

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

By Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Bobby Cox, Commissioner of the Indiana High School Athletic Association.

Inappropriate adult behavior at high school athletic events in Indiana 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% 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% 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 here in Indiana, 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 2% 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 Indiana is dependent on you.