone who may be interested in becoming a track & field and/or cross country official? We are losing officials annually, and we need to make efforts to turn that trend around. The SDHSAA is looking for new officials. Be responsible and recruit someone to succeed you when you retire. Have them contact the SDHSAA and register.

Next Newsletter & Contributions

The SDCCTFOA produces two newsletters, one during cross country and one prior to track season. Anyone with topics is encouraged to reach out to Dana Nelson or Tim Casper. We need more input and ideas, and many of you have things you may like to share. Thank you and best of luck in track & field and cross country.