



KANSAS STATE HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES JOURNAL

Spotlight on Officials

This month's Spotlight on Officials features George Ebert. The 45-year registered official residing in Flush, Kansas took time out of his life on the farm to tell his story as it relates to officiating. Ebert began his officiating career with the KSHSAA in 1974 with basketball, and a few years later picked up football and has been involved ever since. He is very active in the KSHSAA mentorship program and has officiated numerous state championship games in basketball and football.

KSHSAA: Do you remember your first game or the first time you decided to officiate?

Ebert: The superintendent, Lou Hitch, knew that I was struggling on whether I wanted to coach or be an ag teacher. His son was my age and he told us, "you guys ought to get into officiating." So we did. Luckily Kansas State had an intercession officiating class and they let us register. We started officiating right away, going to Flush and a few other local places like Lousiville, Belvue and Wheaton. It was a little bit different back then as you worked junior high and junior varsity levels for many years before you ever got a varsity game, which is totally different now.

KSHSAA: Are any of those that were in the intercession class with you still officiating?

Ebert: There were 10 of us in the class. I do not believe anyone else is still officiating. I do not think there are too many great-grandpas officiating. Part of my goals is to officiate three generations of some families around here within 50 miles. There are a couple families that are getting really close—the grandpa, the dad and the child. It should happen within two or three years. My joke is to tell the grandpa that "I'm not any better than when I 'reffed' you, but I'm consistent."

KSHSAA: What has been the biggest change from 1974 to now?

Ebert: Getting people to commit to an officiating date several months down the road. Many people now-a-days do not want to commit to a date because they are afraid they may miss out on something else. I use the analogy that it is better than coaching because with coaching it is every night and officiating is whenever you want it to be. I think it is a societal thing. Some people say it is the pay or the poor sportsmanship from fans, but that is always going to be there. It is not one single thing for the reason why there is a lack of officials, but the biggest thing that I have seen change is the difficult task to get people to commit to a date a year in advance.

KSHSAA: What is rewarding to you when you mentor a new official?

Ebert: When I am officiating I will notice the kids playing, whether it be football or basketball, that are the team leaders and captains. When the time is appropriate, I will compliment them on their leadership, ask them what they are doing after they graduate, and if they say K-State, I will make it a point to contact them about officiating when they are done playing. From there I tell them to talk a friend into it; it is always better if two get into it, that way they push each other. That is what I do and it is a great reward whenever someone like Kari (Pfrang) or Justin Seuser gets the National JuCo Finals. David Oliver is in the NFL now, so those are all very rewarding. Whether they work just on Friday or Thursday nights, it does not matter. They are out there for the love of the game and just helping kids.

KSHSAA: Is assigning something you always thought you would do?

Ebert: No, it all started with the Cottonwood Valley League. A couple administrators approached me and asked if I would consider assigning for their league. So I started there and then took on the Twin Valley League. They knew I



George Ebert (far right) poses for a photo with his officiating partners before a 2A State Basketball game in Manhattan.

had a lot of contacts so it just kind of fell into my lap.

KSHSAA: How has the farming career coincided with the officiating world?

Ebert: It is tremendous. I may have lost a few hay customers over the years because I may have fouled out their star kid or something, but the majority of the time it is a common bond between the rural agricultural life and officiating. All the old timers know I am a farmer and they want to know how things are going on the farm when I go into somewhere like Topeka High. It has been a very, very good combination of my busy farm summers and slower winters. It is something we can always talk about besides sports when we go out to officiate.

KSHSAA: Has officiating provided you with friendships that you otherwise wouldn't have had?

Ebert: Without a doubt. There isn't a community in Kansas that I do not have somebody that I could call and just talk to them or if I break down with a semi, it is very rewarding to know I can call someone to help me get back on the road. Every community this side of Highway 81 and north of 54 I know someone in every town that has a high school.

KSHSAA: What motivates you to continue every night, year?

Ebert: The friendships. Ninety-nine percent of all the experiences are positive. It is that one percent that gets the publicity that may darken the cloud of officiating. It is human nature to see the bad and of course that is what makes the news. For me it is the love of the game. I love seeing junior high kids start playing and watching them develop through the years as a player and a team leader. It is rewarding running into someone at McDonalds or Walmart and they say, "Hey I remember you. You called a foul on me for shoving that kid." We laugh about it and reminisce. There are some bad punches, sure. If you stay in it long enough you will have some very unusual circumstances and you may get it right or you may get it wrong. Sometimes there isn't a right answer.



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