

*By Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Eddie Bonine, Executive Director of the Louisiana High School Athletic Association.*

If you are the mother or father of a high school athlete, this message is for you.

When you attend an athletic event that involves your son or daughter, cheer to your heart's content, enjoy the camaraderie that high school sports offer and have fun; but when it comes to verbally criticizing game officials or coaches, it's time for everyone to cool it. "The time has come for everyone involved in the game to "pump the brakes" as it relates to conduct at games, particularly, the parents who attend," noted NFHS Executive Director Karissa Niehoff.

Make no mistake about it. Your passion is admired and your support of the hometown team is needed, but so is your self-control. Yelling, screaming and berating the officials humiliates your child, annoys those sitting around you, embarrasses your child's school and is the primary reason Louisiana has an alarming shortage of high school officials.

It's true. According to a recent survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, over 75 percent of all high school officials say "adult behavior" is the primary reason they quit. More than 80 percent of all young officials hang up their stripes after just two years of whistle blowing. Why? They don't need your abuse. "Officials are expected to be perfect and improve as the game goes on but that's not the case because no one is perfect," said LHSAA Executive Director Eddie Bonine.

There are more officials over the age of 60 than under 30 in many areas. As more experienced officials retire, there aren't enough younger ones to replace them. If there are no officials, there are no games. The lack of licensed high school officials is severe enough in some areas that athletic events are being postponed or cancelled—especially at the freshman and junior varsity levels.

The shortage is likely to get worse based on recent acts by parents and school administrators. Consider a few incidents that occurred just in the last few weeks:

- A fan assaulted an official on February 2<sup>nd</sup> at the conclusion of an LHSAA basketball game and criminal charges were pressed.
- Nineteen student-athletes were disqualified for their involvement in a bench-clearing brawl between member schools on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- Fifteen student-athletes were ejected for participating in a fight during a game on January 29<sup>th</sup>.
- In the past two weeks, four LHSAA basketball games have been terminated because of student and/or spectator misconduct.
- Twenty-five basketball student athletes were ejected from a game involving 13 police cars being dispatched.

Research confirms that participation in high school sports instills a sense of pride in school and community, teaches lifelong lessons like teamwork or self-discipline, and facilitates the physical and emotional development of those who participate. So, if the games go away because there aren't enough men and women to officiate them, the loss will be infinitely greater than just an "L" on the scoreboard... it will be putting a dent in your community's future.

If you would like to be a part of the solution to the shortage of high school officials, you can sign up to become a licensed official through the [LHSAA.org](http://LHSAA.org) or by showing your interest

at [HighSchoolOfficials.com](https://www.HighSchoolOfficials.com). We appreciate your support and always welcome positive sportsmanship at all high school athletic events.