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SPOTLIGHT ON OFFICIALS

Before You Yell at the Referees Tonight, Let Me Tell You About My Daddy

By Carolyn Moore, *Her View From Home*

Most of the time, you probably don't even notice he's there.

But the official prowling the sidelines of your high school gymnasium isn't just a zebra to shout angry words at from your spot in the stands—he's my daddy.

And I'm counting on you to be kind.

For a few months every year, he's gone most evenings blowing his whistle in gyms from down the street to halfway across the state. When he leaves for work in the mornings, he takes along a black suitcase with his striped shirt, Sansabelt pants, and a pocketful of rule books and Fox 40s—ready to head straight to another game once his 9-to-5 is done.

On many of those evenings, we follow him. My mom packs a bag with toys and snacks and cash for concessions; our "basketball bag" lives in the front hall, ready and waiting for Daddy's next game.

We drive country highways to the "Home of the Braves/Lakers/Lions etc." and settle into an inconspicuous corner of the bleachers to watch him work. More often than not, we don't know anyone in the crowd, and when one of us kids asks which team we're going for tonight, Mom always tells us, "We're cheering for the refs."

Because if there's anything I've already learned from being in the crowd at youth sporting events, it's that most people do exactly the opposite.

What so many fans forget is that the crew of officials that's so easy to criticize is actually just a trio of average people. They're teachers and pharmacists and mothers and bankers and car salesmen. They're the people you bump into at the grocery store and sit behind in the pews on Sunday mornings at church. They're your neighbors, your old classmates, the parents of your kids' friends.

They also choose to work a mostly thankless side job as sports officials.

I promise you, they're working harder than you realize to make the experience of playing and watching youth sports safe, fair, and fun.

I see how hard my daddy's working out there—and I wish you did, too.

While everyone else is watching the ball swish through the hoop, my eyes are trained on the one standing on the sidelines with two arms in the air, signaling three points.

When fans are erupting over another fast break, I'm watching him match their speed step for thundering step.

When teams are huddled together hurriedly plotting last-possession strategy, I see him talking with the scorekeeper, game ball on his hip, calmly making sure he and his partners are prepared for whatever scenario plays out next.

And what you probably don't realize is that when my daddy's on the court, he's doing a lot more than calling travels, administering free throws, and ignoring "over the backs" (fact check: not a thing).

He's showing me what it means to work hard and better myself.

He's teaching me about camaraderie and friendship.

He's showing me the importance and joy of pursuing a hobby.

He's modeling for me the value of patience and persistence.

He knows angry words, argumentative coaches, and constant criticism is all just part of the gig. (I think he even enjoys it sometimes.)

But what you should remember when you're ready to berate him from the stands next time is this: he deserves your respect.

The fact is, he's spending a lot of time away from our house to pursue something that's become a passion. He's logging countless hours running up and down gym floors, then icing his aching knee afterward. He's watching tape of the game long after we've gone to bed, critiquing everything from the strength of his whistle to how much his left arm swings when he runs.

He takes pride in the work most people aren't brave enough to do.

And you know what I know for sure? He does that work so well.

That's my hero out there on the court, wearing the stripes.

And I'm counting on you to be kind.



Image via Carolyn Moore