



I am not a fan of winter. I don't like cold. I am afraid of falling or sliding on ice. I dislike wind. I don't appreciate so many hours in the dark each day. The last week of February may still feel like winter outside, but for me it marks the coming of spring. The days are getting longer; I can see the horizon when I leave my house in the morning. I have gotten my "winter legs" and consider boots the only appropriate footwear. Most of all, the last week in February baseball players report to Spring Training in Arizona or Florida. I know spring is not far off.

I was rejoicing as I watched the pitchers and catchers warming up. I started thinking about the comparison to dispute resolution. For people in conflict, it feels like a long, long winter. There is an obvious comparison to the dark, cold weather for many in disputes.

When parties come to mediation, they may feel like they are walking on ice - not sure of their footing, watching where they are going, and afraid to fall at any given time. I can even see a comparison to wearing your boots and preparing for mediation.

For many parties, there comes a "Spring Training" moment - that instant when they can imagine moving forward without the conflict. Parties can see the end. It may still take minutes or even hours to reach a final agreement, but the future vision is there.

As mediators, coaches, friends, and others involved with people in conflict, we need to help parties see these moments. We need to stay positive and work with them to find solutions, even when it feels cold, dark and windy. We need to help people struggling with conflict to get to the warm, sunny place. For me, that is the bleachers in Florida in late March.

Melinda Gehris

NHCRA Board President

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