



Soccer players thank the referees after a game. They do this after every game to show their respect.

SMILING THROUGH THE shortage

LACK OF REFS IMPACTS PLAY

By Maeby Aleo

How did you not see that?
Get some glasses!
Are you blind?
You suck!

Harsh statements and questions are screamed across the nation at referees in a variety of different sports. While they may get harassed constantly, officials are a vital part of fairness in almost every sport.

“It’s hard to run any contest without an official,” Harry Waterman, Boulder Valley School District’s Athletic Director, said. “In CHSAA sports, refs are an important component of the game and are there to promote sportsmanship and fair play.”

But the biggest problem facing high school athletics today, is the lack of refs. Schools across the district, state, and country are struggling to find officials to monitor their athletics.

“We’re currently in a crisis with the number of officials available,” Waterman said. “More athletes have come forward to play, and we’re adding new schools and more teams and more levels. But our officials are not adding at that same rate.”

Interest in refing has dramatically decreased because of COVID, but also because of the lack of pay.

“They’re making minimal money,” Waterman said. According to

CHSAA Officials’ Fees, referees and judges rarely make more than \$70 per individual varsity contest, and occasionally as little as \$40 per individual junior varsity contests.

The lack of money isn’t all that enticing for new employees, and the treatment officials receive on the field or the court scares them away.

“Fan behavior is—in my opinion—at an all-time worse than it’s ever been,” Waterman said. “No one really wants to go out there and get berated by fans. Everyone makes mistakes, but it’s just horrific how fans lose their heads in a game and end up screaming harsh comments at the officials.”

Boys varsity soccer player, Ty Hanneman ‘23, has experienced the causes of the referee shortage first-hand.

“I feel like the problem is mostly the parents who don’t really understand the rules of the game, and they kind of just get a little too into it,” Hanneman said.

Hanneman used to referee for younger club teams with players around the age of seven through the Colorado Soccer Association (CSA). He can tell fan behavior is beginning to get out of hand.

“Sometimes it’s just over the top, and I think that’s definitely the main reason why the amount of refs is dropping,” he said. “They don’t really want to get backlash after every decision they make on the field.”

After being in the shoes of an official, Hanneman has found some ways to give referees more grace on their calls.

“After every game, the whole team goes over and we thank the refs,” Hanneman said. “Even if they made bad calls during the game, you don’t mention it to them. If they made a mistake, they know what they did, and they’re just trying to improve their calls to be fair.”