



Officials Need to Know and Follow Rules

By Bill Gosse

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Of all the parties involved in sports – parents, fans, athletes, coaches and officials – the “refs” are recipients of the most abuse.

In TeamScore Inc’s most recent WIAA-member sportsmanship study, “fans yelling at officials” was identified clearly as the number one problem at sporting events.

I know I try my best for officials to hear me at Lambeau Field when I disagree with a call, even though I’m sitting in the comfort of my home.

Many people use sports to vent their frustrations and use any excuse to do so.

Many youth officials open themselves up to disrespect – perhaps unknowingly.

When registering as an official, a rule book, casebook (situations) and officials manual are provided. Toward the front of the officials manual is The National Federation of State High School Associations’ code of ethics.

I would guess many officials never read this code. The NFHS establishes rules and guidelines for all high school and most youth sports, and this code sets the proper tone.

The opening paragraph of the code states, “Officials at an interscholastic athletic event are participants in the educational development of high school students. As such, they must exercise a high level of self-discipline, independence and responsibility. The purpose of this code is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for all interscholastic officials.”

Isn’t it profound how officials are expected to participate in helping educate student-athletes? They have an opportunity and it’s not just to collect a paycheck.

Here are summaries of the eight points of the code:

- Officials need to master both the rules of the game and the mechanics necessary to enforce the rules, and need to be impartial and firm.
- Officials need to work together and support each other.

- Officials need to be professional in all interactions. It's easy to lose control with uncontrolled people. This is difficult, but paramount.
- Officials need to be physically and mentally prepared, dressed neatly and appropriately, and behave with high standards. Dressing appropriately is where many officials "drop the ball". Are all officials dressed uniformly? Umpiring a baseball or softball game with a backwards cap, shorts and a muscle shirt won't immediately command respect.
- Officials need to be on time and professional with their contracts. When it comes to respect, being late is strike one. Don't expect to get paid with cash either.
- Officials will get treated based on how they act. Is maximum effort given? Is an official simply trying to get through a contest?
- Officials need to know whether a field of play is safe for kids, and react accordingly.
- Officials need to know what to do in case of an emergency. CPR? Lightning?

Officiating is hard enough without any guidance. Having everything in order before starting, and joining a support association is a step in the right direction.

Studying, practice and thick skin will help with the rest.