

The NFHS Playbook: Recruiting and Retaining Officials & Addressing Behavior in Sport



*Developed by the NFHS Officials Consortium 1.0 Participants (April 2022),
NFHS Officials Consortium 2.0 Participants (January 2023), &
NFHS Behavior in Sports Summit (August 2023)*

INTRODUCTION

The information presented in this document represents the compilation of the content from the NFHS Officials Consortium 1.0 (April 2022), NFHS Officials Consortium 2.0 (January 2023), the NFHS Behavior Summit (August 2023), and all subsequent follow-up virtual summits and meetings. It is intended for the use of anyone who is interested in improving the sport landscape for the individuals who serve as officials across the country and at all levels.

The NFHS believes that the only way to comprehensively address these issues and to make a difference and effect change on a grand scale is to **collaborate** with all stakeholders in the athletic setting. This document represents the collective efforts between the NFHS and over 100 entities that have contributed to discussions at various meetings since April 2022.

The document is divided into sections, which were the “barriers” identified at the Consortiums. Beneath each of the identified barriers are the identified “Strategies for Improvement” devised through the Consortium and follow-up meetings. Those sections are as follows:

- **Assignors and Assignments**
- **Behavior/Sportsmanship & Work Environment**
- **Financial Issues**
- **Mentorship, Observation and Evaluation**
- **Recruitment and Outreach**
- **Respect and Empathy for the Official**
- **Support**
- **Training & Education**
- **Ideas That Work**
- **The Role of the Individual Official**
- **BONUS CONTENT: Findings of the NFHS Behavior in Sport Summit (August 2023)**
- **Additional Information**
 - **NFHS Initiatives – Recruitment & Retention**
 - **Acknowledgements**

Please feel free to share this information with anyone who wants to assist in this cause. If you have questions about any of the materials contained in this document, please contact NFHS Director of Officiating Services, Dana Pappas, at dpappas@nfhs.org.

ASSIGNORS AND ASSIGNMENTS

One of the identified barriers to the retention of sports officials revolves around issues with game assignments – how they are done, who is doing them and an overload of contests, just to name a few.

- Good old boy/good old girl systems. Assignors choosing their favorites – advancement and assignment not merit-based. Issues with favoritism or perceived favoritism.
- Assignment process is not well-communicated or not transparent.
- Expectations of officials in terms of advancement, post-season selection are not clearly delineated.
- Lack of training for assignors.
- Lack of diversity in assignments.
- Placing officials on games they are not ready for just to ensure games are covered.
- Burnout from too many assignments.
- Assignors gouging officials with “booking” fees.
- Scheduling of games – times are impossible for officials with careers, families, and other commitments.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- TRAIN your assignors – transparency of process, creation of opportunities for all officials, meritorious assignments and advancement, the need for diversity in assignments.
- Address issues and concerns from officials with your assignors immediately.
- Review assignments and assignment practices to ensure that advancements are made based on merit.
- If it is within your authority, replace ineffective assignors.
- Ensure that any “booking fees” being charged to officials are reasonable and that assignors are not charging multiple entities or individuals for assigning the same game.
- Work with schools, leagues, teams on spreading out games across the week instead of stacking them all on one day.
- Work with schools, leagues, teams to schedule games after work hours – remind them that it increases their odds of getting a crew assigned!

BEHAVIOR/SPORTSMANSHIP/ WORK ENVIRONMENT

Boorish behavior and poor sportsmanship are the most common and visible issues identified in terms of why there is a common struggle with recruiting and retaining officials.

- Lack of oversight from administration (school, game site, league, facility) with respect to sportsmanship; this is often left to officials.
- Lack of training for administrators (school, game site, league, facility), security and fans relative to their roles and responsibilities at athletic events.
- Lack of accountability for fans.
- Absence of security at youth and high school contests.
- Absence of a “safe space” for officials to dress and to hold pre-game and post-game conferences and debriefs.
- Local level clubs and youth directors sometimes do not want officials to enforce rules (i.e., ejections when needed) because there is no emphasis on sportsmanship.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Development of zero tolerance policies by governing bodies for spectators. “Three strikes” is too many.
- Ensure the creation of a safe environment for officials before, during and after the contest (dressing room, parking lot, during the game).
- Training of administrators and security as to their role in behavior. What goes on in the stands is NOT the responsibility of the officials.
- How to identify problems with fans, what to look for.
- Administrators need to define expectations of coaches, players, fans and must define consequences for not meeting those standards and follow-through with those consequences.
- Develop partnerships with your coaching associations and other key players.
- Make kids the ones to lead the effort! Student sections – cheer for officials, champion good behavior. Kids create/present PSA’s about parent behavior. Use at all events and at parent meetings.
- Officials’ ambassadors – Students/players welcome officials to game site, escort them onto the playing field.
- Offer education to administrators, fans, security as to the role of an official and what they go through to certify. Give them information officiating crisis and the role they play in the dwindling officiating pool.

SPREAD THE WORD AND HELP US #BenchBadBehavior

The NFHS behavior campaign, #BenchBadBehavior, officially launched on September 15, 2022. For more information about the campaign, go to <https://benchbadbehavior.com/>. State associations can download their state specific toolkit at <https://benchbadbehavior.com/toolkit>. Other entities interested in a customized toolkit, please email Dana Pappas at dpappas@nfhs.org and she will get you in touch with the NFHS Marketing Department to develop a co-branded toolkit for the NFHS and your organization! See page 10 for more information about this campaign!

BONUS CONTENT!!! The NFHS hosted the Behavior in Sports Summit on August 14-16, 2023, to discuss behavior, sportsmanship, and the sport environment. The findings of that Summit are located at the end of this document.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

While officials at the youth and high school level are generally not in it for financial gain, there are financial factors that contribute to problems with recruiting and retaining officials.

- The pay for officials is not increasing with the rising cost of everything else (uniforms, equipment, officials' dues gas, etc.). While there has been a marked increase in the amount of money officials pay to serve as officials, their game fees have stagnated in many associations and organizations.
- The lack of timeliness in payment continues to be an issue for officials.
- The issue of multiple dues, multiple uniforms, multiple background checks for officials working various levels can force individuals to make a choice between one or the other leagues.
- The start-up cost for new officials is often a deterrent for signing up.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Use national data to set pay schedules. By ensuring that your pay schedule is in line with other similar entities in your part of the country, you can offer a competitive fee to your officials.
 - As part of this, you need to also examine what other entities and levels are paying. If a group of sports officials in your area is making more money for less of a commitment, this may be a reason why you are unable to recruit or retain in your association.
- Regularly review your pay scale to keep up with rising cost of uniforms, equipment, gas, etc. It is advised the organizations include this as an "action item" either annually or every other year. Do not wait to factor in officiating as a cost of doing business until you are too far behind the curve!
- Seek out partnerships with uniform and equipment vendors for first year officials or for officials in financial need.
- Provide stipends or discounts to officials who reach certain years of service (for example, \$5 discount at five years of service, \$10 discount at 10 years, etc.)
- Provide incentives for officials who continually give back to your organization or association. We all have the tendency to call upon the same officials for assistance; make sure we are providing them with an incentive or reward for their work.
- Offer discounts or other incentives for officials who recruit others into your organization or association.

MENTORSHIP, OBSERVATION AND EVALUATION

As officials come into their respective associations and organizations, it is often difficult for them to understand the business of officiating – how is organization is structured and its chain of command, where purchase uniforms, who serves in which leadership roles and who to contact for answers to their questions. In addition, officials often do not receive enough feedback as they begin working games to know how they are doing and areas in which they need to improve. These are all reasons that contribute to problems with retaining officials.

- Lack of proper mentorship.
- Absence of evaluations/feedback/observations for officials. How do you improve if you don't know what you're doing wrong?
- Difficulties connecting with/relating to younger officials.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Focus on the importance of mentorship – creation of formalized mentoring system or, if your organization does not have enough officials for a formalized system, make sure that your membership understands the importance of mentoring and that new officials can meet and work with veteran officials. An informal system is better than none.
- Evaluation of officials. It is imperative that officials receive feedback about their performance from observers/evaluators or assignors. It is impossible for officials to improve if they are not provided feedback in some way. Like mentorship, even if the evaluation system is informal, the feedback is necessary.
- Talk to new officials about where they want to go, goals, mentors. Conduct check-ins to ensure they are being properly fostered through the process.
- Ensure training is tailored to the new official and, further, that every level is receiving education appropriate to their competency level.

RECRUITMENT & OUTREACH

The recruitment of officials and outreach to potential officials are age-old problems for most organizations. While the need for officials continues to increase, the ability to find new officials continues to be a challenge.

- Not doing a good job of outreach to current high school and college students to recruit them into officiating.
- Lack of targeted recruitment of women and minorities.
- Inadequate targeted recruitment of law enforcement personnel and military.
- Not enough collaboration between sports entities – cross-recruitment

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- WHY Become an Official campaign. Time to flip the script and promote the positive in officiating. Accentuate the WHY, promote the family of officiating. Publicize these testimonials.
- Targeted recruitment for women, minorities.
- Outreach to high school and college students. Organizations should ask teams/schools for time at practices and scrimmages for officials to talk to the players.
- Outreach to military (Battlefields2Ballfields, Wounded Warrior Umpire Academy).
- Officiating as a pathway (transferable skills) AND as a way to be a lifelong athlete.
- Sharing resources – get all resources in the same place and make them available to the public.
- Personal invitation to officiating is necessary.
- Let go of what you think is yours and bring everyone in. Don't worry about someone taking your games – plenty to go around.
- Shift from "me" to "we."
- Organizations should Invite officials to parent pre-season meetings to talk about rules and rules changes and to encourage parents to stay involved in a sport after their kids graduate or stop playing sports. If officials aren't invited, officiating organizations should ask for these types of opportunities.
- Train younger officials in volume to build the pipeline – course offering as part of curriculum at high school, JC, collegiate levels. Increase initial recruitment with training; also leads to retention when properly trained and mentored.
 - Getting youth involved in officiating may help with empathy toward officials.
 - Grow next generation of leaders.
 - Standardized curriculum.
- Accept experience from out-of-state officials or other organizations' officials to start them at a level comparable to the level in your state or organization. The need to start over often discourages people from joining your association.

RESPECT AND EMPATHY FOR THE OFFICIAL

The lack of respect and empathy for each individual official AND for the entire officiating profession/avocation is certainly prevalent societally. The official is often the scapegoat for a team's loss or for the ejection of a player or coach. Because officials are often seen as "not human," spectators and sometimes media lay blame on these perceived faceless and nameless beings when something does not go their way.

- Lack of respect for the role of an official, what individuals go through to be an official.
- Lack of empathy and compassion for officials by coaches/fans/media.
- Lack of support from media as to the decisions of officials, lack of training for media.
- Unrealistic expectations of officials by coaches, fans, media – "perfection."
- Social media highlighting "bad" calls.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Educate all parties involved as to what officials do and the process for becoming certified. Talk to them about how much time, money and effort officials put forth when they work a game for kids.
- Provide training for media relative to the role of officials and how they can help to support instead of scrutinize.
 - Remind them that people think that media personalities are officiating experts, even when they aren't. Giving their "opinions" breeds negativity.
- Find ways to humanize officials who work games for your organization and in their communities. A great resource is Officially Human (www.officiallyhuman.com).
- Devise policies for coaches, parents, and players relative to social media conduct. This, as well as overall behavior toward officials during contests, could be a part of the overall pre-season code of conduct that every coach, player, and parent is required to sign for participation in a sport.

SUPPORT

From the officiating standpoint, another reason why officials tend to leave the avocation/profession is due to the absence of support from their state associations, local associations, or other governing bodies.

- In many cases, there is no advocacy for officials, and they are often faced with having judgment calls overturned by governing bodies.
- Some organizations do not adequately celebrate and recognize their officials.
- Lack of infrastructure/inadequate staffing to support the administration of officials.
- No designated director of officials or the person who works with officials has other job duties and cannot dedicate 100% to officials.
- Officials not supporting other officials causes a lack of trust.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Celebrate the accomplishments and milestones for officials within your organization (years of service, state tournament assignments, promotion to the next level).
- Send thank you notes and birthday greetings to your officials.
- Assist with the training all stakeholders as to the importance of their role in the improvement of the sport environment (administrators, coaches, security and spectators). This is one of the best ways to support officials.
- Provide mental health resources for officials.
- Create an awareness about legislative items, such as officials' assault legislation and how over 20 states currently have more stringent penalties for assaulting a contest official.
- Help to forge relationships and partnerships between officiating, coaching, administrative entities, and all levels of sport. Improved relationships with coaches are particularly necessary. Creating face-to-face opportunities outside of the game setting.
- Ensure you have adequate staffing to support the needs of your officials and/or officials' association or that you are providing enough external resources to ensure they have what they need.
- Support the decisions and judgments of contest officials to the best of your ability! Make sure you talk to them if you have concerns with a game.
- Ensure that officials are familiar with their own codes of conduct and are aware of the expectations of them during their own games and also relative to how they treat fellow officials.
- Participate in NFHS Officials Appreciation Weeks or create your own! The NFHS has one appreciation week per season to honor officials throughout the year.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

The training and education of officials continues to play a critical role in how organizations can retain their officials. The old expression, “knowledge is power,” certainly applies when it comes to officials and by training and educating our staffs, we arm them with the ability and capability to work their games.

- Lack of “soft skills” in training – verbal judo, de-escalation, communication, conflict resolution.
- What are we teaching them prior to putting them on their first game.
- Need to focus more on the “art” of officiating, in addition to the “science” (rules and mechanics).
- Varying rules and mechanics between different leagues can make it difficult for new officials to work multiple levels (i.e., youth AND high school).

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Provide better training and education for your officials. Seek out individuals and organizations to assist in finding resources if your organization does not have enough.
- Offer instruction in soft skills, such as communication, conflict resolution and game management.
- Sharing resources between entities to ensure that officials are receiving ample training.
- Make sure all officials are made aware of educational opportunities and ensure that there is a good variety of instruction – in-person, online, classroom and on the court or field.
- Work to ensure training meets the needs of all levels of officials and all types of learners.

IDEAS THAT WORK

The NFHS held its Officials Consortium 2.0 in January 2023 to take what was learned from the first Consortium and follow-up Summits and to present and discuss various implementation strategies and ideas that work from various entities.

THE ROLE OF STATE ASSOCIATIONS

Development of A Joint Committee (Arkansas Activities Association)

The Arkansas Activities Association developed a Superintendents and Officials Committee, comprised of one superintendent and one official from each of the regions across the state. These individuals represented diverse sports, school sizes and demographics. The group has met twice as of the date of this publication – once in the fall and once in the spring - to discuss problems that exist and to devise solutions to those problems.

- It was noted that there is a need for Superintendents and other school leaders to coach their coaches as to behavioral expectations and to clearly delineating what is acceptable behavior. Because there are fewer former coaches now in administrative roles, additional training and partnership is necessary between state associations and their administrators about athletics.
- The call to action with superintendents and principals is to be proactive on their campuses and in their school districts about how to host officials, how to train coaches about behavioral expectations, how to facilitate parent meetings to outline expectations for the season; and to ensure that events on campus are managed effectively and in a sportsmanlike manner.
- The group will continue to work together but the critical aspect of this committee is the relationship building and open lines of communication between the state association, the schools, and the officials.

Development of A Call to Action (Colorado High School Activities Association)

The Colorado High School Activities Association devised a call to action, making it easier for potential officials to understand the pathway and process to get started as an official. Their campaign, “You Look Good in Stripes,” has become THE place prospective officials go in Colorado to get started.

- The link to the campaign takes interested individuals to a single web page. CHSAA contacts local assignors, who is then contact the prospect directly.
- CHSAA asked for professional and collegiate teams to get involved by helping to spread the word. Showcasing officials at professional sports games.
- CHSAA reduced some of the start-up costs for their officials: waiving or reducing fees for first year officials; covering the cost of background checks; obtaining and issuing grants for uniforms and equipment.
- Worked through their legislative council to increase officials’ pay across the board (48% increase over the next three years). Used national data to justify the raise.
- Next steps: Providing training opportunities specifically for new officials; training AD’s how to treat officials.

Development of a Junior Officials' Program (Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association)

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association launched its Junior Officials Program in the Fall of 2022, upon approval of their Board of Directors.

- The program allows 16-and-17-year olds to become licensed as officials for 9th grade contests and below.
- Waived registration fees.
- Reduced uniform costs.
- Officials still must attend a meeting and pass a rules test.

In addition, the PIAA started other initiatives to support the recruitment and retention of officials, including:

- Recruiting events at all PIAA state championships.
- Officials' appreciation weeks.
- Efforts to humanize officials.
- Increased efforts to train AD's as to the treatment of officials.

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Representatives from five national organizations (AAU, AVCA, NCAA, NIAAA, USA Track & Field) presented what they are doing to address the issue of officials' recruitment and retention. This section provides examples of best practices presented at Consortium 2.0 that can be implemented by your organization.

- Educate event operators as to everything needed to host an event, including heavy emphasis on taking care of officials.
- Create awareness of the problems and the solutions through articles, presentations at national workshops and partnering with other organizations in the same "circle" as you to provide consistent messaging to coaches, participants, parents, and officials.
- Involve coaches to a higher degree in the recruitment of officials. Ask coaches to reach out to current and former athletes about becoming an official so they can be athletes for longer and can stay involved in the sports they love. Coaches set the tone with their players and fans. Train them to keep this responsibility at the center of what they do and how they act.
- Develop officials' training videos and other educational materials (potentially co-branding with organizations when there is a shared pool of officials).
- Ensure open communication between organizations and entities to ensure that the message is being heard from the youth level up.
- Find opportunities for joint training, sessions and conventions with coaches and officials in the same place at the same time to learn together. The development and cultivation of the coach-official relationship is critical.
- Provide scholarships for new officials for them to defray costs to attend an event.
- Take a hard line on behavior. Devise a code of conduct for all parties, including consequences for a violation of the code of conduct. Make sure you follow through with sanctions!
- Delineate what is acceptable behavior and what is not - event hosts should be trained how to know the difference and how to deal with unruly fans. The same standard should apply regardless of level of play.
- Ensure officials are provided exceptional hospitality, are shown appreciation, and are recognized for their efforts. Say THANK YOU to officials often and in various ways.

THE ROLE OF HOST SCHOOLS/FACILITIES

Five individuals who either directly or indirectly host events addressed how game day management can work to improve the sport environment (Franklin Central (IN) High School, Grand Park Sports Campus, NAIA, NIRSA, Oregon School Activities Association).

Set Expectations for Hosting Officials:

- The Golden Rule always applies.
- Have you asked what the officials want at your site and what the standard is?
- Communication (early & often) – where to park, where to meet game site administration, dressing facilities, etc. Send them all of this information before the contest AND send them a thank you (email is fine) after the contest.
- Bare minimum requirement – hydration.
- Security presence – make sure security and other game site management are trained to know what to do when fans are unruly. Crowd control is NOT the responsibility of the officials.
- Make sure you treat the officials like the third team on the field.
- Safe haven for officials to dress, conduct pre-game, post-game.
- Spectator/parent codes of conduct and enforcement of those codes.
- If officials do not feel welcomed and SAFE at your facility, we have a problem.

Ensure Positive Behavior at Your Facility:

- Easily identifiable, trained security – are they watching the game or the fans; show them what is and is not acceptable.
- Know the roles of your staff and who we are putting in which role – should a student be escorting officials to their cars after a game?
- Train parents in pre-season meetings.
- Pre-game PA announcements with expectations of behavior read by students/youth..

Advice for Event Hosts:

- Make officials feel welcome and safe at every contest, regardless of sport or level.
- Require training for parents every season, every year with regard to sportsmanship, behavioral expectations and codes of conduct.
- Have a plan for dealing with spectators or other issues at contests and make sure that plan is communicated to entire event staff and officials on your campus.
- Educate, evaluate and communicate!

GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

Representatives from four entities addressed how groups can collaborate within the realm of the improvement of the sport environment (Bose Public Affairs Group, National Association of Sports Officials, Positive Coaching Alliance, The OSIP Foundation).

Obtaining Buy-In from Parents, Coaches and Media

- You need to be out there telling your story or someone will tell it for you. Make sure you are controlling the narrative and are providing your message for the people who need to hear it.
- Build awareness of the issues – building student athletes, importance of athletics to the athlete, state legislation for additional protection of sports officials.

Coaches As a Catalyst for Change

- Provide coaches the education and information we want and need them to know.
- Teach coaches our expectations of them regarding how they and their programs need to treat officials?
- Educate coaches about developing a self-control routine – not just reacting to a call.

Media As a Catalyst for Change

- Need media and others to stop calling officials' calls, "bad calls." Shift to "incorrect" calls.
- Focus on grassroots media to change their wording; state associations should work with local media.
- News people want good stories. Have a narrative/message and make it easy for them to pick it up.
- Inundate the media with 200 good stories across the country about officials – creates ground surge to flip the script.
- Use officials in your area who are personable and have a human interest appeal as part of the humanization of officials and showing them as community ambassadors by featuring them in the news.

Working Together to Change the Culture

- 20-60-20 principle: 20% of the fans are out of control, 20% of the fans are positive and clap for both teams; we need to work on the middle 60%.
- Structuring the environment to be able to control when someone is over the line.
- Need to partner with youth organizations to create a new culture before the students are in high school. Share tools and resources with youth sport leaders and organizations.
- Reframe how we look at officials and their mistakes.
- Empower our allies.
- Align ourselves and pool resources.
- Put a face on the officials (humanization).
- Do not stop addressing the issue and educating those in your network.

BREAKOUT GROUP BEST PRACTICES

Two breakout groups were held during the Consortium, where attendees were able to share ideas and best practices with each other. Here is what they shared:

- Common denominator is communication – confusing, poor or doesn't exist.
- Assignor issues/accountability/training; need to develop best practices for assignors.
- Transparency in your processes: assignment, evaluation, postseason selection.
- Need to look at barriers to officiating – reduced registration fees for new officials?
- Make the process for becoming an official easier; let people know what their role will be as an official.
- Continued humanization of officials.
- Engaging students at the high school and collegiate level in officiating classes; outreach to college rec sports officials.
- How to make officiating "cool" – sports are cool but officiating is not seen in the same light.
- Continued training for principals and superintendents due to high turnover in those positions.
- Development of plans for schools regarding behavior issues – like an EAP.

- Coaches – they are the most influential with regard to the behavior of their players and their parents/communities. Coaches can be advocates due to their personal relationships with their players and parents.
- Politicians – which ones were/are officials? They are more willing to empathize with the problem and help us with issues on the legislative side.
- Working with leadership to develop policies within culture about behavioral expectations.
- Continually review officials' fees to ensure they are competitive.
- Coaches and officials in combined training sessions.
- Officials' appreciation outside of designated weeks (say "thank you" at your games).
- Encourage schools to improve hospitality and security for officials.
- Make sure everyone knows their role – administrator/site director must deal with unruly fans.
- Need more educational clinics.
- How to make officiating FUN again.
- Soft skills training is necessary.
- Highlight transferable skills.

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL OFFICIAL

Following the 2nd NFHS Officials Consortium, the NFHS held an abundance of meetings with various organizations and with individual officials, who felt it was important and necessary to make sure that the role of each individual official was included in any strategies and best practices for the recruitment and retention of officials. From those conversations, the following information was compiled:

Recruitment

- The best way to bring people into officiating is by word of mouth. Ask your friends, people you know, officials from other sports, and even coaches and players you work with (in appropriate settings), if they would like to officiate.
- To do this, we must talk about the good things that come from officiating (physical fitness, lifelong athletes, friendships, staying involved with sports we love). To get people involved, it is important to highlight our “why” and to keep the positives at the forefront of these conversations.

Retention

- **Mentorship**
 - This is the missing piece in many areas. Many veteran officials will not mentor newer officials for fear of the incoming officials taking their games.
 - Mentorship can be either formal or informal, but must exist in some form or fashion for new officials to have the opportunity to be successful.
 - Without mentorship, new officials may not know the business side of officiating, they may not have someone to talk to about a bad experience, or to cheer for them when they do well.
- **Support**
 - Officials must support one another. A toxic trait in many groups is the backbiting and jealousy that takes place among officials. Support your officiating brothers and sisters both on and off the field – don’t throw your partners under the bus.
- **Celebration**
 - Celebrate the accomplishments of those you officiate with and make sure you advocate for them to be recognized for their achievements.
 - Make sure you let your leadership know if you have achieved something special so your news can be shared in a non-boastful way.
 - Remember to thank your mentors and those who helped to get you there.
- **Evaluation**
 - Honest evaluation of officials must take place to retain them. Officials will not know what they are doing wrong (or right) if they are not told. Not receiving feedback and not advancing to the next level is a frustration that many officials express and is one that drives them out of the ranks.
 - As individual officials, make sure that you are asking for evaluation and/or feedback as to your performance.

- **Assignments**
 - The biggest issue expressed in surveys and one of the largest internal barriers is centered around assignments. If you are an official and you feel that the process is not transparent, ensure that the individuals who select/hire your assignors are aware and that you ask for an outline of how the process works.
 - Lack of **transparency** of process – how you get from one level to the next.
 - “Good old boy system” makes it impossible to break in.
 - Lack of diversity in assignments
 - The NFHS is going to look at ways to assist with best practices for assignors, as this is an area of need in many state associations.

- **Pathways**
 - Carve out a way for new officials to come into interscholastic officiating – make it simple.
 - Welcome new members into the association.
 - Help fellow officials get to their desired levels.

- **Community**
 - Work with coaches to speak at pre-season meetings. Helps with education of parents, humanizes officials, and provides the opportunity to recruit current players AND parents whose kids might be graduating.
 - Find ways to be involved in your community – food banks, blood drives, other volunteer opportunities. Being seen in your community as a steward helps to build relationships and respect.

- **Fun**
 - Make officiating fun again and make it “cool” to the next generation.
 - Share your “why.” Talk about why you got into officiating and why you stay in!
 - Flipping the script – emphasizing the positive.

- **Professionalism**
 - Teaching officials proper game management and communication skills (soft skills training - outside of the rulebook).
 - How officials look and act during games can set the stage for what goes on within a contest. Negative body language, poor verbal and non-verbal communication skills, how your uniform looks, can impact perceptions by coaches, players and fans, and can actually set a negative tone.
 - Continuing Education – while, at the high school level, officiating is an avocation there is still an expectation of being a professional. Attending camps and clinics, reviewing film, staying in shape, and studying in the off-season is critical. Ending your season in December and then not thinking about it again until July sets an official up for failure.
 - Remember that you are representing the stripes – how you conduct yourself reflects the overall officiating community.

BONUS CONTENT: FINDINGS FROM THE NFHS BEHAVIOR IN SPORT SUMMIT

The NFHS hosted the Behavior in Sports Summit on August 14-16, 2023, to discuss how various entities and individuals can work together to address the issues of bad behavior in the sport landscape across the country. The findings of that Summit are outlined below:

A Team Approach to Influencing Sports Behavior

- **Behavior at Sporting Events – Who is Responsible?**
 - The coach sets the culture more than anyone else – influence over players and parents. They need to see this as part of their job description. They need to understand their behavior influences how players and fans behave.
 - The AD needs to include the expectation of behavior/setting the culture in interview process. How will they address culture as it pertains to the officiating crisis?
 - Pre-season meetings are imperative and must include information about behavioral expectations.
 - Need to start finding new ways of doing things; the old ways are not working: Parent meetings, students reading pre-game PSA's about respect and behavior.
- **Five Levels of Influence:**
 - Coach
 - Participants
 - Parents
 - Student Body
 - Officiating Crew
- **Four Roles of Inappropriate Sport Behavior**
 - Instigator
 - Accomplice
 - Bystander
 - Upstander – Agents of change/potential MVP (We need these!) Parents who take the lead, cheer groups, student body officers, greet and humanize officials. Upstanders must know they have support nearby.
- **Role of Administrator/Supervisor**
 - Be visible & communicate with fans in a positive manner.
 - Be visible & communicate with opposing team/coaches.
 - Be visible & communicate with officials.
 - They need to know your location during events.
 - Escort them to/from the field of play.
 - Prioritized proximity - stop behavior before it reaches the level of violence or ejection.
 - Be in position to deal with unruly fans.
 - Be proactive once identified.
 - Don't wait to talk to a fan.
 - Always remember – crowd control/fan behavior is not the responsibility of the officials! It is the responsibility of game site administration.
- **Establishing Positive Sporting Behavior**
 - Define goals
 - Athletic policy manual
 - School board support
 - Administrative support
 - Communication
 - Awards

- **Creating a Positive Environment**
 - Event Set-Up
 - Signage displayed:
 - Entrance, pricing, restroom, concessions.
 - Seating marked – home, visitor, student section.
 - Fan/student interactions.
 - Security
 - Must always be visible to fans.
 - Positive and interact with fans.
 - Available quickly, when needed, without being asked by officials.
- How do you implement standards without taking the fun out of a game? The AD is the gatekeeper of the game and the community.

Invest in Your Middle Schools

- Preseason meetings are critical at the middle school level.
 - Delineate expectations and equip parents with tools insofar as how to meet these expectations; and outline consequences for not meeting expectations.
- Positive Coaching Alliance:
 - Pcadevzone.com – PCA’s online resource for hot topics and tools.
 - Behavior of parents does not usually align with what they say is important. Parents working with coaches, not against them.
- Lack of administrative presence at middle school contests. School districts need to understand the importance of having game site administration for the purposes of monitoring fan behavior and addressing issues that arise.
 - Empowering officials to communicate with game site administrators – establish protocols for officials to follow. Let them know what is appropriate (i.e., don’t throw out an entire section of fans; don’t address the crowd).
 - Educating coaches about how to deal with officials may not be very good, as they are often new and still training at that level. Coaches can help the overall sport atmosphere by how they react to a sub-par crew.

Mental Health: Parent Triggers and Student Impact

- FACTS (Family, Academics, Community, Team, Self)
- Standards
- High performance parents feel they will have high performance athletes.
- Every negative emotion can escalate into toxic behavior.
 - Must be aware of what triggers you to be able to have the emotional response to stop it!
- Triggers for Toxic Behavior:
 - Safety
 - Fairness
 - Pride in performance
 - Lingering emotions – embarrassment, anger, frustration, or sadness about other things.
- Human response to high levels of emotion
 - Adrenaline is triggered, heart rate rises, ability to reason disappears.
 - Fight or flight

- Difficult conversations:
 - Empathy.
 - Get on their level.
 - Restorative practices.
 - If not a parent:
 - Speak and learn from model parents.
 - End game:
 - Great experiences.
 - Life lessons.
- When it becomes toxic:
 - Wither.
 - Withstand.
 - Become an agent of change – motivate those around us to become agents of change!

Modeling Behavior from the Sideline – Working with Officials

- We do what we see, not what we hear – MODELING!
 - Actions in line with intentions.
 - Shifts in perspective to work better with officials.
 - Listen to understand, not to respond.
 - Body language as an official is key.
 - Hands behind the back, listening, non-threatening.

State Association Best Practices

- **Vermont** – Video about behavior; included in pre-season parent meetings. Sharing with youth groups.
- **Ohio** – Delivery to schools from state office because they are not necessarily seeking out the information. AD roles being filled by young people with sport management degrees and are not necessarily educators.
 - What are we doing at our parent meetings? Captive audience – AD’s have to be there and be leaders.
 - Student section engagement and empowerment; educating them.
 - See Ohio web site (ohsaa.org) for various initiatives.
- **California** – Revisited mission statement – the education-based experience. Fans who behave in a way that students can enjoy the experience.
 - Escalation of sanctions for repeat offenders.
 - Providing schools with tools to address behavior.
 - Students reading statements to their parents telling them how they want them to behave.
 - Rules & Tools – CIF providing both.
 - PSA’s for parent meetings, done by student-athletes. Asked kids how they feel when parents misbehave.
 - Financial support – grant money for leagues to host meetings to go over CIF mission, #BenchBadBehavior, Know Your Role.
 - CIF day of service – partner with rival school day before the game to partner in a service event.

NFHS INITIATIVES – RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

RECRUITMENT: #BecomeAnOfficial was launched in 2017, by the NFHS, to address the nationwide officials' shortage. Since its inception, over 83,000+ interested officials have signed up at [HighSchoolOfficials.com](https://www.HighSchoolOfficials.com) to learn more about how to become a registered official in their states!



WANT THE BEST SEAT
IN THE HOUSE?
Become a high school official.

No other job gives you the chance to stay active, stay close to the sports you love and be a part of all the action! We need more officials in every high school sport. Don't wait! Sign up to suit up today!
Apply online at [HighSchoolOfficials.com](https://www.HighSchoolOfficials.com)

NFHS NCHSAA
#BecomeAnOfficial

The poster features two referees in black and white striped shirts, one holding a whistle. The background is a blurred image of a sports field.

RETENTION: Poor behavior by fans, students and coaches continues to be an issue at sporting events around the country. This makes it difficult to recruit and retain high school officials who are essential to the game. This is why the NFHS launched the [#BenchBadBehavior](https://www.BenchBadBehavior.com) campaign to proactively address behavior at high school athletic events. For more information on [#BenchBadBehavior](https://www.BenchBadBehavior.com) please visit [BenchBadBehavior.com](https://www.BenchBadBehavior.com).



Fans:
YOUR CHARACTER IS SHOWING.

@#\$%&?! NFHS BENCH BAD BEHAVIOR

The poster shows a man in a green shirt with a black sign over his mouth that says '@#\$%&?!'. The background is a blurred image of a crowd.

Join the NFHS in these important conversations on social media!

Twitter (@NFHS_Org)

Facebook (@NFHS1920)

Instagram (@nfhs_org)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The NFHS would like to thank the following organizations for their participation in one more of the following events: NFHS Officials Consortium 1.0 in April 2022, NFHS Officials Consortium 2.0 in January 2023, and/or the NFHS Behavior in Sport Summit in August 2023. This document is the product of their presentations, discussions, and feedback, which we are now able to present to entities throughout the country.

360 Group

A & A Athletic Counseling

Alabama High School Athletic Association

Alaska School Activities Association

Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)

American Football Coaches Association (AFCA)

American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA)

Anchorage Football Officials Association

Archdiocese of Philadelphi Schools

Arkansas Activities Association

Association of Black Sports Officials

Big Ten Conference

Bose Public Affairs Group

Brookfield (Connecticut) High School

California Interscholastic Federation

California Interscholastic Federation – San Diego Section

Colorado Alliance of Basketball Officials (CABO)

Colorado High School Activities Association

Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference, Inc.

Delaney Consulting

Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association

Fishers (Indiana) High School

Florida High School Activities Association

Franklin Central (Indiana) High School

Georgia High School Association

Grand Park Sports Complex (Indianapolis)

Idaho High School Activities Association

Illinois High School Association

Indiana Football Coaches Association

Indiana High School Athletic Association

International Association of Approved Basketball Officials (IAABO)

Iowa High School Athletic Association

Kansas State High School Activities Association

Kentucky High School Athletic Association

Maryland Secondary School Athletic Association

Menomonie (Wisconsin) High School

Michigan High School Athletic Association

Minnesota High School League

Montana High School Association

Mooresville (Indiana) High School

myPerforma

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

National Association of Sports Officials (NASO)/Referee Enterprises
National Association of Women's Gymnastics Judges (NAWGJ)
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
National Football League
National High School Football Coaches Alliance
National Ice Hockey Officials Association (NIHOA)
National Intercollegiate Soccer Official Association (NISOA)
National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA)
National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)
Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association
New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association
New Mexico Activities Association
New York State Public High School Athletic Association Section VIII
NFHS Officials Advisory Committee
North Carolina High School Athletic Association
Officially Human
Offside
Ohio High School Athletic Association
Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association
Oregon School Activities Association
Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, Inc.
Perkiomen Valley (Pennsylvania) School District
Phoenix (Arizona) Xavier College Preparatory
Pine-Richland (Pennsylvania) School District
Positive Coaching Alliance
Prairie City Monroe Community (Iowa) School District
Professional Association of Volleyball Officials
Regional School District 18 (Connecticut)
RefReps
Ridley (Pennsylvania) High School
Safe Sport Zone
Salmon Press
Shape America
South Carolina High School League
Special Olympics
St. Albans School (Washington, DC)
Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association
The American International School of Muscat (Oman)
The Daily Memphian
The Mental Game Academy
The Pictor Group
The Tennessean
Unionville-Chadds Ford (Pennsylvania) School District
United States Soccer Federation (USSF)
United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA)
United Umpires
University Interscholastic League
US Youth Soccer
USA Baseball

USA Cheer
USA Diving
USA Fencing
USA Field Hockey
USA Football
USA Hockey
USA Lacrosse
USA Soccer
USA Softball
USA Swimming
USA Track & Field
USA Volleyball
USOPC
Utah High School Activities Association
Vermont Principals' Association
West Chester (Pennsylvania) School District
West Liberty (Iowa) High School
Weston (Wisconsin) High School
Washington Interscholastic Activities Association
Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association
WTLW

It is an honor to have over 100 organizations that have given their time and expertise to help us address the issues of the recruitment and retention of officials, and behavior in sport, and that are committed to being a part of the solution. The NFHS and its membership thank you and look forward to continuing to collaborate with these outstanding organizations and the individuals within them.