



## Why Officials Stop Officiating

There are a lot of reasons why people stop officiating. The one that everyone talks about is abusive behavior from participants and from spectators. There are reasons to think that this leads to the lack of officials in sport - and there are situations where that is true. Abusive behaviour towards officials is as acceptable as abusive behavior towards anyone else - it is not. However, when we look at the officials who drop out, we don't see abuse as a top reason.

Here are the reasons we do consistently [see in surveys](#):

### 1. Life gets in the way.

The most common reason you hear about officials dropping out are the same reasons that anyone drops any hobby - their life has changed. A new job or a baby means you have less time for other things, sometimes including your passion. The good news is that you can always get back into officiating after taking a break while you settle into a new job or once the baby starts Kindergarten. If you have moved, you can also check with your local officiating group or with NFHS for resources on where to get started in your new community.

### 2. Lack of progress in the sport - don't know how to progress

Sometimes good officials take as long as 15 years at the High School level before they can progress to their first college game. That's a long time and often during the wait, there is no clear sign as to what you would have to do in order to move on. For officials who work hard, read the rulebook religiously, and really hone their craft, it can be too frustrating to not know why they aren't progressing.

If you are leading officials, make sure you are communicating with your team and you are evaluating who is getting the better games. It is easy to forget someone or to give the games to someone because.....they always



do it. Remember there is someone else who may want that game and may deserve that game - give them a chance before you lose them.

### 3. Better job comes along for younger officials

Often for younger officials, the job of officiating is more of a job. This means that another job can come along. Lifeguarding, babysitting, retail, Dairy Queen, they all could provide more steady hours, more money and may just be a better fit (officiating is not for everyone). Like many jobs aimed at young people, there is a lot of turnover, and probably some of that is just natural and to be expected.

What should not be expected is losing young officials to another job because.....no one called them to officiate a game. This happens - far too often. After recruiting officials and training officials be sure to have a plan to make sure they get on the field/court/ice as soon as possible. Officiating can be incredibly fun, so let people experience it before they end up asking you if you'd like fries with that.

### 4. Abuse

This is a big one. It is not the big one though. Let's unpack abuse a bit....

#### *Abuse Drives Officials Away*

Without question this happens. We know from stories that sometimes [officials have just had enough and walk away](#). Usually, when we hear a story like this, we understand immediately - getting abused is no fun and eventually enough is enough. There is reason to think that the abuse of officials [has gotten worse over the years](#), but there [is evidence](#) that there was [never really a "golden age"](#) of respect for officials either.

When we dig into the scientific literature though, this reason is not commonly given by officials for why have they leave officiating (see the reasons above), but is one of them.

#### *Abuse Keeps Officials from Ever Starting*



This one is hard to track, but for sure there is something here. If you are a young person, or a young person's parent, would you let them start officiating after you saw:

[Baseball Brawl Over 13 Year Old Umpire](#)

[Teen Kills Soccer Referee](#)

[Taekwondo Referee Kicked at Beijing Olympic Games](#)

Our view of officials is pretty grim. Necessary evil, target for abuse, *rightful* target for abuse and more. Not much of it is good. All of this adds up to making it harder and harder to get new officials in the door in the first place.

### *Abuse Keeps Everyone Away from Sport*

Look at those stories above once again. But this time, not as an official, just as a person with young kids. Do these stories describe an environment you would want your kids to be? Would you feel good about dropping your child off at the field? Would you want to be associated with all of this as a parent? Of course not!

A bad environment for officials is a bad environment for everyone. So, as you think about abuse officials, think about an abusive environment and how good or bad that can be for kids.

### *Abuse Requires Support*

When officials are abused, officials need support. Fellow officials are good at this and help support each other on tough days. For leaders in sport, it is important that officials are supported consistently and clearly. Some things to think about when supporting officials:

- It does not matter if the call was wrong
  - Often, support of officials seems to be contingent on them making the correct call. Missing a call is not a license for abuse



- and abuse creates a terrible environment no matter the accuracy of the call.
- Safety First
  - Ensure the safety of officials and of everyone else in the sport environment first. If it is not safe to finish the game - don't finish the game, period.
- Officials are Accountable Too
  - A scenario where the official is disciplined in some way for conduct (bad call, bad relationship with players, etc) can, and should happen when circumstances warrant. But again, none of this justifies abuse. There are cases when everyone is wrong, and there can be times when everyone needs to be corrected.
- Support Doesn't End Quickly
  - An abusive day for an official resonates for a while, so support needs to be there for a while too. Support can be a pat on the back or a quick check in - it does not need to be an overwhelming function. So, be there for officials, and for your fellow officials - for a while after the tough day comes and goes. For the official in the short term, it gives them what they need and in the long term, and after the memory of the abusive incident fades, the memory of the support from the sport community will remain vivid.



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