

Officials Spotlight

by Brad Hallier, a reprint from *VYPE Magazine*



We've seen the videos. They often go viral, and even someone with a marginal use of Facebook or Twitter has probably seen them.

The angry soccer mom kicking a ball at, and hitting, a teenage referee.

The basketball dad coming out of the stands and hitting a referee.

A wrestling dad verbally assaulting a referee on the mat after a match.

Folks, it's going to happen. Maybe not this year. Maybe not next year. Maybe not when your kids are in high school sports. But it will happen eventually.

There will be games that will be postponed or canceled because of a referee shortage.

As a Kansas State High School Activities Association soccer referee, I can assure you the concern is already there. Already, some high school boys soccer games in the fall have had to use the dreaded two-person crew for varsity games, which is insanity given that using a two-person crew for junior varsity games is difficult enough. While the referee pool is deeper for the girls spring

season (no college games in the spring), it's not deep enough. Already, I'm hearing concerns that two-person referee teams may have to be used this spring.

In Nebraska, the shortage of football officials has led rural districts to play mid-afternoon games so that referee crews can do the afternoon game, as well as an evening game.

Scheduling will have to get creative. You're going to start seeing more Thursday and Saturday high school football games. You're going to see more Monday and Friday soccer games. You're going to see more Monday, Thursday and Saturday basketball games.

The reasons for the growing shortage are ample.

Some referees have a hard time getting off work in time to work games.

Some referees age and retire.

Some referees decide to cut back on their schedule due to injury, family matters or just catch a breather.

But the biggest reason for the growing shortage? Capable referees thinking, "This isn't worth it."

What isn't worth it? Several things. I can assure you my body is already readily questioning me why I continue to referee. The pay is good, but not great when you figure in travel.

But ultimately, it isn't worth getting screamed at. It isn't worth having people who couldn't tell you the difference between soccer offside and football offsides (notice the spelling?) telling you how bad you are. It isn't worth hearing coaches repeatedly hammer you for something that happened two hours before. It isn't worth hearing the insults from the stands. It isn't worth sitting in the locker room and wondering if it's safe to go to your car yet.

This is not a whine fest where I think referees shouldn't be held accountable. They should. Heck, I think all referees at the high school varsity level and up should be available to media after games, especially in postseason play. I certainly wouldn't mind explaining calls I make. And referees who put forth a poor effort and are grouchier than "Oscar The Grouch" should be called out.

And this isn't to say fans, players and coaches can't be human and have a moment where they get angry with a referee. Do you let it go? Do you continue to seethe for 20 minutes, for 45 minutes, for the rest of the night?

In order to get the highest quality games, you need the highest quality officials. To get the best officials, you need a deep pool in which to choose from. The United States isn't a world basketball power because we have a few great players. It's because the talent pool is ridiculously deep.

To have any sort of athletic event, you need officials. The shortage is growing, and problems are only going to get worse. Ask yourself this – do you want to be a part of the solution? Because if not, you could have a heck of a problem when there aren't enough officials to work your school's games.