

As the school year begins in earnest across our state, school athletic teams begin preparation for another season of competition. For most Oklahomans, the start of school signals the start of sports. Community and fan involvement in school sports is part of our Oklahoma DNA. As parents and fans return to attending school athletic events another group of Oklahomans appear from their summertime of preparation---the game officials.

Over 3500 officials enroll each year with the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association to officiate the sporting events for the OSSAA's 483-member schools. As the OSSAA's Director of Officials; I would tell you emphatically that this is a very special group of people.

Recently, *Referee* magazine asked officials across the country why they officiate. Answers varied from the camaraderie, the love of sports, the passion, the adrenaline, the challenge to the memories made. No doubt, it takes a special person to officiate in a state where competition is so intense----whether it is a junior high game or a state championship contest; Oklahomans want to win. As much as your team wants to win; officials want to get the calls right. Make no mistake, officials miss calls. The official on the field or on the court spent the majority of their day at their regular job before working the contest you are watching. In the world of secondary sports, athletics is education-based---the core value to the student-athlete is in the process not the outcome.

Our OSSAA officials live and call in "real time." There is no replay to reference when a call must be made—and our games are better for it. Student-athletes (*and those of us that watch them play*) should learn games are not always officiated perfectly. There is a saying in officiating, "Officiating is the only job where perfection is expected the first day and then you are supposed to get better." Officials are not going to get every call right but the vast majority of them I know approach every contest in an effort to work "The Perfect Game."

As we journey through this next school year and we can lose ourselves momentarily in the competition of a secondary athletics, let me encourage you to support and cheer the athletes on the field of play. To insure that the games continue on for the next generation, may I also ask you to support those that call the game. No, do not cheer for them openly---just don't cheer against them in a manner that would prevent this generation of athletes from becoming the next generation of officials.

Mike Whaley

Director of Officials

Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association