

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

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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 #1 reason? You guessed it: Coaches, parents and fans mistreating officials.

National surveys of officials report alarming statistics:

- 55% of officials say verbal abuse from coaches, parents and fans is the #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, cancelled. 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!