

Social Media Conduct for Umpires and Referees

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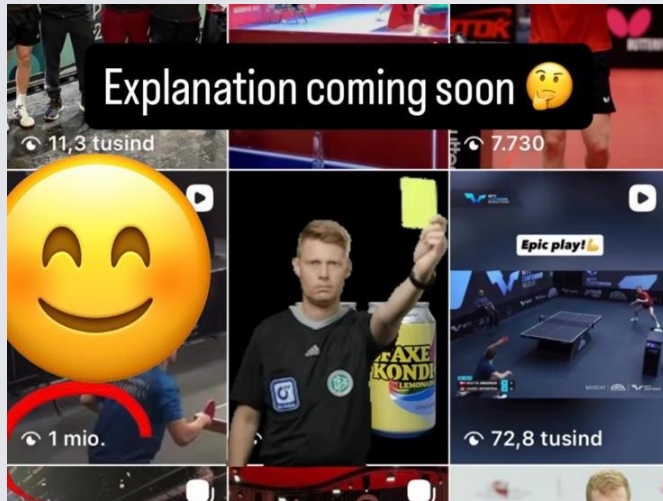
Today´s topics

- The growing interest
- Numbers
- People on SoMe
- Commentators
- Do´s and don´t´s
- Practical advice
- No SoMe?
- Specific for Referee´s

The growing interest

- WTT have 1.8 million followers on facebook, 842.0000 on Instagram and 1.3 million on youtube.
- Plenty of different accounts, create content every day.
- Table tennis is the sport where most money is spent on betting.
- All this means that exposure is just a thing we must deal with.
- This exposure is also positive, as it gives us a lot of videos we can use for teaching and becoming better.

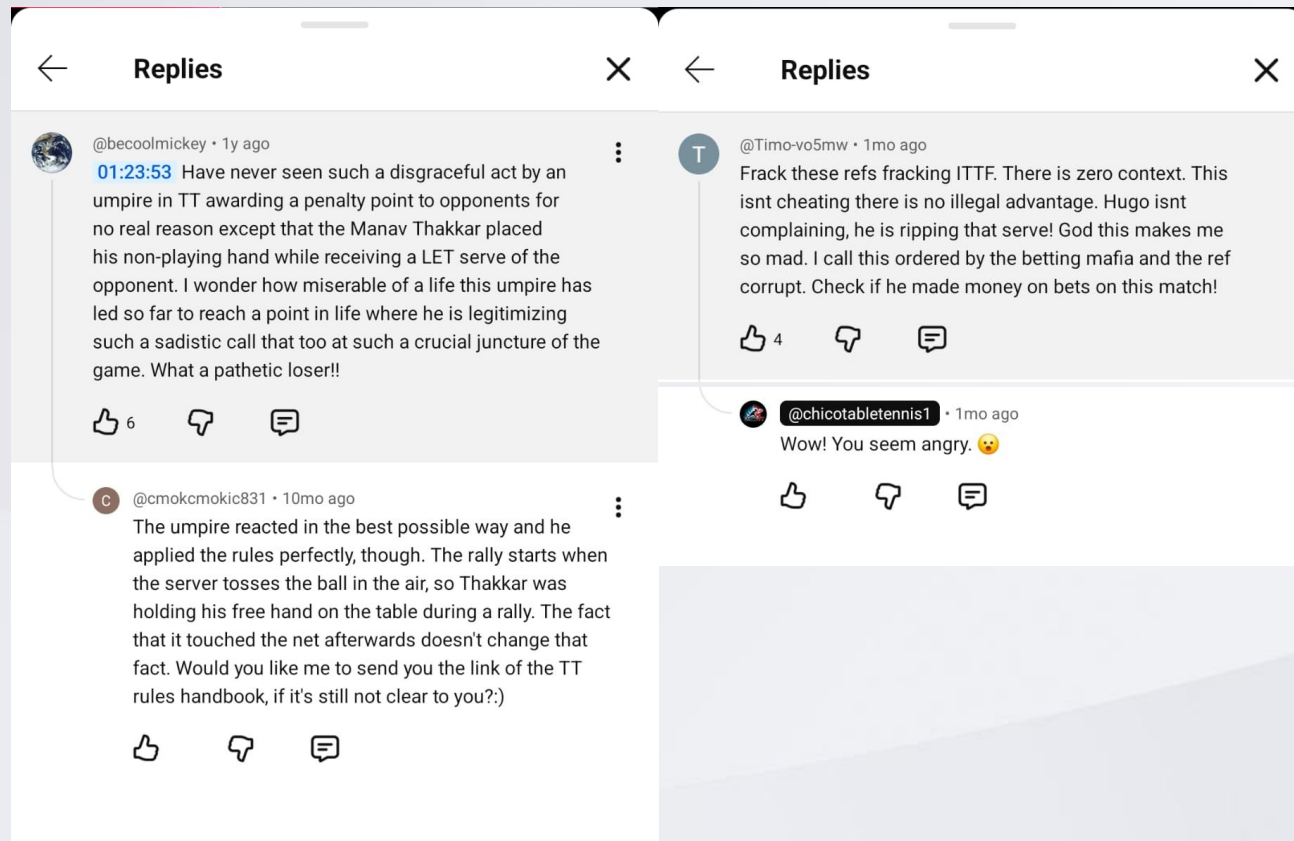
Numbers



- Great rallies and point of the day videos on WTT's Instagram account rarely reaches 20.000 likes.
- The match point in the Europe smash 2025 final reached 208.000 likes.
- A Danish player with 11.000 followers placed 220 on the world ranking made a video from one of his matches, where he thought the umpire did something weird. That video got 106.000 likes and more than a million views. Meaning umpire "mistakes" is interesting on SoMe

People on SoMe

- In general people behind a screen are always using more extreme language, than they would be face to face.



Luckily there are some "heroes" out there

Do you have any experiences like this, either positive or negative?

Commentators

- The commentators can both work with us and “against us”
- Their knowledge of the rules, or lack thereof, can influence how much a video gets shown.
- If they are outraged by our decisions, the numbers automatically grow.

Do's and don'ts

Do's:

- Private social media.
- Talk to colleagues about your matches. Share experiences (support group).
- Try to find the positive in each comment (I personally amuse myself whenever I see a bad comment about me).
- Good presentation.

Don'ts

- Don't follow players on social media.
- Don't share pictures/videos from the tournament during the tournament.
- Don't comment on other colleagues matches/decisions.
- Don't let negative comments affect you. Random strangers over the internet have no power over me.
- Don't be too friendly with players. It will affect your performance in the FOP.
- Don't engage coaches too much. Long discusses are never useful.

Practical advices

- All matches have exposure. (from the lowest league national matches to the biggest stages in the world). Always be professional – not only in the FOP.
- Accept that social media exposure comes with the job.
- It can be a match recorded by a player, it doesn't have to be a live stream.
- Whenever a mistake is made, try to be as graceful as possible about it.
- Even good/correct decisions are under scrutiny and discussed. Start from the idea: we know the rules, the "keyboard warriors" don't.
- Expect the unexpected.



No personal account on social media – why?

- personal decision not to create an account on facebook or similar in 2010
- nothing to do with table tennis but with research for university (bachelor thesis)
- main reason weak data protection



Still no account today

- decision stands, mainly to protect myself from changing environment
- Information about posts (concerning me) still reaches me: in real time sometimes directly after a match and unfiltered
- no intention to react myself, so I can keep calm
- during tournaments it helps to concentrate on my duties
- remain privat, when I want to be privat



Am I missing out social interaction among umpires?

- no feeling like this
- needed information is available through other channels (e.g. websites)
- friendships can be built and last without social media as well. Sometimes these friendships are the most valuable ones



No media at all?

- time to review requests
- If there are media requests, it is good to have the control over the topics and pictures, before something is published

Specifics for referees

- Not the same focus as umpires at the table
- But if referee is present = escalation already happened
 - Audience is already focused on this issue
- TV/media will follow referee and his/her decision
 - Be careful about your "gesture/mimic even movements"
 - Be careful about your "words"
 - Communication with umpire (observed by media/audience) even if you separate from players/coaches

Specifics for referees

- Discussions with players/coaches
 - NOT in the FoP
 - NOT in presence of media/audience – invite players/coaches for a meeting to a separate room (of course never alone)
 - Do not react to provocations – keep calm (never take it as a personal issue)
- Interviews
 - We do not give interviews without permission of ITTF or WTT

Discussion

- **Match Officials should not initiate to take any photos with players in a tournament and also not post any private photos with players on any social media** (e.g. Facebook). If however, players ask umpires for a picture with them, umpires may not refuse.
- Last game of the match. 10-9 for player A. The umpires don't see an edge ball by player X, award the point to player A and player A wins the match. After the match player X wants to take a picture with the umpires and moments later social media is flooded with the caption: "the blind umpires who don't see an edge ball and cost me a match."
- Should we not be able to refuse players as well when pictures are asked of us?
- In a positive situation I would agree it would benefit us, but when the outcome will for sure be negative, I believe we should be able to refuse.

Questions - Recommendations

- Will there be any restrictions what match officials can post on social media during a competition?
 - *No restrictions, BUT it has to be taken into account in selection of match officials for events/matches in an event (e.g. neutrality..)*
- “In what ways can an umpire share personal views on social media while still fully respecting the neutrality and impartiality required by our official regulations — or does true compliance mean avoiding any kind of public statement on any topic altogether?”
 - *We should not share our personal views on social media about matches/decisions of other umpires.*
- Is it OK for an umpire to run a social media channel where they bring some in-depth knowledge of umpiring to the subscribers and share their experience and best practices as well as some basic information about the rules and regulations of table tennis?
 - *No problem, as long as no videos/photos of players or umpires or scenarios of matches are used; should be general explanations of rules*
- Why should a private SM account concern URC? It's not a official tabletennis site.
 - *No restrictions, BUT it has to be taken into account in selection of match officials for events/matches in an event (e.g. neutrality*

Questions – Recommendations

- How should we deal/response with offline doubts when a rare question of fact decision has unfortunately been made incorrectly and later posted on social media?
 - *Do not react on social media posts, discuss your cases internally with your umpire community*
- Is it proper to reply to emails that fans are sending ?
 - *No, appeals/protests/questions should only come from the player or coach of this specific match and who has the right to appeal.*
 - *Replying to fans, can open "Pandoras Box"*
- How should an umpire respond if they are publicly criticized, tagged, or targeted on social media after a match, and what is the proper reporting procedure within the federation or officiating structure?
 - *Forward it to ETTU URC for further investigation*

Questions - Recommendations

- Is it permissible for a sports official, such as an umpire or referee, to also serve as a personal coach for a player, including traveling with them, without violating the rules of the sport?
 - *YES, but not in the same tournament and not in the same event (e.g. league); or e.g. your child is playing U11 – you should not umpire U11 as your decision in a match might influence the ranking list in U11 and might influence also the ranking of your child*
- If you have pictures with players from all different associations in private clothes, it's that a problem? If so why?
 - *Yes, also in private clothes we are still match officials, who are officiating events and might umpire this player in another event.*
- What if we don't want to be filmed and posted while officiating matches?
 - *As soon as you are nominated for an event, you agree to be filmed or posted.*
- Are there any specific protocols or mental preparation for top-level umpires to deal with sometimes virulent comments after a controversial decision?
 - *This webinar is a first start to support umpires. You are all invited to share your experience with your colleagues and to learn from each other.*

Thank you