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State in need of officials

November 8, 2011

By DAVE POE (dpoe@newsandsentinel.com) , Parkersburg News and Sentinel

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It hasn't reached a crisis point yet, but the situation is getting more serious each year.

Serious enough for Gary Ray, the executive director of the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission to bring it up during Sunday's high school football playoff meetings.

The number of people going into officiating school sports events is dwindling. It's not hard to figure out why.

Most sports events are played at night or on weekends, downtime for most human beings.

Plus, they aren't played in your backyard. They require travel, often over bad roads in bad weather.

Then there's the pay. High school athletics programs don't have deep pockets. No one is going to get rich officiating.

Then are the games themselves. While the participating coaches and players understand and respect the role of those adjudicating the games, many fans cross the line in their verbal use of referees, umpires and officials.

I've seen people who are professionals during the day turn maniacal at a sports event after convincing themselves the men in the striped shirts are out to get their team.

One of the stories we have talked about doing is sending reporters to youth games, not to cover them, but to sit in the stands and write down everything that is yelled at the players, coaches and referees during the contest. Much of it wouldn't be printable.

I've never understood that. I've never known a coach, athlete or official who wasn't giving their best. Sure, some are more talented than others based on experience and other factors.

But as long as they are trying to be professional and fair, they deserve our respect.

Every call an official makes is going to go in favor of one team and against the other. That's the nature of sports.

As long as the calls are consistent, that's all we can expect. Some baseball umpires have a high strike zone. The good coaches and teams will adapt to it. The bad ones will complain all day and walk out the loser.

I've been in the sports business long enough to have witnessed a major change in the attitude of fans, who are quick to criticize and to vocalize their displeasure.

It's a reflection on modern-day society, where respect for authority seems to have all disappeared. We don't treat one another with the respect that used to exist, and not all that long ago.

I guess by mentioning all these things, I probably haven't helped the cause of recruiting officials. But being an official can be quite rewarding.



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First, you get a ringside seat to local sports events. You get to work with other officials, who have a culture of their own. You travel with them, spend time with them and learn from them.

Plus, officiating is like any other job.

Most of the satisfaction comes from within. Of knowing you did your best, whether or not all your calls were perfect.

Let's hope some interested souls make the call to join the ranks of officials.

Without them, sports would be chaos.

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