

Spotlight on Officials

A Family Tradition

Many officials set goals for themselves as they begin their avocation. Some wish to make it to the collegiate level or maybe even the professional level. Others want to get to “state” and work a championship. Or maybe they just want to keep progressing at their craft and be a solid, respected high school official. For one family, a goal turned into more of a bucket list. This season they ran a Sharpie through a check box.

Saturday, September 7, mom, dad, and the two daughters worked the same event together at the Three Rivers League Volleyball Tournament. “I was excited for this opportunity, it has been on my personal ‘bucket list’ for some time,” said Tracy Smith. “Teresa (Smith) and I work together quite often, and with Kaity (Bradbury) living in our area, I get to work with her at times. Now that Abbie (Thomas, Topeka) is registered, Teresa and I find the opportunities to try to work with her and have requested matches in that area. The Three Rivers Tournament was large enough to play on four courts, so it was wonderful that the four of us were calling matches on side by side courts.”

Mom, Teresa Smith, and dad, Tracy Smith, each began as registered volleyball officials in 2006. For 14 years they have taken the court together. You could certainly say volleyball is a family tradition. The parents showed what opportunities were still there in the game and it didn’t take much for Kaitlyn and Abbie to join.

“Kaitlyn did not play college volleyball, so we encouraged her to officiate as a part-time job during her college years,” said Teresa. “Abbie did play college volleyball but saw officiating as a way to stay involved and give back to a sport she loves. Obviously having parents as officials made it a natural choice for both.”

They may not all get to work together often but they are very familiar with each other’s experiences. “We call each other on the way to our games to discuss our upcoming matches and then after to share any unusual situations,” Kaitlyn explained.

Kaitlyn Bradbury, a mom, cattle rancher and educator, has been registered for 13 years in volleyball. Playing the game in high school she was familiar with the game, obviously, but learned a lot from her dad as she began officiating.

“My dad served as my mentor,” said Kaitlyn. “He has always been the standard I strive to achieve. When I started, he told me to always read the rules book before the season started, to find a way to attend the meetings, and to practice my mechanics in front of a mirror. Thirteen years later, I still do those things to start a season, and by staying consistent with the fundamentals and knowing the rules, it has made me a better official year after year.”

Abbie, an Assistant Controller at Stormont Vail, said the advice she received from her parents was simple but the number one thing all officials need to remember, “My parents told me to take your time and make the right call.”

Many families in Kansas grow up around a sport. Whether it is coaching, watching your kids play or playing, they have a vested interest. It doesn’t just go away. Officiating is a way the Smiths have stayed in a game they love and grew up with.

“As a principal and my wife as a teacher and both daughters involved in volleyball, our family actually grew up in a gymnasium,” said Tracy. “Teresa and I often kept score, line judged and obviously, as the administrator, set up and administered the events.”

How did it all begin? Their daughters had graduated so Tracy and Teresa found something they could do together and still be involved in the game.

“Teresa played volleyball in high school, so it was a natural ‘jump’ for her,” said Tracy. “Me, I was always football! But with two daughters...the change was harder for me. I’m blessed that I am surrounded by ‘my girls’ that know the game and through them my knowledge base blossomed. Officiating at lower levels to begin, watching Kaity coach at Pitt State and then watching Abbie play at Pitt State, volleyball has become my passion.”

Every official gets their start, they set goals and hope to attain them. Having family along the way certainly makes it enjoyable.

“They (her family) are all GREAT officials, and I think we make each other better each time we get to work together,” said Abbie.

