

THE NFHS VOICE



Parents and Adult Fans: The Biggest Challenge Facing High School Sports Today

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Inappropriate adult behavior at high school athletic events throughout the country has reached epidemic proportion.

When more than 2,000 high school athletic directors were asked in a recent national survey what they like least about their job, 62.3 percent said it was “dealing with aggressive parents and adult fans.”

And the men and women who wear the black and white stripes agree. In fact, almost 80 percent of officials quit after the first two years on the job, and unruly parents are cited as the reason why. As a result, there is a growing shortage of high school officials nationwide, and in some sports like wrestling, swimming, and track and field, the shortage is severe. No officials means no more games.

If you are a parent attending a high school athletic event this fall, you can help by following these six guidelines:

1. **Act Your Age.** You are, after all, an adult. Act in a way that makes your family and school proud.
2. **Don't Live Your Life Vicariously Through Your Children.** High school sports are for them, not you. Your family's reputation is not determined by how well your children perform on the field of play.
3. **Let Your Children Talk to the Coach Instead of You Doing It for Them.** High school athletes learn how to become more confident, independent and capable—but only when their parents don't jump in and solve their problems for them.
4. **Stay in Your Own Lane.** No coaching or officiating from the sidelines. Your role is to be a responsible, supportive parent—not a coach or official.
5. **Remember, Participating in a High School Sport Is Not About Getting a College Scholarship.** According to the NCAA, only about two percent of all

high school athletes are awarded a sports scholarship, and the total value of the scholarship is only about \$18,000.

- 6. Make Sure Your Children Know You Love Watching Them Play.** Do not critique your child's performance on the car ride home. Participating in high school sports is about character development, learning and having fun—not winning and losing.

Purchasing a ticket to a high school athletic event does not give you the right to be rude, disrespectful or verbally abusive. Cheer loud and be proud, but be responsible and respectful. The future of high school sports in our nation is dependent on you.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is beginning her second year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS, which celebrated its 100th year of service during the 2018-19 school year. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.