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## Bad behavior among fans, players pushes sports officials out of the game

Idaho continues to seek officials

By Bridget Lux - Idaho County Free Press Feb 13, 2019 Updated 17 hrs ago

Officiating high school sporting events can be a thankless, frustrating job. So why do they do it?

"We love the game," said Shannon Wilson, assistant principal and athletic director at Clarkston High School and a District II basketball official. "We have camaraderie. We love to referee with our buddies, and it keeps you in the game. We're trying to have a perfect game, too. We don't make every call right, but we try to have perfection."

Unfortunately, the negatives of the job can outweigh the positives. The situation is leading to a shortage of officials in Idaho, according to Ty Jones, executive director of the Idaho High School Activities Association, and Karissa Niehoff, executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations.



“Yelling, screaming and berating the officials humiliates your child, annoys those sitting around you, embarrasses your child’s school and is the primary reason Idaho has an alarming shortage of high school officials,” Jones and Niehoff wrote in a column recently published in The Idaho Statesman.

“According to a recent survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, more than 75 percent of all high school officials say ‘adult behavior’ is the primary reason they quit. And 80 percent of all young officials hang up their stripes after just two years of whistle blowing.”

Wilson, who will be officiating his 20th year of state basketball tournaments starting Thursday, has faced his share of such bad behavior. He described a state tournament game about a decade ago in which the players were bitter and displaying bad attitudes. He and his colleague “threw out five Ts. When I went to report the last T, some kid threw a Starburst and it hit me ... in the Saint Christopher,” Wilson said. “One more T and we were going to clear the gym.”

Wilson’s colleague quit after that experience. “And I almost quit.”

The decline in the number of officials comes as Idaho moves toward having three officials calling each basketball game. For the first year, the state high school basketball tournaments will have three officials calling each game, a move that Wilson said is helpful to all involved.



"It's a better called game -- (rather than having just) two (officials) where we miss a lot of stuff. I also think it helps your career. Two man just beats you up," Wilson said, noting that they run about 3 ½ miles each game.

Joey Stegner, head men's basketball coach at Treasure Valley Community College, has played pretty much every role in such dramas: player, official, coach and spectator. Despite his keen understanding of what officials go through, he still gets worked up enough to garner a technical foul now and then and was ejected recently from a basketball game he was coaching.

"I got thrown out of a game this year against College of Southern Idaho," said Stegner, who grew up in Grangeville and spent his high school years playing basketball, football and baseball in Lewiston. "It was very embarrassing."

Stegner has given up officiating basketball and football – they’re too subjective, he says – but continues to umpire baseball despite some, well, close calls.

“I had a beer bottle miss my head once by a few inches in Nicaragua,” he said. In addition to Nicaragua, Stegner has officiated baseball in the Dominican Republic, Taiwan, Venezuela and across the U.S. Throughout his 26 years of officiating, he said he’s never thrown a fan out of a game.

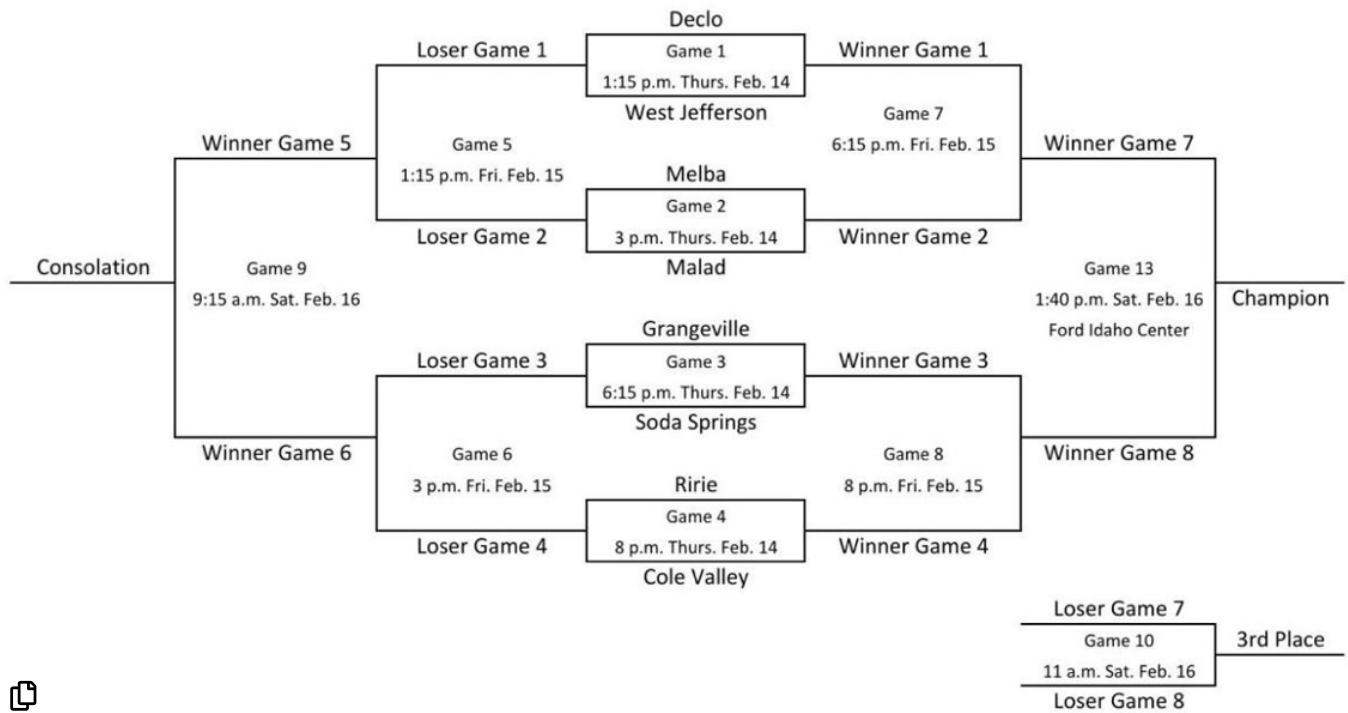


“I have pretty thick skin,” he said.

Spectators note – that is not a challenge, but this is: Idaho is always looking for officials.

“If you want to officiate, you should jump in,” Wilson said. “It’s a great way to stay in shape and stay in the game.”

2019 Class 2A Girls State Basketball Tournament - Feb. 14-16 at Bishop Kelly High School, Boise



2019 Girls State basketball tournaments

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