



## Keeping Officials in the Game: Our Collective Responsibility

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Everyone in our sport plays a role in making sure we have the right people in stripes come game day. Most lacrosse organizations recruit new officials annually. They do their best to find fit people with flexible work schedules who may already officiate another sport.

But recruitment and retention of officials are not just a problem in the officials' community. Coaches, administrators and parents all must have a stake in this effort to preserve the integrity of the game. Many organizations host open meetings for parents who want to volunteer to coach. Why don't we do the same thing for potential officials?

Training is the easy and fun part. The [US Lacrosse Officials Education Program](#) staff works year round to produce awesome materials and a certification program delivered through qualified trainers in your area.

Retention—that's where things can get ugly. A good retention rate for an officials' organization is 30 percent. That means for every 10 new officials recruited, just three will stay in the game. The remaining seven may never get realize the sense of community and responsibility we enjoy as officials.

This is a lacrosse problem, not just a lacrosse officials' problem. Plenty of fit candidates with good game knowledge walk away because of unsportsmanlike conduct, a lack of coaching civility and parent behavior.

We need more than the compulsory pre-game announcement you hear before some high school and college games:

*Thank you for attending today's contest between the Bobcats and Tigers. Our school promotes good sportsmanship by student-athletes, coaches and spectators. We request your cooperation by supporting the participants and officials in a positive manner. Profanity, racist or sexist comments or other intimidating words or actions directed at officials, student-athletes, coaches or team representatives will not be tolerated and are grounds for removal from the site of competition. Consumption or possession of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.*



Unless expressly prompted by an official, I have yet to witness in my 12 seasons anyone actively enforcing this kind of announcement. Sure, it gives an administrator authority to give someone the boot in extreme cases. But enforcing good sportsmanship from fans and parents requires more than just lip service. Some people are meant to officiate. They stay in the game a long time. Cheers and jeers from the stands fall on deaf ears for most of us veterans. But we are human. No one likes to get heckled at work. What if at your job, someone sat 20 feet away shouting at you that you're terrible or biased, or that you made the wrong call?

All officials must undergo training. What kind of training does it take to stand on the sidelines and yell? Every time someone heckles an official, he or she makes inhibits positive growth in lacrosse and contributes to the lack of consistent and confident officials. Will you have the courage to confront the next fan you see doing this or at least notify an on-site authority?

If spectators had the courage to police each other or administrators were actively involved in managing their fan base, you might just convince one of those seven to stay in the game—to grow and keep players safe.

Isn't it about them, after all?