

## Spotlight on Officials: Warriors 2 Whistles

Officials know that many good stories start with, “Our crew was driving to our game on Friday...” What follows obviously could cover an array of topics and events, but it typically leads to a good story worth telling. The beginnings of an organization that looks to be impactful on two fronts, for veterans and for member schools, began with a drive to a Friday night game.

“Four out of the five people on our crew are retired military,” said Steve Milton. “One afternoon while driving to our Friday night football game the crew began talking about the recent news stories and discussion at meetings and clinics about the shortage of officials. We each wanted to brainstorm how we could help.”

Like all good military personnel, the call to action was, “What can we do to help recruit and retain officials?” Milton explained that there was something obvious right in front of them with their background. “What better demographic than military folks to help with the situation?”

Accompanying the news stories are several reasons for the shortage of officials, but one being prominent is the negative criticism new officials experience with coaches and fans.

“If you’ve been through basic training in any branch of the military then you can handle any coach or fan that gets irate at you,” Milton explained. “Veterans would have the appropriate demeanor to be good officials. When I officiate games, even at the fifth and sixth grade level, I call the kids ‘sir’ and ‘ma’am.’ By the end of the game it is reciprocated by the kids back to us.”

In addition to appropriate demeanor, military personnel are accustomed to upholding rules, policy and procedure. All are good characteristics for officiating.

Milton, retired Army and currently chief of housing at Fort Riley, works with several non-profits, so the idea of starting an organization wouldn’t be farfetched. In the car that night after the game, Tim Morgan put the idea out there of *Warriors 2 Whistles*. They thought that would be a great name to start things off; now it was time to figure out what they were going to do to help.

“We created a board of directors, bylaws and created a mission statement. We want to be value based and empower our members to give back to the community by being service oriented,” said Milton.

*Warriors 2 Whistles* is aimed at connecting veterans of the military to sports officiating. The organization is set to provide mentorships, financial assistance and training to individuals across the state. The group believes there are several military veterans out there who want to be, or would make good officials but might not know the avenue through which to become one.

The organization is now part of Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program (SFLTAP) briefings on Fort Riley. What that does for the organization is allows them to market and talk to all the transitioning soldiers about officiating. And this is where we get in the second benefit of *Warriors 2 Whistles*. The transition from active duty to civilian life, for whatever reason, has the potential to come with an array of struggles. The organization believes this could be an avenue to make it easier for some. Becoming an official can provide support from likeminded people while doing something they will enjoy.

Milton and the board of directors would like to express that one need of theirs will be officiating uniforms. If you are a current official or retired from officiating and have access to uniforms for any sport, they would love for you to donate to their organization so they can assist new officials getting started.

In addition to uniforms, the organization is already setting up camps, clinics and meetings to train new officials while connecting them with mentors who have been officiating for some time, and are also veterans.

Veterans or officials who wish to get connected with *Warriors 2 Whistles* are encouraged to visit their Facebook page, *Warriors 2 Whistles*. Kansas has a strong military presence across the state. The *Warriors 2 Whistles* organization wants people to know this group is for all veterans, no matter their home base.

Anytime you have an idea that benefits two sides equally, that is a story worth telling.



*Warriors 2 Whistle board of directors (from left to right): Matt Krause, Todd Hokanson, Tim Morgan, Steve Milton, Joel Maldonado, Ron Kabat & Jason Lafasciano*

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Warriors 2 Whistles is comprised of Active Duty, Guard, Reserves, Retired and honorably discharged Veterans. The association exists to bring together people who share the two loves of “military service and sports officiating.”

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*The KSHSAA supports the Warriors 2 Whistles organization and their efforts to recruit military veterans into the officiating avocation. Registration scholarships, mentors and training are available upon recommendation from the Warriors 2 Whistles organization.*