

# SPECIAL REPORT



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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS OFFICIALS

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# How TO GET & KEEP OFFICIALS



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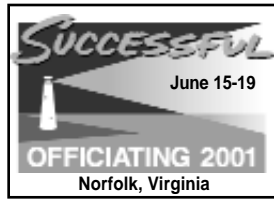
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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS OFFICIALS

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# How to GET & KEEP OFFICIALS



Written By Dave Sabaini

Edited By Jim Arehart, *Referee* associate editor  
for The National Association of Sports Officials  
Racine, Wis.

*NASO Special Report: Successful Officiating 2001 – How To Get and Keep Officials*

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Written by Dave Sabaini  
Edited by Jim Arehart  
Cover and layout by Don Motley

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Friends of Officiating,

We've had anecdotal evidence for quite a while suggesting a shortage of sports officials exists. A survey conducted by NASO this January however, provided the quantitative support to conclusively back that up. The survey asked for opinions from the person who had the responsibility for overseeing high school officiating at the state or state equivalent level. Ninety percent told us they had an officials' shortage.

Also, we learned that "lack of new recruits" (71%) was a bigger problem than "lack of retention" (22%) and poor sportsmanship was the main problem in getting and keeping officials.

In June, NASO members and others who have strong ties to officiating assembled in Norfolk, Virginia under the NASO umbrella to discuss that challenge. The occasion marked the 18th year NASO has conducted a national gathering of officials. In the following pages you'll read the results of those discussions and get further insight into the scope of the officiating shortage problem, who has responsibility for solving it and what can be done to abate it.

Please share this report with the people you know who can influence the situation. Though we asked 'who is responsible for solving the problem?' in Norfolk, it is clear that anyone interested in preserving the benefits that come from healthy sports programs is a stakeholder in finding solutions.

NASO takes pride in bringing intellectual force to bear on challenges like this that face officiating leaders and our games in general. We hope this report helps you do that in your organization.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry Mano". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial letter.

Barry Mano  
President

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**SUCCESSFUL OFFICIATING 2001**  
**HOW TO GET AND KEEP OFFICIALS**

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### **Educational Program**

All the sessions at NASO's 18th national conference related to the overall conference theme of recruitment and retention, with each examining the issue from a different angle. The program was set up so that the first day of sessions focused on recruitment and the second day was devoted to retention.

You'll notice several charts and graphs throughout this report. Those are based on the results of a survey conducted by NASO asking state association officiating leaders questions to determine if there is a nationwide shortage of officials. The session "Why Aren't There Enough Refs?" (p. 13) explains that survey in more detail.

What follows is a breakdown of each session in order, including a speaker list and pertinent information of what was discussed.

## **“IT’S GREAT TO BE A REF”**

*Session One — speaker: Jim Tunney*

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The 18th NASO conference kicked off on a high note when NFL officiating legend Red Cashion introduced his friend and former colleague Jim Tunney. Tunney, who officiated in the NFL for 31 years, including three Super Bowls and nine League Championship games, challenged those in attendance by relating several personal experiences and uplifted his audience with his positive outlook on life.

A co-author of the number one *New York Times* bestseller *Chicken Soup For The Sports Fan’s Soul*, Tunney began his presentation by urging those in attendance to increase their “personal power” and, therefore, become a better official.

“If you’re as successful today as you were a year ago today, you’re worse,” said Tunney. “Each of us needs all of us. That’s why NASO is so important.”

Deeply involved with the Special Olympics, Tunney related inspirational stories of physically challenged athletes, including a blind, 11-year old female diver, and a 59-year old wheel chair racer who had only the use of one leg. “Too late to keep on keeping on?” asked Tunney. “Too late to take it to the next level?”

Quoting one of his *Chicken Soup* co-authors, Tunney observed, “You have to do it yourself, but you can’t do it alone.”

Relating a story about former NFL quarterback Joe Montana, Tunney noted that the fear that athletes and officials feel before a game is a good thing. It shows that the athlete wants to win, and that the official wants to call the best game possible. “(As officials, we’re) not into winning, except that winning, in your and my interpretation, is being successful at what we do. That’s when we win, just doing the best job we can.”

Using a combination of humor and career highlights, Tunney then focused on the purpose of his message. “Everybody can be the best at what they want to be,” said Tunney. “Everyone. Not a soul can just say I’m going to be mediocre. When you go to an athletic event, you don’t want to see a mediocre game. People don’t want to see mediocre officiating; they want to see the best. How do we get you to the best? How do we get every one of us to get the best possible way we can?”

To answer those questions and illustrate his point, Tunney used the acronym NASO.

N stands for “nurture.” “Nurture your nature,” Tunney suggested. “I believe your nature is the PMA — Positive Mental Attitude. I don’t think you’re born negative.”

Tunney believes that other people’s negative attitudes will rub off on us, and suggests we avoid negativity at all times. “My advice when you’re around negative people is don’t walk away from negative people. Run! They’ll tear you down. Vince Lombardi said it very well in terms of failure and self-confidence. He said, ‘Failure is not getting knocked down. Failure is not getting back up if you’ve been knocked down.’”

A stands for awareness. Tunney believes that the key to awareness is in preparation. “NFL teams spend 50 to 60 hours a week in preparation for a three-hour game,” he observed. In the last half of his NFL officiating career, Tunney said he “did something with the game every day. Films, rules, tests, studying, talking to people on the phone, discussing this rule, that rule, every day. Nobody said officiating was easy, did they? You look at any description you’ve ever seen, it doesn’t say, this job is easy. It’s not there. You’ve got to work at it, you’ve got to prepare.”

S is for service. “We serve the game. We serve the players. We serve the coaches. We serve the fans,” noted Tunney. “We’re in the service business, to help people, to help the game be right.”

With that attitude of service, however, comes the issue of respect. Tunney points out that “Service people respect the players, respect the coaches, and most of all, respect the game.”

O stands for the circle of our huddle. “You see, the thing about a circle is there’s no start and no finish,” he observed. “Everybody is important to this organization. Everybody is important to NASO. Everybody is important to this word, team, T-E-A-M. Together, everyone accomplishes more.”

Tunney then made a point about the “brotherhood” of officiating. “I guarantee you that you’ll meet somebody in this room this weekend that sometime during the year 2001 is going to have a tough day. Will you pick up the phone and call him? ‘How’s it going? Heard about your situation. Is there anything I can do to help?’ That’s what teamwork is all about, helping somebody else.”

In a fitting conclusion to a stirring address, Tunney simply noted, “You build teams by building people.”



## **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: WHOSE JOB IS IT?**

*Session Two — moderator: Jim Arehart, panelists: Jack Roberts, Don Collins, Darci Doll, Tim Crowley*

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The first session dealing directly with the topics of the 2001 NASO conference provided an overview to the basic problems facing recruiting and retention. Speakers included people from a local, recreational, state and legal perspective.

The panel agreed that, essentially, the jobs of recruiting and retention of officials belong to everyone at every level.

Jack Roberts, executive director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association, set the tone for the session. “The state high school associations that I represent certainly have a great responsibility,” he said. “Any organization that sponsors competition has some responsibility to assure that the competition is safe, sane, and sportsmanlike, and officials are going to be a large part of assuring that. So while we have very definitely a responsibility, it doesn’t mean state high school associations are the best at it.”

Tim Crowley, Texas Association of Sports Officials executive director agreed, noting that Texas has 1,268 high schools and 13,000 licensed officials. That translates to 10 officials per school covering 22 state-sanctioned sports.

Darci Doll, assistant director of intramural sports at the University of Texas, said, “I work with students, people 18 to 22 years old, trying to teach them how to officiate, and to get them involved in officiating at a young age. Eighteen to 22 year olds want to do what their friends are doing. So if I can recruit one fraternity member, or one dorm leader, or one student organization member to be an official and to enjoy it, then they’ll bring their friends.”

Bringing people in is the start of the recruiting process. Good efforts can be likened to a funnel: lots of people at the start, funneling down to a few whom complete training, licensing, and get out on the field.

Crowley related the story of a local association that set up a kiosk at a shopping mall to generate interest. “We all know that’s not the best approach in terms of the quality that you can control,” he admits. “But it’s driven in incredible numbers. (They) have a very simple brochure that they hand them, kind of the ground rules, as it were. They’re available for all the sports. Just since they started this effort in football two months ago, we’ve had 135 people in basically five weekends now that they’ve gotten the names and have agreed to come to a meeting.”

Doll said that aggressive recruiting doesn’t have to stop at the malls.

“(A basketball officials association in Houston) has several of their board members who have begun to talk to high school players,” she related. “So during the season, several of the board members from the Houston chapter will talk to high school players, specifically those about to graduate, and will involve them in (officiating) the summer leagues.”

“People will go where they are invited, and they will stay where they feel welcomed and appreciated,” echoed Roberts. “Invite them, welcome them, appreciate them. I think that works for officiating just as a general theme, a general philosophy of how to recruit and retain officials.”

In some areas, however, there may be some reluctance to recruit new officials since the status of being an independent contractor can cause some legal snarls.

“Over time some (association) members are going to lose their jobs, and some of those members are going to identify the local officials associations,” noted attorney and official Don Collins. “That’s something that a local officials association can’t avoid. Now, can they prevail when confronted with the problem? I do believe that they can. The problem is, local officials associations aren’t financially suited to fight such a battle. Litigation against a tax agency for a local official’s association is virtually unwinnable, even though all of the published cases say you’re an independent contractor.”

How can a local association be “on the hook” for one of its members who is suddenly unemployed? “State agencies aren’t people who read cases. They’re people who are in an office,” explained Collins. “You go and file for unemployment benefits, and there’s a person there who takes the claim and says, oh, these guys pay Johnny. So they send a form to the association that says, you pay Johnny, we don’t have a record of you paying employment taxes. Then the association either has to put together an overwhelming package immediately showing that they’re independent contractors.”

In many areas, however, such concerns are far removed from the day to day business of finding enough officials to run recreational, youth league and other sub-varsity contests.

In her role as an intramural program supervisor, Doll experiences shortages of her own, but also fields calls from others needing officials.

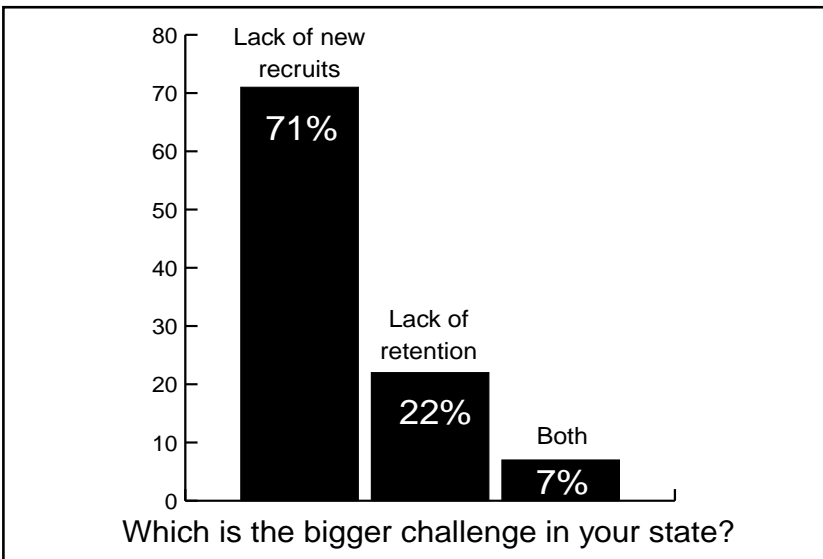
“The local (associations), be they football, basketball, soccer, volleyball, call me almost weekly and want the intramural students, since there are so many, to come and work all the junior high games, all the sub-varsity games,” Doll told the audience. “The (association) can’t

cover them all because there just aren't enough officials. I am not in a position to offer up my students until after they've graduated because I need them to work at the University of Texas."

Michigan's Roberts agreed that high school and college students provided a vast and largely untapped source for potential officials. "We see each year good student athletes pass from the high school program, they graduate, go out into the work world or college, maybe never to play organized sports in the school college setting again, and we lost them," he admits. "We never asked them to officiate. We never brought them into the athletic director or coach's office and say, you know, John, or Suzy, you really seem to have the ability. Have you ever thought about being an official? Here's the form to officiate."

Despite the different backgrounds of the panelists, the session concluded with the agreement that virtually everyone with an interest in improving the numbers and quality of officials must become involved in recruiting and retention.

"I want to say it's everybody's job," said Collins. "But I also think because of demographic factors, sportsmanship factors, the lack of people who are willing currently to do it under the current conditions, the contractor needs tremendous assistance from the governing body to provide an appropriate setting, to provide appropriate resources, to make this all happen. So to that extent, it is everybody's job."



SOURCE: NASO's state high school association survey, "Is There an Officials' Shortage?" See p. 13 for more information on the survey results.

## **WHY AREN'T THERE ENOUGH REFS?**

*Session Three — presenters: Mary Struckhoff, Bob Still*

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It happens far too often. A person begins officiating, often after a lengthy “sales pitch” by other officials, only to give it up within a few seasons. Why does that happen? What can we do to keep officials in the game?

Key to answering the crucial questions surrounding recruiting and retention of officials is being able to understand why officials quit. So important is the issue that both NASO and the NFHS conducted separate surveys of state executive directors and former high school officials to gain some insight to that critical problem.

Bob Still, NASO public relations manager, led off with the NASO survey results. NASO had surveyed all the state high school associations in the nation. Response to requests was excellent, as all 60 state association executive directors responded (some states have more than one state association). The NASO survey consisted of 15 questions. The first question was: “Do you think there is a shortage of officials?” 90 percent of respondents answered yes to that.

NASO next wanted to find out which sports were most in need of officials. Soccer was the number one sport in need. Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated a soccer official shortage. Second was field hockey. Third was baseball, wrestling was fourth followed by volleyball.

The survey next asked which is the bigger challenge in your state: a lack of recruits or a lack of retention. A lack of recruits was a bigger problem for 71 percent, while retention was the key issue for 22 percent. Interestingly, seven percent of state association directors said both recruiting and retention were equal problems.

While, the NFHS survey was directed toward former officials and concentrated on reasons they no longer officiated, the NASO survey asked a similar question of administrators. Specifically, administrators were asked the reasons officials do not re-register. The number one problem from the administrator’s view is poor sportsmanship. Specifically, 76 percent said poor sportsmanship on the part of spectators was to blame while 68 percent said poor sportsmanship on the part of participants was the problem. That is a theme repeated often in the NFHS survey.

Right behind poor sportsmanship, administrators agreed that, at 65 percent each, career and family demands cost them officials, while 53 per cent thought difficulty in advancement was a problem. Thirty-five percent said they lost good officials simply to retirement. Other

responses included assignor or local association problems (33 percent), and low pay (30 percent).

Of special interest to NASO was the number of officials who quit after one short year on the playing fields. The next question asked: what percentage of officials does not re-register for their second year? The disturbing results indicated that 34 percent of the high school associations are losing one-third of their first year officials. After three years, the numbers get even worse.

The next question related to availability of qualified officials. It wanted to know how much the availability of officials affects the rescheduling or canceling of games. Ten percent of respondents said not having enough officials is a common problem, while an astounding 60 percent more said that it was at least an occasional problem.

NASO also discovered that there are 164,086 officials registered across the country with Pennsylvania having the most of any state at 15,702. Illinois had the biggest 10-year loss in number of officials, having experienced a 21 percent decline over that period.

In an attempt to put a positive spin on what seem to be almost overwhelmingly negative numbers, Still concluded, "More games available means more opportunities, so there is a way to look at this on a bright side. There's a lot more opportunity to officiate."

Still then turned the session over to Mary Struckhoff, an NFHS assistant director. Struckhoff indicated the NFHS survey was conducted online, targeting officials who did not re-register, and was born out of an idea presented at the Midwest Officials Summit, a group of state office personnel that are in charge of the officials departments in their individual states.

The NFHS had 463 respondents over a five-month period. The survey asked specific questions about gender, what sport they had left, and how many years of experience they had in those sports. As for the reasons they left officiating, respondents were given 17 choices, too many in Struckhoff's opinion.

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents were male. The first and most important question asked of the men was why they had left officiating. The number one reason among males was career and job demands. So 138 of the 406 men responding said the reason they left officiating was a career and job demand. The second reason was poor sportsmanship by participants followed by poor sportsmanship by spectators. Number four was low game fees. Number five was relationship with the assignor and local association. In the sixth position was difficulty in advancing.

Struckhoff then compared the female responses to the same question: why did you quit?

Number one for former female officials was career and job demands followed by time away from family and friends and poor sportsmanship by spectators, then by participants. The fifth most common reason was low game fees.

The NFHS had several tables that broke results down further by sport and experience level (how long they had been officiating), lending interesting twists to the data. Consistent as the number one reason people left officiating within the first five years, was career and job demands. Among those leaving after six to ten years of officiating, poor sportsmanship was the top reason cited.

The master table of responses to “why you quit” covering all sports, all genders and all levels of experience listed their top six reasons as career and job demands, poor sportsmanship by participants, then by spectators, time away from friends and family, low game fees, and relationship with assignors.

Struckhoff noted that the NFHS is dealing with the issue of making it easier for experienced officials to continue their officiating careers when they move to a new state. “We’re developing a National Federation of Officials education program. A component of that will involve some credentialing, if you will. If you obtain this credential on a national level and you move, it will still be the same credential that will stay with you wherever you go.” The hope is that this will aid in retaining officials since they won’t have to ‘start over’ if they move.”

“It’s a monumental task, as you can well imagine,” continued Struckhoff. “(One) of the components that will be involved, is a general education component, which means preventative officiating. How to get assignments, how to deal with players and coaches, all of those things that are inherent in all sports. We also have a sport-specific component.

“This national credentialing program that will provide a level one, level two, level three, and transfers from (state to state), is about eighty percent (complete). I suspect this time next year there will be a presentation in Albuquerque (the site of next year’s joint NASO-NFHS conference) about the four sports that are being launched by the NFHS. That’s my goal,” Struckhoff concluded.

## THE BOOK ON RECRUITING

Session Four — speaker: Commander Steven C. Lowry, United States Navy

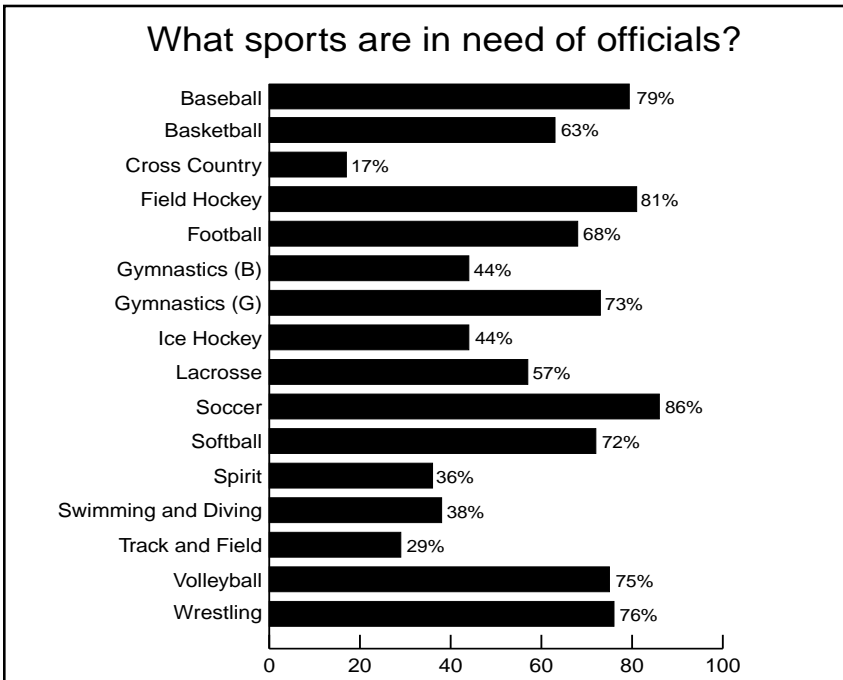
Since the theme of the 2001 NASO conference was “Recruiting and Retention of Officials,” who better to draw professional advice from on the former than an expert from an organization that has been recruiting for well over 100 years: the United States Navy?

Commander Steven Lowry is a public affairs officer with the U.S. Navy recruiting command.

Lowry noted that the Navy proactively examined personnel needs and accurately predicted a sailor shortage. Rather than waiting until the anticipated shortage arrived in full bloom, the Navy began a campaign to recruit new young people before a severe shortage caused strategic problem.

Lowry told attendees that the Navy utilizes four phases in recruiting and identified four challenges to those efforts.

**Phase one is identifying and acknowledging the problem.** Lowry



SOURCE: NASO’s state high school association survey, “Is There an Officials’ Shortage?” See p. 13 for more information on the survey results.

noted that officiating organizations around the nation have made it to this phase. “All these shortages mean that you’re also going to experience intense competition for new people,” he observed. “And once you recruit and train sports officials, you’re going to have to work harder to keep them.”

**Phase two is research.** Lowry said this was, perhaps, the most important phase of the program. The U.S. Navy hired an independent advertising and marketing firm to conduct research into how best to reach their target “market,” in this case, young people.

“They talked with former sailors. They talked with current sailors. They talked with brand new sailors in training. They talked with sailors who were waiting to be trained. They talked with families of sailors. Young people who didn’t want to be sailors. They talked with counselors, coaches, teachers, and educators of prospective sailors. They talked to minorities, females, professionals, technology experts, and a host of other groups. They examined what was working in recruiting and what wasn’t working.” Clearly, for officials Lowry advocates speaking to anyone and everyone with even a remote interest in athletics in general and officiating in particular.

The result of the Navy’s research? “After massive research into the habits, likes, dislikes, goals, and abilities of our target market, we’ve been striving to adjust our recruiting efforts to better reach our target market,” said Lowry.

What does that mean to local officials associations with a desire to increase their numbers? “It’s important you know what’s working for you and what isn’t,” observed Lowry. “Do you know who your target market is? Do you know their long range goals and defining characteristics? Do you know what media they prefer? That’s critical. How they seek out information. Are they Internet junkies, or are they DirecTV fans? Would it be wise to invest in advertising outside of sports venues? If so, what venues? You not only have to identify your target market and their preferences, you have to develop a definitive plan for reaching that market.”

Lowry said the Navy does that through “Awareness Programs” like public appearances by the Blue Angels, or the Navy parachute team, the Leap Frogs. He notes, however, that awareness can not replace advertising.

**Phase three is packaging and selling the product.** “It sounds sort of crass, but that’s the reality,” admitted Lowry. If you want to sell somebody something, you need to persuade them that that’s what they need.” One new way the Navy does that is by getting current sailors to go back home and talk to people they know about the benefits of



serving in the Navy. It's called Hometown Area Recruiting Program (HARP).

Lowry described HARP as a way for recent recruits "to return to their hometowns on the Navy's nickel, to assist recruiters for two to three weeks. That happens immediately after their initial training. They go back in town, they're wearing a uniform, they're looking good, and they've achieved. Their peers are still there saying, 'May I supersize that for you?' And here's this sailor, and he says, 'No, boot camp isn't that bad. Anybody can get through boot camp. You've got to work a little. It's hard. It's not easy. If it were easy, anybody could do it. But if you think you can cut it, I cut it.' And they're hometown heroes. They've been very successful."

Lowry also noted that recruiting is not an easy effort. For every person who signs a contract to join the Navy, recruiters talk to between 80 and 100 prospects. "Not a great ratio," Lowry admitted. "A lot of nos there. A lot of rejection. A lot of 'you've got to be kidding me.'" To meet the Navy's personnel requirements, they need 1,000 new recruits every week. That translates to talking to between 80,000 and 100,000 prospects every week.

How many potential officials have you spoken to over the past year? Lowry said state and local associations need to ask themselves a series of questions. "How many (new officials) will you have to bring in each year to maintain the level of coverage. Is one official per game enough? Is two; is three? Do you have to have standbys? My guess is yes. Who will make the best recruiters? Is it you? What training do you need? Do you need training to go out and recruit new sports officials? Perhaps. Will you need periodic refresher training? Who is going to provide the training? And of course, the bottom line, who is going to fund that training?"

Navy recruiters are encouraged to go where the prospects go. Where do officiating prospects go? Where can we find them that may not be quite so obvious?

**Phase four of recruiting is identifying obstacles to recruiting.** The Navy breaks this phase into four "recruiting challenges." The first is simply the availability of prospects.

The second challenge is something the Navy refers to as propensity. That means the likelihood that an individual is interested in being recruited.

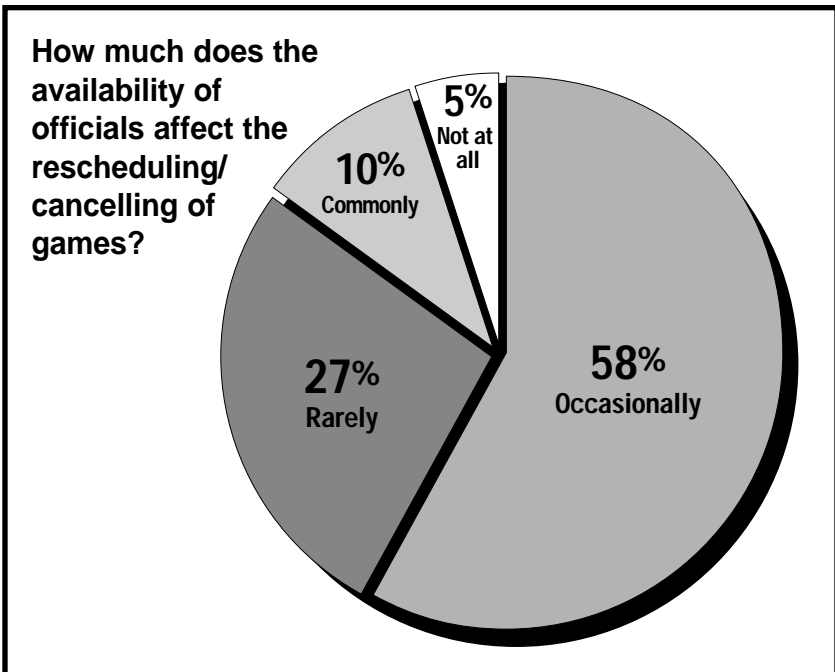
The third challenge is a decline in veterans and other spheres of influence. If people who used to officiate or who had a great deal of respect for officiating retire, move or simply don't talk about the need

and value of officiating, a great resource is lost, says Lowry.

The fourth challenge is the status of the national economy. Lowry noted, “What’s good for the country isn’t necessarily good for the military (or officiating). The booming U.S. economy of the last seven to 10 years has made it very hard to compete with Corporate America.” As more people make more money and receive more benefits, it becomes more difficult to “sell” the economic benefits of officiating as an avocation.

Lowry summarized his useful session by pointing out that “the Navy looks at recruiting as only one leg of the tripod of its personnel program. The other two are attrition and retention. We’re convinced that they need to be part of any recruiting effort. By reducing attrition and increasing retention, you lower the number of prospects you need. In Navy recruiting we’ve had better success so far at increasing retention than we have reducing attrition.”

In other words, getting new officials is only half the battle. Once we get them, we have to keep them. As Lowry emphasized, “(It is) the responsibility of everyone in the organization.”



SOURCE: NASO’s state high school association survey, “Is There an Officials’ Shortage?” See p. 13 for more information on the survey results.

## RECRUITING SHOW AND TELL

*Session Five — panelists: Jeff Murray, Gary Gullett, Bob Lade and Bill Bupp*

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Some state and local associations have been successfully proactive when it comes to recruiting and retention. This session featured four such success stories with somewhat varied approaches.

The session took the form of mini-presentations, as each speaker shared details of his organization's activities. First up was Jeff Murray, president of Metro Officials Association (MOA) in Oklahoma.

Murray said that Metro's efforts began in Spring, 1999 when an association member who worked at the local cable company suggested running a public service announcement on cable television to help recruit new officials. The commercial ran for three months the first time. In order to track responses, the association contracted for voice mail service that interested persons could call and leave their contact information. Association officials then responded via mail or telephone. Metro sent out 265 information packets to interested persons responding to the ad since it began about two years ago.

As a second step in recruiting, Metro also has a fully developed website that it encourages interested parties to visit. The third element is an introductory pamphlet produced by the association.

Of course, there is no substitute for interpersonal interaction. Metro addresses that vital point with weekly training sessions and a mentoring program in which experienced football crews are assigned a "rookie" as a travel companion. Although the rookies don't work games with the experienced crews, they are a part of the pregame, half time and postgame sessions, and are able to learn more about what being an official means. The other part of Metro's mentoring program allows the new official to call his mentor after working games with any questions or problems he may have had. Mentors are also expected to observe at least one of the rookie's games each week and provide feedback.

The programs have begun to work for the Metro Officials Association. When the advertising, phone mail and mentoring programs started in August of 1999, Metro had 418 members. Since that time, membership has increased to 449. That's an increase of 7.5 percent in less than two years. This year, MOA expects 35-40 new officials on the field. What would an increase like that mean to your association?

The session then turned from a large association to a tiny one. Gary Gullett, an NASO board member, is with the Rockford Officials Association (ROA) in Rockford, Illinois, which two years ago had only

35 members. Today they have more than 70. Retention is obviously a major issue for such a small organization but it must have done something very right in the recruiting department to double its membership in such a short time.

ROA started with a brainstorming session. At first, no idea seemed too far-fetched. Eventually, they focused on just a few ideas they felt they could work effectively.

First to be tried were radio interviews. Most radio stations are looking for local people to interview about local issues. When you couple that with the fascination people have about officiating, you have a winner. ROA members got on every radio station they could think of to talk officiating for three minutes at a time. Although the response wasn't what they had hoped, it got the ball rolling.

Next, association members attended area high school athletic conference meetings to speak to athletic directors and coaches. Gullett said association members asked the adults to "plant a seed in those high school kids. The kids that have the aptitude for this, you can tell who they are as coaches. You know what you want to see in an official, so when you see a kid that has those traits and those qualities, talk to them a little bit about it."

That group targeted by the Rockford contingent is fast becoming one of the most frequently identified groups when it comes to recruiting new officials, but their response in this case was disappointing. There was no way to track the actions of coaches and athletic directors once they left those meetings. They weren't deterred, however.

ROA then took on a variety of community service projects, often performing them in their stripes. Officials gave blood, put playground equipment together, and worked with disabled kids. They let the newspapers know, and there would be a photo in the paper the next day. They wrote to more than 600 licensed officials in surrounding areas to tell them what was going on. Maybe they'd like to take part? Maybe they'd like to join ROA?

The association also offered a 14-week course at a local community college, and couples that with a growing mentoring program in which mentors officiate with new officials.

There is a scholarship program for officials who want to attend clinics anywhere in the U.S. Two officials are given \$300 scholarships annually. Most of the money comes from annual donations to the association for that purpose. Interested officials turn in applications and follow information-sharing criteria.

Most effective for the ROA, however, was an ad placed in the local paper seeking interested persons. The 5x7 ad ran for a full week and netted 46 responses, of which 30 actually started attending meetings. It was costly, however, setting ROA back \$2,700.

“This takes so much energy,” admitted Gullett. “I think you have to have some people behind (your recruiters). So think about all those things as you’re putting these recruiting and retention programs together.”

Next up was Bob Lade, campus recreation director at Northwest Missouri State University in Marionville, Missouri. Lade needs to recruit officials for NWMSU’s active intramural program.

Lade indicated his recruiting pool is made up of students. Reaching students means using their media, so Lade tries a combination of fliers, brochures, campus cable TV, and the intramural program’s web page.

Word of mouth has also been an effective recruiting tool for Lade. How many people have you talked to about officiating recently?

The final speaker of the session was Bill Bupp of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA).

Bupp highlighted Michigan’s aggressive efforts especially in the areas of training and recognition. “Our goals are these,” said Bupp. “We’re going to increase the (number of) officials to fulfill the needs, we’re going to keep pace with the attrition that we happen to have, and we’re going to provide basic training to promote successful officiating experiences.”

Michigan strives to provide a convenient registration process and adequate training as essential first steps in recruiting. Part of the training focuses on the trainers. They are taught how to run effective meetings. Bupp suggests “cut the war stories. Get into a topic. Deal with the topic. Have an outcome, and then reach that outcome. Test for clarity and understanding.”

Of particular interest to those in attendance was an effective and attractive recruiting video produced by the MHSAA, and Bupp’s description of Michigan’s highly developed Legacy Program, a model mentoring device.

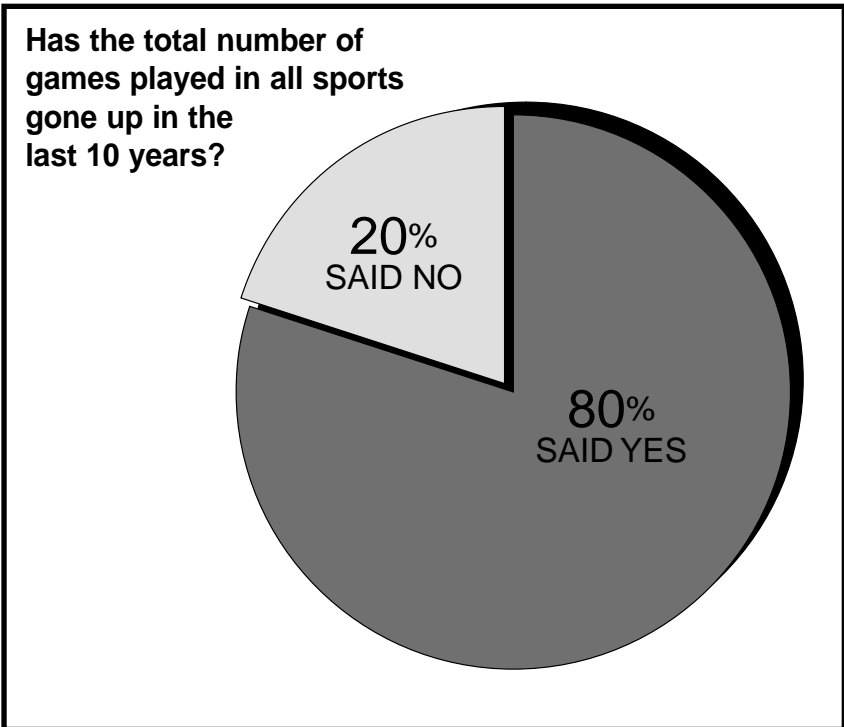
“Our Legacy Program is a mission to deal with juniors in high school,” related Bupp. “We can take a junior in high school who is 16 years old, pair him up with an approved official, and we let them work sub-varsity games — as long as they’re with that official on the court, field, or on the pool deck, or that person is available and watching them

officiate. If they're a senior in high school and seventeen years old, we let them work as a bona fide official through sub-varsity games."

MHSAA also has a program targeted at recruiting female officials that it calls "Two-DAE," an acronym for "dedicated, accomplished, and educated." People who attend these informational clinics are fed breakfast and lunch, given materials on officiating, T shirts, and a voucher for their first registration that, in essence, makes their first season fee-free.

How easy does your state make it for officials to get started?

The ideas presented in this session ignited a lively question and answer period, and the halls were buzzing during the break. From state associations down to the smallest local association and even school programs, everyone came away with a list of ideas to try.



SOURCE: NASO's state high school association survey, "Is There an Officials' Shortage?" See p. 13 for more information on the survey results.

## CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

*Session Six — speaker: Tommy Nuñez*

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Opening the second day of speakers at the 2001 NASO conference was 28-year veteran NBA referee and 1999 Gold Whistle Award winner Tommy Nuñez.

Nuñez' enthusiasm and warmth were contagious. His love for officiating, obvious.

Kicked out of high school when he was 17, Nuñez was given a choice by his probation officer in his hometown of Phoenix: jail or the Marines. The choice was clear for the troubled Latino kid from a poverty-stricken family.

"I've had a lot of misfortune with my siblings," related Nuñez. "I have a brother who did three years in the joint for transporting drugs. I had another brother who died of a drug overdose. I have another brother who was a police officer for 39 years in Phoenix, so we're a very diverse family. We could write a book on dysfunction."

Joining the Marines proved to be a blessing for Nuñez who never was taught any discipline as a youngster. "The only discipline I ever knew really (prior to the service) was punishment," he said.

After his discharge from the Marines, a cousin got him started officiating high school athletics. "I started working high school ball, freshman and JV games, and football, basketball, baseball. Actually, I was a better baseball umpire," chuckled Nuñez.

Early on in his career in stripes, Nuñez discovered he enjoyed the respect that came with being an official. "It was really interesting when I'd go to these high schools and principals, administrators, people with doctorates, would call me 'Mr. Nuñez,' and say, 'It's good to see you here.' I knew they weren't talking about my father, because I hadn't seen him in a long time, and he certainly wasn't at the ballgame with me. They were talking to me, and they gave me a sense of pride. It raised my self-image."

Nuñez officiated high school athletics for 12 years. Some contacts he made at that level had moved into office positions with the then new Phoenix Suns NBA franchise in 1968. Two years later, one of them called Nuñez and asked if he'd like to work a rookie game. That led to a referee tryout camp in New York.

"I'm thinking of every reason why I would not go to this tryout. The excuse I was making really was because I didn't want to go back there and fail. Then they said you'd be the first Mexican-American official in

the history of major league sports. And I said, 'And I'll be the first one to fail, too, if I don't make it.' So I kept talking, I talked to my wife, and my kids were all coming up the ladder, and I turned it down, for fear of failure."

But not for long. As Nuñez pointed out, "none of us are failures unless we fail to try."

A year later, he worked another rookie game. Then in 1972, he got on the jet.

"I got to Buffalo, New York for the tryout," recalled Nuñez. "A couple of the referees I'd met, NBA guys, told me don't ask questions, keep your mouth shut, just listen. When you get home, call me up. I went to this camp, and there were 16 referees invited out of maybe two thousand applicants. Sixteen guys! Good people. But I'd never been around people that were obsessed with something. In my whole life, it was my first time. These guys were like dying to get in the NBA, and I didn't know that feeling."

His tryout at the NBA camp wasn't all that he expected. "I worked five minutes in that camp. Five minutes!" he exclaimed.

Nuñez couldn't believe that was all he'd get to do. Yet he made the first cut from 16 hopefuls to eight. They worked two more nights. The highlight of those last two nights was when NBA officiating legend Mendy Rudolph walked through the gym. The memory is still vivid for Nuñez.

"He looked at me and says, 'How you doing, Mex? I hear good things about you.' And walked off. So I get home and I call (a friend). He says, 'How did it go?' I said, 'I don't know. He told me he'd let me know.' 'He says, well, did Mendy talk to you?' I said, 'No, he didn't talk to me.' 'He didn't talk to you at all?' I said, 'Yeah, he said how you doing, Mex.' And (my friend) says, 'You're in.'" And so he was. One year later, in 1973, Nuñez began his NBA career.

Nuñez has passed his love of officiating down through his family. "My son works for the WNBA. His priority is the Pac Ten. My other son worked the Junior College Nationals in Hutchinson last year. We have started a lot of people in sports officiating. I'm going to Spain in July. Not bad. I go every year to do camps for Spanish referees.

One point Nuñez made clear throughout his presentation was that virtually every good thing he has is due to officiating. "(The good things he has accomplished) are because of refereeing basketball, and football, and meeting people, and having an opportunity because of officiating for doors to open wide to be able to do some community work. Because we, as a group, whether you believe this or not, are the



most respected group of individuals in the country. Our integrity is beyond reproach. Our credibility is beyond reproach. Forget the fans, the coaches, the players.”

Núñez then turned his attention to the issues at hand: why it is difficult to recruit officials and to keep them once we get them.

“Do you want to sit around and belabor the point about all these people and the reasons they leave officiating, preferential treatment, favoritism, cronyism, ‘I don’t get the big game.’ You’ll have that forever. So many referees do not enjoy the journey, do not smell the roses, do not take the time to really see what they’re accomplishing regardless.”

To illustrate his point, Núñez pointed out that, despite his 28-year NBA career, he has never worked a NBA finals game and never will. The reality, according to Núñez, is that 70 percent of NBA officials never will work the finals. He’s OK with that. “Am I disappointed? Somewhat, but I still know the journey. I smell the roses. You can’t dwell on the negatives. You can only dwell on the positives.”

Like other conference speakers, Núñez used an acronym to drive home the main point to his theme of climbing the mountain: Pride. “You live by it, you’ll be successful,” he declares.

P is for potential. Some officials don’t reach their potential because they worry about the things they can’t control such as game assignments.

R is for respect. “You respect yourself, you respect your partner, you respect the game, you respect the gymnasium, you respect the people that are there. If they respect you. You respect them,” urged Núñez.

I is for initiative. Take the initiative to learn, get better, and become more successful.

D is for dream. Dream to be better, dream about the future. It helps to set goals.

E is for education. Learn all you can about officiating.

Núñez summed it up best with his closing statement. “I really believe sincerely that sports officials are the best group of Americans in this country. What you do is meaningful, and there’s a lot of people who appreciate what you do, and what you also do besides getting involved in your community, community affairs, community action, helping a kid here, helping a kid there. You’re what the country is all about. You’re the last of a dying breed, people who give a damn.”

## **YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO HOLD ‘EM**

*Session Seven — panel: Barry Mano, Joyce Sisson, Russ Thomas, Bryan Lewis, Tom Herre, Marcy Weston*

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Retention is an issue facing not only officiating, but business and industry as well. Think about it: a manufacturer invests weeks and dollars into training an employee to do a specific job efficiently. It is in that employer's best interest to keep that employee as long as the employee remains productive. If the employee changes jobs before the employer has received an appropriate "return" on their training, it translates to a loss for the employer.

What parallels exist in effective retention efforts between the business world and officiating? That was the question addressed by the largest panel of the weekend.

*Referee* Vice President Tom Herre began the session with a retention overview. The first retention initiative, according to Herre, is "increasing an organization's level of professionalism. What that in essence means is that good organizations adopt systems that introduce objectivity into the way that organization runs." Herre likened this to rating and assignment systems in officiating.

The next step was to move from family to professional management. In other words, eliminate the "good old boy" network. Related to that issue is making performance appraisals objective. Herre admitted that this is "a problem in any rating systems that we come up with."

Another effective retention initiative is involving employees in the decision making process. Let others know that their opinions count. In addition to possibly getting some better ideas, you will have better acceptance of the decisions that are made. It is also essential to ensure a match between authority and accountability. Are those who are assigned decision-making responsibilities the same people who are held responsible for the outcomes?

How can an "employer" get a handle on those and other initiatives? In measuring employee satisfaction, most organizations tend to measure effectiveness "outward." In other words, we're most concerned with how we are serving others than how we're serving our own. That can be a big mistake.

Another step is to achieve a match between individual and organizational goals. "Balance is much better than people having to subsume their personal interests continually to the interests of the organization," Herre noted.

Promoting employees from within is an initiative that has direct parallels with the officiating world. “We want to make sure that the people who are coming in have an opportunity to rise to get good assignments,” said Herre. “But we also need to make sure that the folks (who) have been long time members of our organization are getting the opportunities that they deserve.”

Another method from the business world that has a direct match in officiating is helping employees acquire new skills. In the context of officiating, that could mean everything from the obvious measures of training and clinics to seeking officials from one sport and training them in another sport. The benefits are immediate.

The next initiative, focusing on welfare measures, doesn’t mean what it seems to mean. “It means being aware of the things that your members need in your association, that they have a life outside of officiating, that they are looking for some balance in their lives,” said Herre.

Before turning matters over to the panel, Herre presented results of a survey conducted of 2,000 small businesses. Employers and employees were asked what was important in the retention of employees. The answers didn’t match up.

Bosses thought the four most important things were good wages, job security, promotion, and growth. Employees said, however, that most important to them were interesting work, appreciation and recognition, and feeling involved. Do we understand our constituencies?

Herre then reviewed some of the top reasons officials don’t re-register as determined by the NASO survey (poor sportsmanship, career demands, family concerns) and turned the session over to the panelists for their thoughts.

Bryan Lewis, Former NHL director of officiating, said, “Our number one problem in terms of dealing with hockey officials is abuse of officials. (Canada’s) national newspaper ran an article about losing officials to abuse. (Canada’s) version of *60 Minutes* did a 20-minute segment on abuse of officials and why people walk away.” Lewis said that when officials walk away from lower levels of officiating, the professional levels feel the effects.

“I think we actually probably lose more officials as a result of experiences they have in recreation settings,” said Joyce Sisson, an assignor for Northern Virginia Cardinal Basketball Association and an NFHS field hockey rules committee member. “It seems like the younger the participants, sometimes the worse the behavior of the fans, or parents, who are there to watch them. I can remember specifically a

long e-mail that I got from a (newer) official who, said he was never going to officiate again. It was the worst experience he'd ever had in his life, the fans were horrible, the coaches were horrible, and it was an AAU game."

Any discussion about retention inevitably returns to mentoring. In this case, it was Marcy Weston, a member of the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame and NCAA national coordinator of women's basketball officiating who brought the topic back up.

"Having someone who is available to you to help you get through the tough spots, is really a key," Weston emphasized. "I find a real lack of that. We have a tendency to let people sign up at the high school level, buy a shirt, register, get a whistle, move on out. 'Good luck, call me if you have a problem.' And very often, new people don't want to call if they have a problem, because it shows they can't handle the problem."

Weston said she challenges her officials at the collegiate level to help someone. "At least one," she says. "If everybody helped one, we'd be in good shape."

NASO President Barry Mano next commented on some of the 12 initiatives brought up by Herre at the start of the session. "I think excellence in officiating is poorly defined, and hence poorly rewarded," Mano stated. "I don't think we as administrators and leaders have locked on to what we truly mean by excellence in officiating. We know it isn't just getting 99 on your test. We need to find what things go into the mix that we call excellence in officiating, and then we need to turn around and reward when somebody exhibits that excellence."

Mano said that officials should receive "psychic income" — defined as intangible benefits like pride, fun and leadership as opposed to monetary benefits — from officiating. Once that psychic income is increased, retention problems will ease.

Russ Thomas, supervisor of officials for the Milwaukee Public School System and recreation programs in Milwaukee, had a different view of the problem.

"I think one of the problems we have are younger officials who are ill equipped to handle situations," he observed. "There's got to be an attention to this business of developing and nurturing officials. We can't get away from that buzzword now, continuous improvement."

But whose job is it to accomplish that? "It has to come down to the local association," stated Sisson. "We need to look at what our members want, to find out what they think our organization is, to find out if the board of directors in our organization thinks the same thing that the

members of our organization think. We've pretty much been ignoring the fact that our membership has been declining." Sisson urged local associations to do comprehensive member surveys to get a feel for what needs to be done. "If you don't let the people in your organization know that they are important, no matter what level they have achieved in officiating, you're going to lose them."

"Sometimes assignors must take risks, calculated risks. We must sometimes go out and step out on faith and hire those people that will attract other people to our profession," agreed Thomas.

"You get to a certain point, you have to keep going up, or you start going over, and then you start to crash," observed Weston. "We still need everybody. We still need all of you. But you've got those young in age or young at heart, they can keep moving up, and you have to let people know they have that opportunity."

Mano stressed honesty when recruiting as a way of helping retention down the road. "We're losing people in years one, two and three. That's the critical dimension in the retention problem," Mano noted. "Early on, they walk away. So either the wrong people are coming in, or what we said to them to bring them in, we lied. And they were smart enough to figure that out in years one, two or three: 'This isn't what you said, and I'm moving.' So we need to be very accurate in what we state as the promise or the expectation of people coming into officiating."

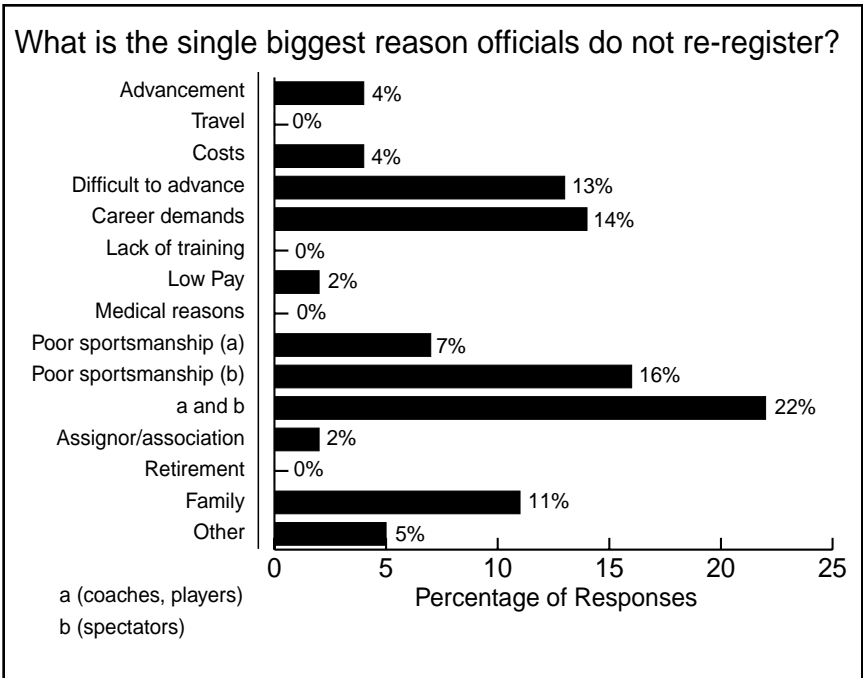
Panelists agreed that choosing the right type of people as mentors was another important element for retention. Not everyone wants to mentor or would be good at it.

Along with mentoring, training is key. Training includes, as Weston pointed out, not merely instruction on rules and mechanics, but in the "hands-on" elements as well. "We don't teach communication skills, we don't teach how to get out of trouble before you get to Ts, ejections, flags, red cards. We don't do that, because that's too nebulous," Weston declared. "It's easier to just go through the book. I'll take a person who can communicate and blow a few calls other than a textbook official any day of the week."

"The very best officials that I have working in our association are the best communicators. There is no question," agreed Sisson.

The session was concluded by Mano in strong fashion. "NBA referees have a small book by John Maxwell on leadership. It's not the rulebook. They study the book, and come together in the summer, and

talk about leadership principles. That's what we're talking about here. This has to work its way into the evaluation system. Do the tests that we have to take and upon which we are graded, take into account those principles? The answer is no, and we need a big dose of those principles in year one to help new people survive. That's the paradigm shift, as they say in business, that we need in this business called officiating."



SOURCE: NASO's state high school association survey, "Is There an Officials' Shortage?" See p. 13 for more information on the survey results.

## WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

*Session Eight — presenter: Jeff Stern, attendees*

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If two heads are better than one, what are a few hundred worth? That seemed to be the philosophy with the most unique session at the 2001 NASO conference, “What’s Your Experience?”

*Referee* associate editor Jeff Stern divided attendees into 12 groups, by birth month, to answer one of 12 questions regarding the conference theme of recruitment and retention of officials. After breaking into groups, attendees were given several minutes to brainstorm solutions to the issue presented to their group. The results were interestingly consistent.

Group one handled the question: “What are the largest untapped sources for new officials?” NASO chair Gary Whelchel led the group. Responses included: military bases, despite the transitory nature of those assignments; retired people, despite their probably shortened careers; college students, sports arenas and adult leagues.

Group two, led by Pac 10 women’s basketball officials supervisor and NASO board member Carter Rankin, was asked to discuss “What do you say when recruiting one on one?” The group identified truthfulness as a key element when discussing officiating with the uninitiated. Topics to be covered included telling prospects what type of equipment they’ll need and how much it will cost; what the pay is like; and what the chances, requirements and timetables are for advancement. Also recommended was an emphasis on the physical benefits of officiating, becoming more active.

The assignment for group three was to discuss “How Do You Grow the Market of New Officials?” Their solutions included talking to players before and after games about officiating. Media exposure was also recommended by putting officials or programs in the public eye via ads in local newspapers, radio, TV, or the Internet. You may elect to have your association involved in community service. Youth camps, high schools, colleges, and PE classes within the schools are great resources, as are one-day workshops where you bring in recruits that are all encompassing, covering how to get a uniform, and how to get assignments and so forth. Speaking to various civic groups may work well, as may booster clubs. Recruit officials from other sports. Look in YMCAs, Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, health clubs, or your church. Make sure you recruit in your work place, in your social settings, and target specific vocations like educators, police, or firefighters, people who

have to make pressure decisions or who can handle pressure situations.

Group four, led by former NFL senior director of officiating and current NASO board member Jerry Seeman, dealt with actions that can be taken to attract more quality people to officiating. Again, being honest with prospects was a primary issue. Also suggested was taking the best people from local associations on recruiting visits. Group four also recommended utilizing schools as a source of prospects. The development of an effective mentoring program was mentioned as a “must.”

The task for group five was to identify the top seven things that an individual official can do to recruit and retain officials. Their leader was NASO board member Joan Powell. Their recommendations: 1. Set a positive example; 2. Network and talk to people; 3. Stay in touch with new recruits; 4. Find one recruit a year; 5. Don't be overzealous; 6. Help your mentees; and 7. Make people aware that you are an official in your social settings.

Group six had the assignment of identifying six logical things a local association can do to keep its members happy and was led by Rockford Officials Association president and NASO board member Gary Gullet. Their list included 1. Give the information to the entire group. Nothing is worse than feeling “out of the loop” when it comes to important communication; 2. Reward young or new members with some higher level games. The games should not be above their current abilities, but should reward newer officials who are improving; 3. Train to the ability levels. At clinics make sure the veterans have material that is beneficial to them so that they stay interested and keep attending; 4. Communicate with and give feedback about the performance of newer officials. Be positive, but let them know how they need to improve.

Group seven was charged with determining how can states use varsity game and tournament assignments as a recruiting and retention tools, and was led by Ohio High School Athletic Association Assistant Commissioner Henry Zaborniak. It was a tough assignment, but the group believed that tournament assignments could be used both for recruiting and retention because of increased positive visibility. The increased visibility is primarily a result of media coverage. Television promos during the course of the tournaments themselves can do the same thing with high profile varsity games in the areas in which we live, as can having a “recruiting booth” at high-profile games.

Recognition of officials assigned to work state tournaments either in the



media or at meetings is an effective retention tool that should not be ignored.

Group Eight was assigned the task of discussing ways in which we can combat the bad experiences that first year or new refs encounter. They were led by NCAA Division I men's basketball official and NASO vice chair John Clougherty. Interestingly, the group said that a bad experience is not always bad, as long as the referee understands that a bad game doesn't make him a bad ref. And you follow that up with an objective evaluation of that game. Having a mentor was again cited as vital. Role-playing was offered as a good way to help train officials for conflict situations. Their final recommendation was to be sure not to give new officials games they are not ready to officiate. This is a problem particularly in areas experiencing a severe shortage of officials.

The assignment for group nine, led by retired NFL referee Red Cashion, was to determine how to keep new officials. Members felt that the best officials tended to stay regardless of measures taken by the association. Helping officials who are either moving from or to a new geographic area was considered of paramount importance. Also suggested was to develop a good recognition program, getting families of officials involved to make them a part of things.

Speaking of recognition, the types of rewards that help retain good officials was the topic discussed by group 10. Randy Christal, an NASO board member and NCAA Division I official in both football and baseball, led the group. Playoff assignments came to mind first, beyond that, simply assigning progressively more challenging games was a key. Presenting certificates at the end of a season can be an excellent method of recognition, as can a release of names to the local newspaper. The group also cited recognition by the community at large and its attendant respect as being important.

Group 11 dealt with challenges unique to recruiting and retaining women officials. They were led by someone who has been there, NCAA national coordinator of women's basketball officials and NASO board member Marcy Weston. Discussion was active as Weston outlined what her group had determined. The group decided that there are stigmas. In many sports, women are not perceived as being capable of officiating. Cited as examples were boys' basketball, wrestling, and football. Weston pointed out that there are successful female officials in each of those sports. More should be nurtured. Another problem is that many women would rather coach than

officiate. The group said to combat this with an explanation that in officiating, you have more control over your time and commitment. There also needs to be more female role models in officiating. Weston summarized her group's discussions by stating "You need to think about women, then you will get women."

Finally, group 12 was asked to discuss methods of funding recruiting and retention programs. They were led by outgoing NASO chair Julie Ilacqua. The group pointed out that in many associations, recruiting and retention is a line item in the budget, and it comes from dues and fees. Other methods may include corporate sponsors, grant requests, using association members to speak at functions for a fee that would be put to the recruiting budget, advertising in local movie theaters, and the use of good-natured "fines."

The session netted not only some good, practical suggestions but helped form the closeness and camaraderie so common to officials everywhere.

## HERE'S THE WAY WE DO IT

*Session Nine — presenters: Norm Dueck and Maltbie Brown*

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Imagine for a moment that you are the manager of officiating for the national sport of your country. Your league is so massive that you have competition at virtually every age level and in virtually every bus-stop sized town in your massive country. Imagine now that you are in charge of getting officials for this enormous undertaking. Your sport has no offseason. You have so many games that you need 32,000 officials. Thirty-two thousand! Now imagine you have to replace 10,000 of those officials every year because they either quit, retire, or move up to another level.

Welcome to the world of Norm Dueck.

Those are just the beginning of the daily problems facing Dueck, the officiating manager for the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA). Many of his officials are young. How young? Try 11 years olds. As Dueck himself admits, “We’ve got a big retention problem in the CHA. Most of those (leaving) would be in the teenage years.”

This session focused on successful retention programs. No official enjoys being “ridden” by an irate coach or biased fans. Imagine being a child, not yet a teenager, and having to withstand the pressure. Obviously, the CHA puts a strong emphasis on sportsmanship to help retain their officials. “We can deal with it on the ice, we can communicate,” said Dueck. “But we can’t do anything about the fans, the leatherlungs in the stand. So how do we get a message to them?”

To that end, the CHA began producing a series of posters to be placed at the hundreds of venues around Canada to make fans aware of the impact of negative behavior.

“We’ve had about four posters produced over the last number of years,” said Dueck. “We need to improve the work environment for officials. Essentially, that is what these posters intend to do, improve the work environment. About eight years ago, we started to recognize the amount of abuse that officials were taking, and the need to do something about it.”

Copies of the posters were provided to those in attendance. Most agreed they did a good job of getting the message across.

“Yelling at the refs will help your team win,” one poster exclaims. “‘Cause they really like that.” Then in small print underneath comes the real message: “Do ya think?”

Another poster says “That ref is somebody’s kid, or somebody’s mom or dad. A person who cares about hockey and the players. A person doing a tough job as best they can.”

Still another shows a referee ready to drop a puck in a face-off between two players. On the back of one player, where the name would normally be placed, it says, “Dad’s Dreams.” On the back of the other player, it says “Meal ticket.” Both have tiny Stop signs above them. On the back of the official, it says “Scapegoat.”

Those are powerful messages that bring results that are difficult to measure.

“How do you judge whether this poster works,” asked Dueck. “It’s hard to know. You can’t really go out there and determine that it stopped seven people in this community from abusing officials. But it’s just part of the message. We’ve had great response. I’ve had lots of e-mails from people saying, ‘Great, I need a copy.’ We tried to get it up in every arena in Canada.”

Another step undertaken by the CHA was the “Shared Respect Initiative,” which evolved from a previous “Zero Tolerance Policy” regarding abuse of officials.

“Shared respect, is between players, officials, parents and coaches,” Dueck observes. “And that is in essence what the shared respect initiative is, trying to get everybody to work together to improve the game and having respect for the role of each other. Obviously, that came out of the officiating department, but we’re trying to mandate it and make it a part of the coaching program, and also introducing it to the parents.”

As a way of developing the officials they are able to keep, the CHA has been working on putting videos and other training material on the Internet.

Dueck offered the artwork to attendees for local adaptation, and suggested people may want to visit the CHA website to see other current initiatives. The web address is [www.canadianhockey.ca](http://www.canadianhockey.ca), and Dueck’s e-mail address is: [nDueck@canadianhockey.ca](mailto:nDueck@canadianhockey.ca).

When it comes to local association websites, you’d be hard-pressed to beat the one belonging to the Central Ohio Basketball Officials Association ([www.coboa.com](http://www.coboa.com)).

The elaborately useful interactive site was the result of a member survey conducted by the COBOA. Maltbie Brown treated conference attendees to a brief site tour.

As one would expect, the site contains links to areas like NASO, the NFHS and the state association, but that's just the start.

COBOA also has areas for members to find out about meetings, camps and clinics. Officials can go online and anonymously ask rules questions of local interpreters. Both the question and answer get posted for 60 days.

Game opportunities are posted as are individual officials' open dates. In this way, assignors are able to see which officials are available and book them on-line.

Obviously, the level of expertise necessary to create and maintain such a complete and interactive sight may not exist within every local association. The COBOA contracted an expert to create and maintain their site. According to Brown, the cost was seven dollars per member to start and then two dollars and fifty cents per year per member after that. The site averages 1,800 hits per month, including 5,000 in January, peak basketball season.

Brown invited those attending to peruse the COBOA site at their leisure as temporary "members." Simply use user ID number 8000000. The password is 5448.

Whether print or Internet, the initiatives undertaken by the organizations represented during this session proved there are a variety of effective approaches to retention of officials.

## NOBODY LIKES A POOR SPORT

Session 10 — moderator: Bill Topp; panelists: Bob Kanaby, Mike Pereira, Dan Boggan Jr.

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Consistently listed as a top reason why officials quit, and the subject of legislation in many state governments, sportsmanship is an issue of major importance at every level of athletic competition.

Assaults, both verbal and physical are becoming all too common. Taunting and other unacceptable player and coaching behavior also appear to be on the rise.

Sportsmanship, according to session moderator and *Referee* editor Bill Topp, “is the common thread of all the sessions” at the 2001 NASO conference. “In all the numbers, all the statistics, all the examples, all the posters, all the reasons for recruiting and retention problems, there is a common thread, and this is it. There are a number of people who put on the striped shirts every day, and say, ‘If we could solve this, maybe our recruiting and retention problems solve themselves.’”

The Citizenship Through Sports Alliance (CTSA) spent a year looking at the problem of poor sportsmanship. “We came to the conclusion that sportsmanship is about respect, civility and playing fair,” summarized Dan Boggan, NCAA vice president and chair of CTSA. “(It’s about) understanding and appreciating the importance of the competition and playing the games the right way.”

The panel agreed that there are different levels of acceptable behavior at the various levels of competition, but that the line gets blurred with media coverage.

“I’m so strongly opposed to the lack of respect that has crept into our game and any game,” declared NFL Director of Officiating Mike Pereira. “I really believe that at our level, sportsmanship is about the way that players respect each other, and the way that coaches respect officials, and that’s our focus this year. We want to get to the point where we’re going to address those one-on-one actions where players show great disrespect to their opponents, and one-on-one action where coaches disrespect officials. Those are the areas of the game in the NFL that we’re going to target this year.”

At the high school level, the issues are far more fundamental. Athletics, and the lessons they teach, are parts of the curriculum. “You learn to deal with defeat. You learn to deal with victory, and all those other parameters that basically help you deal with what life is going to give you,” noted the NFHS Executive Director Bob Kanaby. “So

sportsmanship is in our schools for that particular reason. The definition of sportsmanship, then, is to be an educational experience, and to engage in activities that provide you with opportunities to learn from the experiences that you have.”

Television coverage has fueled displays of poor sportsmanship. High school and youth league athletes watch their heroes mired in boorish behavior and too often decide to emulate them. The NFL has decided to recognize its responsibility to its young fans and has undertaken a campaign directed at its own players to curb unsportsmanlike behavior.

“From my standpoint, I think it starts with us. I really do,” stated Pereira. “Whether it’s the NBA, or Major League Baseball, or the National Hockey League, people watch us on Sunday afternoons, kids emulate what athletes do. We work sometimes in contradiction with what everybody else is trying to do.” Pereira believes that athletes finish their high school and college careers “clean,” but when they get to the pros, “they get to that point where they start doing some of these acts on the field that should not be acceptable.”

The last straw as far as the NFL was concerned, was the infamous “throat slash,” which quickly made its way from the NFL to youth leagues. It was immediately examined by the NFL and banned.

“The minute we saw that, we knew we had to address that, and we did,” Pereira said. “(Former Senior Director of Officiating) Jerry Seeman got involved, and got with the officials, and said this is going to be a foul if we ever see it, no matter whether it’s directed at another player or just directed at the crowd. There’s nothing good that comes from that.” The damage had been done, however. Within three weeks of the first throat slash in the NFL, tapes were being sent to NASO depicting the act by high school players.

Pereira told attendees the NFL has produced a video to be shown to every NFL player about sportsmanship and their responsibilities as role models. The video, shown at the conference, featured players talking to players.

The Citizenship Through Sports Alliance is comprised of representatives from the NFL, the NFHS, Major League Baseball, the NBA and WNBA, the National Hockey League, the United States Olympic Committee, the National Junior College Athletic Association, the NCAA, and the NAIA. The Alliance determined that the key initiatives to be undertaken are respect, and player behavior. The CTSA has also begun to “work with our constituencies to reinforce those messages of sportsmanship, fair play, respect, civility, and those things

that you learn from competition within the game,” said Boggan.

Kanaby pointed out that such initiatives must target select groups to be successful. Those groups include coaches, officials, school administrators, athletic administrators, students, and finally, the parents and fans. It is the last group, however, that is the hardest to reach and educate. “With the exception of putting people out of the facility, we’re virtually not doing what we should be doing in terms of fan behavior and parents’ behavior,” admitted Kanaby.

“I’m not so sure we can reach the fans, and certainly their behavior is totally out of line at times,” observed Pereira. “But I’ll tell you one guy we ought to be able to reach who could have the single most influence on the kids is the coach. If he is allowed to show those types of values, whether it’s the treatment of the official or an over-emphasis on winning or skirting the rules to win, then we’ve got a problem.”

“Power coaches are very difficult to reign in,” Boggan countered, “and you have to make a decision as to whether you want to take them on, in many cases, or deal with someone challenging you as the administrator, and whether you’re going to be here running this institution.”

Clearly, there is no single solution to the problem of poor sportsmanship. It is a monster with many tentacles. But officials can and should play a role in improving the situation.

“Everything is connected,” Boggan concluded. “Everyone has an opportunity to impact this situation, and clearly officials can do it, and they can do it in ways that are comfortable for them, and should. It may be only one time, but you see officials talking to players. Those conversations can be educational, or they can just be fluff. We have choices that we can make. Sometimes it takes courage when you’re in a situation where you think you may not come out as well as you’d like. (But) yes, we all can make a difference.”



## SUCCESSFUL OFFICIATING 2001 SPEAKER LIST

- Jim Arehart** — *Referee* associate editor
- Dan Boggan Jr.** — NCAA senior vice president and chair of the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance
- Maltbie Brown** — Secretary-Treasurer of the Central Ohio Basketball Officials Association
- Bill Bupp** — Michigan High School Athletic Association assistant director
- Don Collins** — Attorney and basketball official
- Tim Crowley** — Executive director of the Texas Association of Sports Officials and Big 12 football official
- Darci Doll** — Assistant director in charge of intramural sports at the University of Texas
- Norm Dueck** — Canadian Hockey Association officiating manager
- Gary Gullett** — NASO board member and president of the Rockford (Ill.) Officials Association
- Tom Herre** — Vice president of Referee Enterprises, Inc.
- Bob Kanaby** — Executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations
- Bob Lade** — Campus recreation director at Northwest Missouri State University
- Bryan Lewis** — NHL consultant and former NHL supervisor of officials
- Commander Steven C. Lowrey** — Public affairs officer of the U.S. Navy recruiting command
- Barry Mano** — NASO president and *Referee* publisher
- Jeff Murray** — President of the Metro Officials Association (Okla.)
- Tommy Nuñez** — NBA official
- Mike Pereira** — NFL director of officiating
- Jack Roberts** — Executive director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association
- Joyce Sisson** — Assignor for the Cardinal Basketball Officials Association (Va.)
- Jeff Stern** — *Referee* associate editor
- Bob Still** — NASO public relations manager
- Mary Struckhoff** — National Federation of State High School Associations assistant director
- Russ Thomas** — Milwaukee (Wis.) Public Schools athletic administrator and supervisor of officials
- Bill Topp** — *Referee* editor
- Jim Tunney** — Retired NFL referee
- Marcy Weston** — NASO board member and NCAA coordinator of women's basketball officials

### **About the Author:**

*Dave Sabaini is a football, baseball and basketball official from Terre Haute, Ind., where he serves as the treasurer of the Wabash Valley Officials Association. Additionally, Sabaini is the head official for the Vigo County Youth Football League in Terre Haute. He is employed as the director of audio operations at Indiana State University. Sabaini's writing credits include Referee magazine and Officials Quarterly; he also serves on the NFOA publications committee.*

## NOTES

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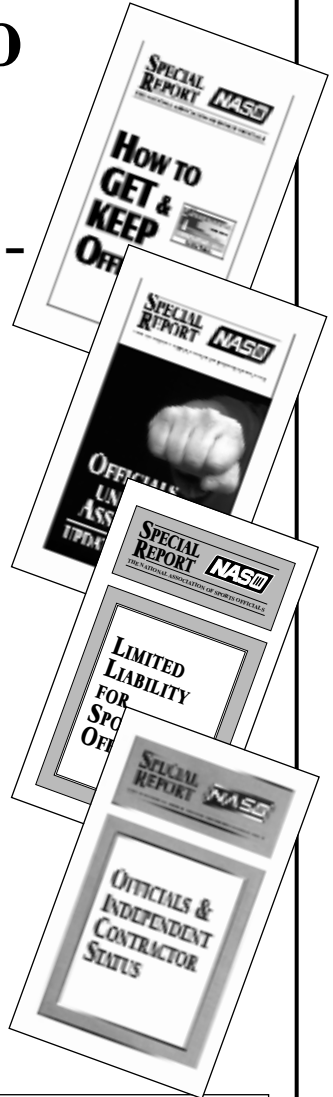
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