



# KANSAS STATE HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES JOURNAL

## SPOTLIGHT ON OFFICIALS

This edition of the Officials Spotlight is a conversation with Josh Tanking. Josh has been a registered official with the KSHSAA for 24 years and is also the league commissioner for the Big Seven and Twin Valley. Tanking has a unique view of officiating. He is an active official, commissioner/assigner and parent of current student-athletes. Josh has been instrumental in recruiting new officials and contributing to the general administration of officials in Kansas. We thank Josh for his service and taking the time to discuss his story.

What led you to begin officiating?

One of my high school coaches encouraged myself and a friend to try officiating basketball. We did not really know much about officiating but we both decided to give it a try. After a few weeks, it was something that I enjoyed and continue to this day.

As a high school athlete did you ever envision being as involved in officiating as you are now?

No. I enjoyed playing every sport that I could when I was in high school. Sports were a very important part of my life growing up and once I graduated, I still wanted to be involved in some way. Some kids will go into coaching and some will play at the college level, but most of them will not. Officiating was a way for me to stay involved in sports after my playing days were done.

What do you feel is the biggest negative impact affecting officiating?

Personally, the biggest negative of officiating is time spent away from my family. The lack of registered officials in the state requires officials to work more nights than they normally would. Many nights officials are traveling several hours to the games and get home well after midnight and must get up the next day, go to work and do it all over again the next night.

What do you feel is the biggest positive to someone who can get into officiating?

Currently there are several positives that come from officiating. With the lack of officials, we have many young and newly registered officials that have a great opportunity for advancement. Several officials work hard to study the rules, attend meetings and clinics, and jump on any opportunity to make themselves better. Thirty years ago, officials had to work over five years before they had any opportunity to work a varsity game. Another positive is the networking that is achieved through the officiating community. There are registered officials in nearly every profession, and I've known numerous officials that officiating helped them get their foot in the door for the job they now hold. Another positive is the income. Although most people do not use officiating as a full-time job, it is a nice supplemental income.

How do you view high school sports as an official?

As an official, I view high school sports as an extension of the classroom. The higher the level, the more the game becomes about winning and I feel like most officials would feel the same. I feel like we are part of the education process with the kids, especially at the lower levels. Taking a few seconds to explain to the kid why they were called for a violation or foul helps the kid become a better player and understand the game better. At the varsity level, it is rewarding to work in a full gym or stadium and see the game played at a high level.

How do you view officiating as an assigner?

As an assigner, I look for officials that work hard, use proper mechanics and rule enforcements, call consistently throughout the game and look professional. Most of the time when I'm observing a crew, my comments to them include positioning, mechanics, rules enforcement and communication.



How do you view high school sports as a parent?

As a parent, I love to attend my children's games and enjoy watching them compete. It is hard to sit in the crowd and listen to the fans degrade and critique the officials without saying anything to them. Almost every call during a game, I understand why the call was made and usually cannot disagree with it. One of the biggest challenges is watching a game in both the eyes of a parent and as an official. When the officials are working hard and giving their best effort, that is all we can ask of them. I always look at the game and think that if the kids played perfect and did not make any mistakes, then we could expect the officials to be perfect as well. The biggest frustration is seeing an official that does not want to be there, because each game is important to every player on the court at every level.

What obstacles do assigners face?

The biggest obstacles include the lack of officials and the lack of quality officials. The number of games in the state is not decreasing but our pool of officials is. This requires many officials to work more nights which is contributing to injuries. The average age of officials is continuing to rise. Many games we have officials that are 50, 60 and 70 years old and trying to keep up with 16 to 18-year-old athletes. In regard to the lack of quality officials, some officials register but do not attend area meetings or clinics. Another obstacle is assigning sub-varsity and middle school games. Many of these games begin at 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon. It is hard to find enough officials to take off work early and officiate these games. It is also difficult for all assigners to handle rescheduled games. We are already working with a limited number of available officials and then following a snowed or rained out game or a COVID related cancellation we try to squeeze extra games into a smaller time frame. Many of the officials this year in my leagues have been very understanding and flexible to make changes on location/times of games on very short notice.

What do the leagues that you assign for look for as a result?

I would say that both the Big Seven and Twin Valley Leagues want the best officials every night for every game. They also understand that each game is different regarding the need for officials. Certain games are good opportunities for up and coming officials to get valuable experience at the varsity level with a couple of veterans, and both of my leagues embrace this. We have a lot of officials that work in the two leagues that are "home grown" kids and I feel like the leagues understand how they got to where they are by being able to work varsity games with veterans. It is rewarding as an assigner to be able to look at the postseason officials list and share it with my leagues. This list represents the quality of officiating in the area surrounding our leagues.

What attributes do you look for in an official?

The top things that I look for is someone who is coachable and reliable. If someone is always looking to get better, work hard and learn, they have the potential to be a great official. Other attributes that are important include self-confidence, athleticism and quick decision making. Certain sports require more particular items, but all of these are good qualities to have. Many times, during a game, you can tell by the players on the court who would be a good candidate to officiate. I usually try to visit with the AD (athletic director), coach or even the player about what they intend to do following high school. Many times, we just need an avenue to relay the information to these players. Most players will be done with sports once they graduate from high school, and helping them realize that they can still be involved is sometimes all that it takes.

Best advice for a new official to advance in their avocation?

Use every resource available to you. KSHSAA does a great job to conduct clinics, meetings and offer educational materials. There is also a mentor program and a scholarship program for new officials. Going to meetings and meeting experienced officials is a great way to advance. League commissioners are always looking for new officials to place in games, so I recommend sending them emails, text messages and phone calls. Game experience is one of the best ways to get better, so take every game that you can to get on the field or court.

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