

# Georgia Athletic Officials Association

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To Georgia's Athletic Enterprise Stakeholders:

March 10, 2023

The dilemma of a shortage of high-school contest officials in Georgia has been looming for roughly a decade. Here in 2023, we're finally starting to feel its ramifications, and without remedies the shortages and their complications will only worsen as our sports seasons progress in the years to come. There is no time left for anything but solutions, a few of which are detailed as follows.

What's at stake? Georgia's high school athletics has routinely earned the prestigious "Elite" status for the huge number of athletic scholarships earned by its athletes. Georgia's high school athletics, especially football, is an economic indicator that affects state and local businesses income and expansions, shared pride in the state's athletic accomplishments, and the opportunity for players' and their families to defer college expenses, et al.

Unfortunately, the misplaced anger of spectators has manifested into assaults on contest officials and even the occasional death of an athletic contest official. Sad but true. This horrible situation has greatly contributed to a shortage of high school contest officials that has worsened over a decade to a point where shortage of high school contest officials is beginning to alter how many games can be played as scheduled in some districts. "No officials, no games" is becoming a reality.

Safety is routinely held up by officials as one of the foremost concerns, if not the main concern, surrounding officiating today. This debilitating situation can be reversed if: (1) athletic arenas are made safe and (2) respect for contest officials is restored. This is doable by setting high behavioral standards and by administering them without fear or favor - eliminate cronyism, promote environments conducive to attracting and retaining officials.

Additionally, (1) pay contest officials commensurate with the important role they fill; (2) ensure broadcasters – who have little or no officiating training or experience – refrain from questioning contest officials' integrity. Instead, have announcers relay what has happened in-game by reporting what the contest officials' signals indicate; and (3) collaborate with local law enforcement crowd-control personnel to ensure their procedures and techniques are applied towards this purpose - EMS agency personnel too.

Likewise, we must address components of other issues that will adversely impact the already difficult reality of shortage of officials. These actions will require constant vigilance to keep pace with changing trends and will require broad oversight and cooperation among stakeholders to make athletic arenas safe and to restore respect for contest officials.

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One remaining suggestion: coaches, talk favorably about contest officials with your players and encourage them to officiate when their playing days end. It is a great way for them to stay connected to a game they love, to stay in shape, to learn meaningful lifetime skills, to make likeminded friends, to make extra money, and to make lifetime memories.

No officials, no games.

Making high school athletic arenas safe and restoring respect for high-school contest officials is a great and necessary investment, and, along with the other remedies mentioned herein, is a vital step towards stabilizing and protecting a future that is so important to so many in our state.

Thank you for your time and all best,

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