



How Can Refs Work With Others to Stop the Madness?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"I referee basketball from youth through D-II colleges and recently appeared on several Twin Cities radio stations after an incident in which a league supervisor suffered a concussion and dislocated jaw when assaulted by a fan who was irate over timekeeping at a 6th-grade house league game. I want to know your thoughts on how officials, coaches, players and parents can work together to stop this madness."

PCA Response by Eric Eisendrath, PCA Lead Trainer

Creating a positive culture for youth sports is truly a shared responsibility. This is especially true as it pertains to the behavior of coaches and the treatment of referees. The first step is for administrators to make sure coaches recognize their role as culture shapers. By having a coach's job description focus on coaches as role models, where they are expected to "Honor The Game" by respecting referees and players alike, you are laying the groundwork for this culture.

Next, it is up to the coach to hold a team meeting with parents and players to share a coaching philosophy that covers respecting officials. The coach must insist that the parents "Honor The Game" as well, by refraining from berating officials. Coaches can effectively facilitate that approach by first making sure they model the behavior themselves. Never "add fuel to the fire" by yelling at officials, regardless of the situation. It is essential that the players understand this as well.

While coaches pursue both wins and life lessons, parents should focus on the life lessons aspect of youth sports. Concentrate on the "big picture" of teamwork, handling winning and losing with class and overcoming adversity. Do not get hung up on the "small picture" issues such as whether it was a block or a charge, a foul or incidental contact.

By creating a shared vision where league administrator, coaches, parents and athletes all understand the importance of creating a positive culture, hopefully incidents such as the one you describe will be few and far between.

Eric Eisendrath is a former Division One hockey goalie at Brown University, and has coached soccer, lacrosse and hockey at a variety of levels.

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