Proactive Approaches to Minimizing Negative Interactions Between Fans & Officials

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Why Officials Quit

In almost every study of attrition amongst youth and interscholastic officials, the #1 reason officials quit is because of verbal (and sometimes physical) abuse by fans, coaches, and participating athletes.
Why Officials Quit
Recently, the NASO conducted nationwide research on officiating at multiple levels. Nearly 17,500 officials responded to their survey and the following data points were reported at their 2017 Sports Officiating Summit.

1. Nearly 48% of male officials and 45% of female officials claimed that they had felt unsafe, or in danger, due to administrator, coach, player, or spectator behavior.
2. 65% claimed that sportsmanship towards officials was at its worst in recreational youth, competitive youth, and high school sports.
3. 58% believed that the fans and parents created the most sportsmanship problems.
ADs as Officials

- How many of you are licensed officials?

- Why did you get into sports officiating?

- What are you seeing as an official? What group is the worst in terms of sportsmanship?
By The Numbers

In Canada, there are nearly 30,000 registered youth hockey officials every year. Of that number, nearly 10,000 quit annually, meaning that each year \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the youth hockey officials in Canada are first year officials. (Mulcahy, 2017)
By The Numbers

In Spokane, WA the Inland Empire Soccer Referee Association reported that of the 166 youth soccer referees that had went through the certification process in the Spring of 2014, only 84 of them were still officiating by November of the same year. (Barville, 2014)
Group Discussion

In groups of 4-5, share a brief summary of the worst official/fan experience you have encountered as an athletic administrator.

5 Minutes
What Can We Do?

Silent Sideline
What Can We Do?

Stop Tormenting Officials Permanently (STOP)
What Can We Do?

Minnesota’s “Thank A Ref” Campaign

In the wake of a nationwide officials’ shortage, the MSHSL’s “Thank A Ref” campaign was first launched in 2015. But instead of accentuating the national crisis for more officials, the MSHSL’s “Thank A Ref” campaign was designed to not only emphasize the positives of officiating, but also to complement the League’s efforts at recruiting and retaining officials (NFHS, 2017).
Strategies

SET THE TONE EARLY

Work with those responsible for the youth leagues/teams that feed into your school district. Getting them on board with your expectations of fan behavior, and having them hold their parents to the same standards, will set an early tone about what is and isn’t acceptable at the next level.
Strategies

HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR OWN SPECTATORS

Make it a point for you and your coaches to discuss in-game behavior with parents prior to each season. This won’t always solve the issue, but it does serve as a pre-existing warning to fans that do become unruly at some point.
Strategies

HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED EXPECTATIONS FOR VISITING SPECTATORS AND THE COMMON FAN

Make sure everyone that enters your facility can see, read, and hear your expectations for fan behavior. You can convey this information with the use of banners, posters, programs, and PA announcements.
PLEASE REMEMBER
1) THESE ARE KIDS
2) THIS IS A GAME
3) THE COACHES VOLUNTEER
4) THE UMPIRES ARE HUMAN
5) YOU DO NOT PLAY FOR THE CARDINALS

City of Metropolis
Dept of Parks & Recreation

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS
TIGERS
BELIEVE SPORTSMANSHIP IS AN EXPECTATION
PLEASE LET THE PLAYERS PLAY
LET THE COACHES COACH
LET THE OFFICIALS OFFICIATE
LET THE SPECTATORS BE POSITIVE

PARENTS
These are children
This is a game
The coaches are volunteers
The referees are human
This is not the World Cup
It’s their game,
just let them play

If you’re here to cheer for your child,
WELCOME
If you’re here to yell obscenities, please leave now.
SPORTSMANSHIP HAS A FACE. Yours.

#FaceOfSportsmanship

ATTENTION ADULTS!

YOU REPRESENT US ALL

Their may not be wearing a jersey, but the adults in our community are representatives of our high school almost as much as our student-athletes are.

When parents or adult fans belittle and disparage a coach or disrespect an official, it reflects poorly on our school.

And when they use language that is abusive, rude or vulgar, it casts a negative light on our entire community.

Remember, your behavior at a high school sporting event is a reflection on more than just yourself. It’s a reflection on all of us.

#FaceOfSportsmanship

SIX EASY WAYS TO BECOME AN MVP

AND BY MVP WE MEAN MOST VALUABLE PARENT.
Strategies

HAVE AN AUTHORITATIVE PRESENCE

Fans of all ages are less likely to act out toward officials, or anyone else, if there is a clear authoritative presence at the game. Make sure that you, your administration, and your security team are spread out and paying attention to what is going on at all times.
Strategies

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR OFFICIALS

Take the time to talk with your officials before any event. Let them know where you or other people that they can turn to for help will be located and alert them to any issues that they may encounter. This communication helps to build a sense of trust between you and the official and lets them know that you have their back.
Strategies

SET AN EARLY EXAMPLE

Inevitably a negative interaction between a fan and an official will occur. Calmly dealing with the situation in an immediate fashion will serve as an example for not only that fan, but for all spectators in attendance. The more you let the situation escalate, the harder it will be to control at that time and at the next event.
Strategies

RECOGNIZE GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

Find ways to recognize acts of good sportsmanship by fans, officials, coaches, and athletes. Broadcast those recognitions via social media as often as possible. Doing this sets the precedent that sportsmanship is important, expected, and celebrated at your school.
Group Discussion

In the same groups as earlier, discuss how you as an athletic administrator handled those negative interactions at the time, and what changes, if any, were made to future policy or protocol at your school.

Or share something unique that you, or your school, does to help with the promotion of good sportsmanship amongst fans.