

Facility Management



CODE OF CONDUCT

Play By the Rules

Make sure your facility has a clearly defined code of conduct for members and guests that is consistently enforced.

BY JOHN TORSIELLO

A verbal scuffle breaks out in your club when one group of players is coming onto a court. You rush to see what the issue is, hoping to maintain the peace. While you may not be able to mend any friendships, you and your facility will be best served if you approach such a situation with an established code of conduct in hand.

“For any club, it is a best practice to have a clearly defined policy of member and guest conduct,” says Jeff Morgan, CEO of the Club Managers Association

of America. “This provides transparent expectations to your members and their guests regarding general standards of conduct. These may contain important information about the culture of your club, including your dress code, mobile phone usage, guest usage policies, etc.”

Mark McMahon, president of McMahon & Associates, a consulting firm that helps clubs recruit and hire directors of tennis and head professionals, says that similar to most successful businesses, members and their guests need a clear understanding of the expectations

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of people using the club. “This can be both behaviors that are expected—such as vacating a court immediately upon completion of court time when others are waiting—or behaviors that are unacceptable—such as wearing jean shorts or other types of designated attire,” he says.

“The easiest and most critical point of contact is the club member,” adds McMahon, who is a USPTA Master Professional and former USPTA Professional of the Year. “Most clubs have, or should have, a member policy that clearly defines that members are responsible for the actions and behavior of their guests. From the first communications received when becoming a member, to ongoing reminders about important rules in the monthly newsletter, a club should clearly outline the rules and code of conduct in place when using the club.”

Many clubs deliver this information during a member's initial joining process, and review it during new-member orientations. Any changes to the club's rules of conduct should be clearly com-

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municated to all members.

“It is incumbent upon your members to ensure their guests are fully aware of the club’s rules of conduct,” Morgan says.

Chances are issues with or between members won’t reach a stage where attorneys get involved. However, it’s always a good idea to make sure your lawyer is aware of any club rules or code of conduct you put in place.

Club bylaws should include a grievance procedure, providing clear guidelines for how member discipline is handled. In some clubs, a discipline issue may be handled by written notice to the member, and subsequent or more severe infractions may be referred to a board of directors. Adherence to these grievance procedures is important in the event the issue becomes chronic.

“It’s important for an owner or general manager to be consistently visible around the club so that members have the opportunity to have informal conversations on a regular basis,” McMahon notes. “This allows the owner/general manager to build relationships with members, which in turn promotes consistency around rule enforcement. Consistently applying and enforcing the rules and a code of conduct will also mitigate any sense of unfairness or favoritism.”

JoAnn Lee, tennis director for the Creekside Tennis and Swim Club in Mount Pleasant, S.C., says her facility posts signs with the basic rules for all to see. “We do not have a policy stating appropriate behavior for people playing on the tennis court, but we have basic policies regarding proper tennis attire,” she says. “It’s a good idea to have general rules, and the club manager should enforce the rules, as well as the staff, so the club is a pleasant environment for all.”

McMahon says a “good owner or general manager will trust and empower senior staff” to enforce club rules and a code of conduct. Where things can get sticky is when a member challenges the authority of a staff member or the validity of a rule, and appeals to the owner or general manager directly.

“In these situations, it’s critical for the owner or general manager to support the staff member,” McMahon says. “An

owner or general manager that decides to waive a rule because he or she doesn’t want a conflict with a member only undermines the staff and invites a future line of members who come to believe that the rules are for everyone but themselves.”

Disagreements and misunderstandings with members will happen. But if your facility has clear, written rules and a code of conduct, communicates both clearly and frequently to members, and enforces them consistently, you’ll most likely avoid uncomfortable situations. ■



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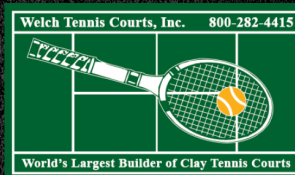
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