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## Triple Crown stiffens fan ejection policy to combat growing problem

MILES BLUMHARDT | THE COLORADOAN

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Go to just about any youth sports tournament and you will likely hear that fan. You know, the one who yells excessively at the officials.

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Triple Crown has had enough of those fans.

The Fort Collins-based company that produces sporting events around the country recently more strictly enforced its policy for ejecting fans exhibiting unruly behavior as a way to combat an umpire shortage and improve the experience of well-behaved fans, players and coaches.

“For some reason, a small percentage of fans forget their decency when they attend sporting events and think they can yell at officials for an hour or two or all day and we have decided that as a company we don’t have room for that,” Triple Crown CEO Kerri King said. “Our company has a value system of respecting all and we believe this better delivers that message to our customers. If fans don’t, they will be ejected.”

Triple Crown instituted the stricter enforcement Memorial Day Weekend, which is one of its biggest event weekends of the year. King said he has not seen reports from all tournaments since the policy was implemented but that preliminary reports show 30 parents were ejected from games based on the new policy from among 16 events the first two weekends the policy was in place.

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He said all ejected parents were from youth baseball and youth softball games and the numbers were about evenly split between the two sports. Lacrosse and basketball tournaments those weekends saw no ejections.

He said fans were rarely ejected before the policy.

King, who assumed the reigns of the company from his father and company founder, Dave King, said the policy was necessary to show umpires that Triple Crown has their backs and to assure well-behaved fans that bad behavior will be dealt with to reduce uncomfortable situations.

“We have been seeing for several years in news articles the growing shortage of officials and that shortage is a scary situation for Triple Crown because

officials are key to our business,” King said. “The average age of officials is growing older. What millennial would want to stand out there and get yelled at when they could be working at a swimming pool where no one is heckling you?”

Sean Grogan owns Northern Colorado Sports Officials, which assigns thousands of games for 600 officials in a dozen sports in the Fort Collins area.

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He said he appreciates Triple Crown stepping up to more strictly enforce the ejection policy because it addresses the manifestation of the issue of a shortage of officials.

"It's nice to see a major player like Triple Crown step forward and say abuse of officials is not OK and address the real problem of a lack of general respect for sports officials," Grogan said. "That is not always the case with some organizations."

King said he realizes his company may lose business if some teams don't play in TCS tournaments because of previous fan ejections, but he is willing to live with that in hopes of providing a better experience.

“We’ve already had some parents thank us and told us it was about time that we addressed this problem,” King said.

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Chris Walker, a 10-year umpire in Northern Colorado, said he already has seen a change in fan behavior.

"Last weekend while working a Triple Crown tournament the parents were a lot nicer to us before, during and even after the games," said Walker, who umpires for various organizations. "The parents were talking about the policy so they know about it."





A fan reacts to a play during a Wednesday night rec league baseball game in Windsor.

MILES BLUMHARDT/THE COLORADOAN

King said he has reached out to his company's competitors such as USSSA in an effort to unite more companies, organizations and high school associations to adopt a similar policy. He said that would help create a black list of teams and/or fans who either would not be allowed to enter tournaments until their behavior improved or would be notified they were on a "short leash" when entering a tournament.

"It's not just a Triple Crown problem or USSSA problem; it's a baseball problem," said Walker, who said competitive youth baseball tournaments generally produce the biggest fan problems. "The more organizations that get together on this and address it the same way the better because these teams

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play tournaments in various organizations."

Triple Crown's policy generally allows first for umpires to ask the coach to address unruly fans. If that doesn't alleviate the situation, the umpire can stop the game and contact the tournament director or chief umpire. Either of those two people then approach the fan to escort them from the premises. If the fan refuses to leave, the team may have to forfeit the game.

King said to put more meat behind the policy, the initial change included a provision that if the ejected fan had a player on the team, that player would also be ejected. But he said the group, which included umpires, umpire game assignors, company staff and others, felt the punishment was too severe for players.

Triple Crown's coaching ejection policy has not changed.

King acknowledged the policy is a work in progress but that the company felt it needed to take the first step in what it hopes will become a national movement.

"We might have waited too long to address this issue," King said. "But there just comes a time when you have to say enough is enough. And that time is now."

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## **Triple Crown policy memo**

**Here is the message Triple Crown sent to teams and umpires to address its new fan ejection policy:**

Officials and TCS staff will have an expanded commitment to enforce good behavior through:

Ejecting parents, coaches and possibly their respective players when parents demonstrate bad behavior (i.e. parents could cause coaches and/or players to be ejected).

Forfeiting the game if the coach can't help the parent(s) to demonstrate good behavior.

Removing coaches or parents for the entire event for confrontations in-game or post-game.

Why is TCS doing this? Two main reasons:

1. To improve the player experience with respectful behavior in the stands.
2. Officials are in a major shortage, partly because of bad behavior by parents and coaches.

### **Can I still debate a call with the official?**

Are you a head coach? Then yes, go for it. Do it in a positive manner and not to ridicule or belittle the official. If you're a parent then please enjoy the game and don't confront the official. Advertisement

### **What is considered bad behavior?**

Verbal or physical abuse

Foul or profane language

Relentless questioning and ridicule of the official

We know that you don't always agree with the official and we acknowledge that they make mistakes. That said, sports officials rarely, if ever, determine the outcome of a game. Players and coaches cause the true outcome of a game.

Triple Crown's purpose is to "bring athletes and families together in competition and create experiences that embed lasting lifetime valued memories". Our "Respect of All" value says that there's "no grunts, no servants and we're all equal, real people". These two guiding principles lead us to the decision to crack down on poor treatment of officials and we're excited to improve the youth experience.

Thank you and enjoy the game.

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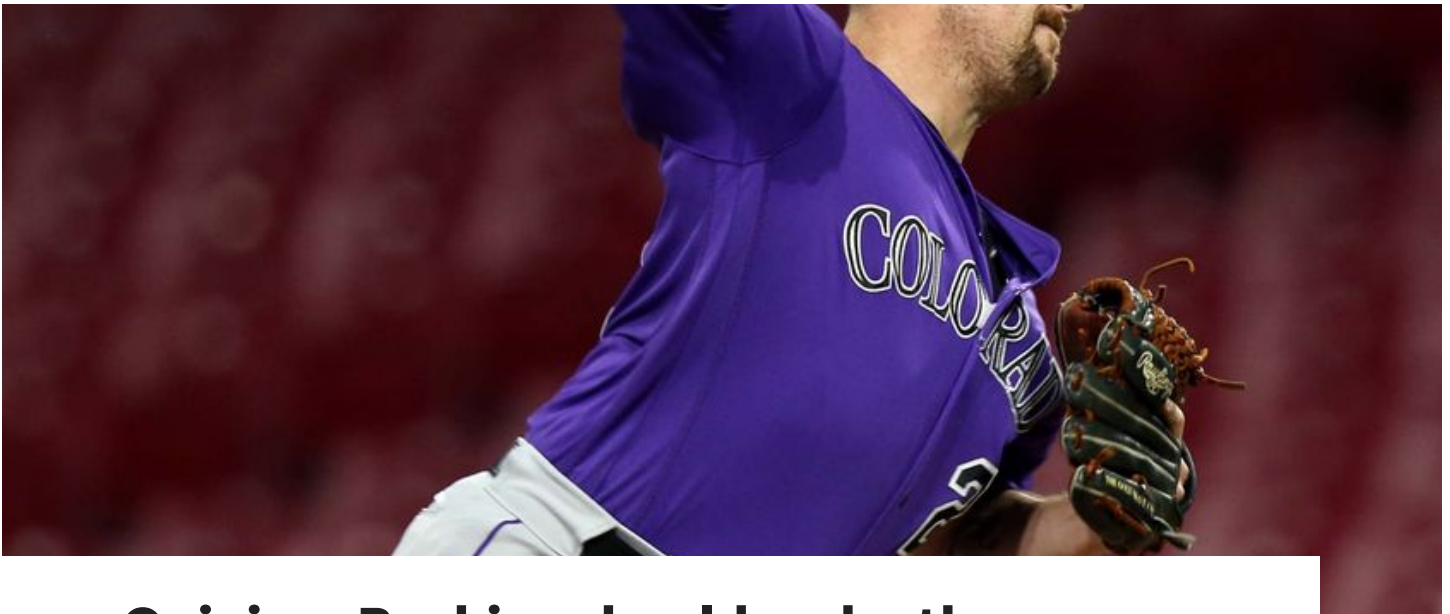
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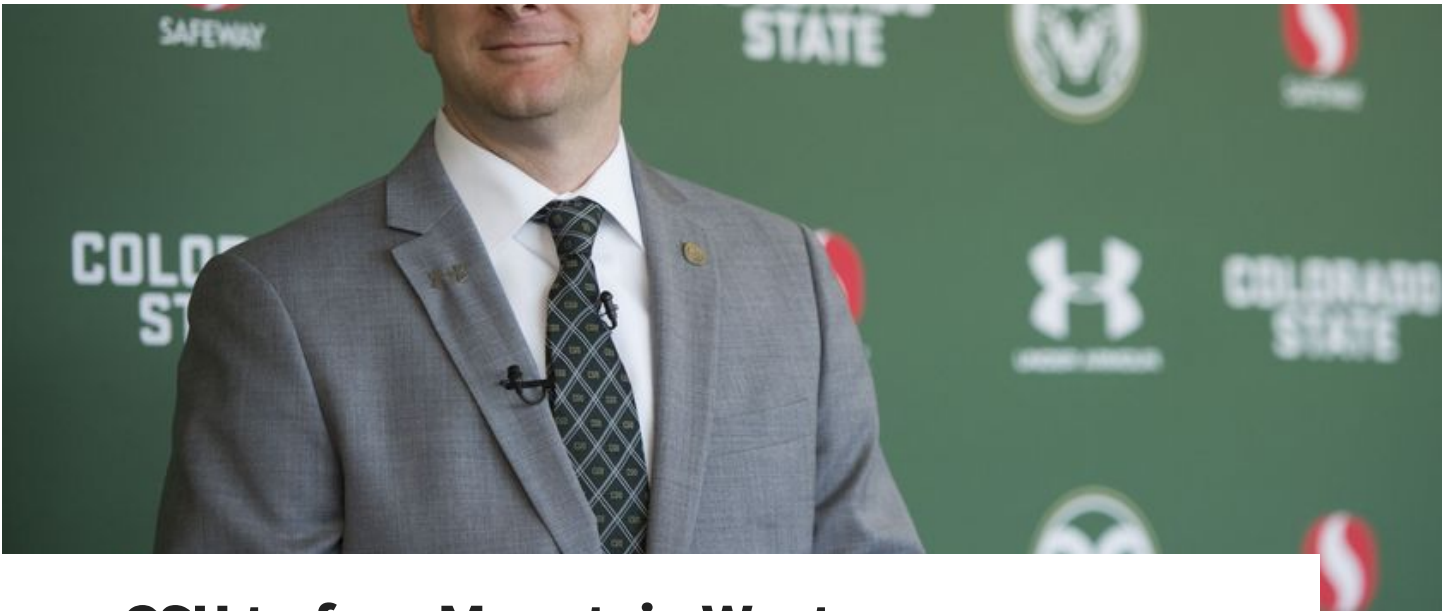
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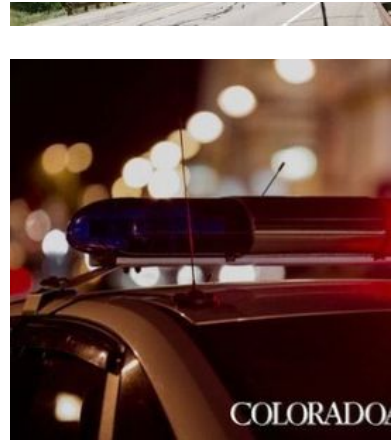
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