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Enough is enough: Bad behavior by coaches, parents and fans must stop

By: Peter Weber and Dr. Karissa Niehoff Sept. 16, 2022

Heads of national and state sports organizations warn that trend could be an end to high school sports

There's an unfortunate trend continuing in Oregon and across the nation that must be stopped: the bad behavior of coaches, parents and fans at high school athletic events.

We've all seen it: the yelling, harassing, berating, disrespecting and even physically assaulting high school referees, umpires and other officials during and after games. And oftentimes, the harassment continues on social media. Perhaps you've witnessed it firsthand or even been one of those offenders yourself.

Not only is this behavior unacceptable and embarrassing, but it's also having serious consequences on the future of high school sports.

That's because another unfortunate trend is sweeping the nation: a critical shortage of high school officials in every state. The No. 1 reason? You guessed it: Coaches, parents and fans mistreating officials.

"Officially Human: The State of Sports Officiating 2020," a national survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, reports some alarming statistics: 55% of officials say verbal abuse from coaches, parents and fans is the No. 1 reason they quit; 59% don't feel

respected; 57% think sportsmanship is getting worse; 84% feel officials are treated unfairly by spectators; 46% have felt unsafe or feared for their safety due to spectator, coach, administrator or player behavior.

Officials are quitting faster than new ones are signing up. It's a major area of concern for states like Oregon just to cover games. We're already experiencing many varsity and sub-varsity games having to be rescheduled and, in some cases, canceled. All because there aren't enough officials.

Unfortunately, bad behavior at high school athletic events has become normalized. It is almost expected that coaches, parents and fans will disrespect the individuals serving as officials.

This culture of bad behavior and the negative perception of officials must change now. Everyone involved in high school sports — parents, coaches, administrators, fans, the media — must turn their focus to the student-athletes playing the games and away from the individuals officiating the contests.

The bottom line: With no high school officials, there can be no high school sports.

That's why the NFHS is partnering with state high school associations across the country to launch the nationwide #BenchBadBehavior campaign. We'll use the power of social media along with other tools to help educate everyone about the importance of good behavior at high school athletic events.

You can help by being a positive role model at your high school's athletic events. And if you think you have what it takes to be a licensed official, sign up today at NewOfficials.org and help fill an urgent need in Oregon.

Dr. Karissa Niehoff is CEO of the National Federation of State High School Associations; Peter Weber is executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association.

Article Available [Here](#).

Opinion: What Makes a “Good” Student Section

[Brandon Kruse](#) and [Tyler Kleine](#)

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Student sections are a key aspect of high school and college sports. Whether it be Fossil Ridge High School or Kansas University, supporters of an organization strive for student representation at sporting events. But what exactly makes a “good” student section? Is it the size? Traditions? Noise level? Chants? Sportsmanship? There are a plethora of characteristics that illustrate a great student section. However, Brandon and I will discuss the three main traits of student sections that define the best in both high school and college athletics: support & intensity, themes & tradition, and sportsmanship.

Support & Intensity

Overall fan support exemplifies dedication to a sport. This is true for many professional sports franchises, including NFL’s Seattle Seahawks, MLB’s St. Louis Cardinals, NBA’s Dallas Mavericks, and NHL’s Nashville Predators. But in high school and college sports, the intensity increases dramatically in the presence of passionate student fan bases. Fossil’s senior point guard Drew Cornmesser discussed the impact fans have on the game, explaining, “(Fan support) definitely has an impact on everyone. When there’s a lot of students there, everyone feeds on that. The energy that a student section brings is contagious. It helps our team play with more energy. And then when we have more energy, we play harder.” In addition, great fan support generally reflects a team’s success. For example, both Purdue University and Kansas University consistently get sellouts to their basketball games. As a result, both teams went undefeated at their home courts this past season. Purdue won all 15 games at Mackey Arena while Kansas went 17-0 when playing at Allen Fieldhouse. And, this isn’t just a coincidence. Purdue has an all-time record of 637-139 at Mackey Arena, while Kansas has lost only five games at Allen Fieldhouse in the past six seasons. In fact, Kansas has an overall 791-114 record at Allen Fieldhouse going back to 1955. The fact that both Purdue and Kansas have consistent incredible fan support has generally led to great success for both programs. Cornmesser considered this as well, expressing that a great student section “rattles the other team, making them play poorly which generally leads to success for us.”

Themes & Traditions

Themes and traditions contribute to the overall fan experience of a game. Certain schools have their own customs for games but some of the main themes include blackout, whiteout, tropical night, frat out, etc. Themes are designed to make all the fans feel unified and create a positive atmosphere. Taylor University holds their annual “Silent Night” game in which students and fans dress up in Halloween attire and costumes. The students and fans remain absolutely silent until Taylor scores its tenth point, after which students and fans go crazy, storming the court and chanting. Taylor University has been doing this for 22 years now and is considered one of the best traditions in college basket-

Sportsmanship

Finally, sportsmanship does not apply just to the players, but to the fans as well. At every sporting event, there is repeated heckling from fans to opposing players (just sit in left field at a Colorado Rockies game). This is expected, but it sometimes can get out of hand, especially when the instigators are people that represent a school (students). By way of example, on February 20, 2019, Georgia's basketball team hosted Mississippi State in a conference matchup. After Georgia's Tyree Crump hoisted up a game-tying three with 10 seconds left in the game, Georgia's Jordan Harris fouled Mississippi State's Quindary Weatherspoon on a jump shot with less than a second remaining in the game. Subsequently, the 81% free throw shooter missed his first attempt from the charity stripe. However, a Georgia fan idiotically decided to throw a stuffed animal on the court, initiating quite the reaction from the Mississippi State bench and head coach Ben Howland. As a result, the referees called a technical foul on Georgia, granting Weatherspoon with an additional free throw. Inevitably, Weatherspoon hit one of the free throws, winning the game for Mississippi State 68-67. This example demonstrates the incredible impact a student section can have on the game. If fans aren't careful or have poor sportsmanship, then their team may suffer the consequences.

Having good sportsmanship also means showing respect for sports officials. Whether it be umpires, referees, or linesmen, a great student section doesn't berate an official excessively. Now, I know that referees sometimes make horrendous and awful calls, and they need to hear those mistakes. However, when fans give officials crap over what was a difficult or even appropriate call, that is uncalled for. I mean, referees do have a difficult job. When they do well, no one gives them much credit, but when they do poorly, everyone calls them unfair, incompetent, or inefficient. A great student section recognizes this and respects the work of sports officials. Student sections represent an institution's passion for a sport. Whether it be in high school or college, student sections are an important factor that determines the overall feel and success of a sports organization, and this is best seen by analyzing the support and intensity, themes and traditions, and sportsmanship of a fan base.

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