

# That we need legislation to protect referees is embarrassing | Opinion

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May 2, 2019

Have you ever noticed when a basketball, football or soccer game ends, the officials run off the field like someone is chasing them?

Now we know why.

Legislation has been introduced to the Ohio General Assembly that, if passed, would make it a felony to assault any sports referee in the state while he or she is on the job.

Go back and read that sentence again.

It's sad.

No, actually, it's embarrassing that this is our current reality.

Officials have to legitimately be afraid of being assaulted by unruly fans after refereeing a game.

In a [story published on WKYC.com](#), where House Bill 208 and Senate Bill 118 were explained, State Sen. Kristina D. Roegner, R-Hudson, noted that two soccer referees talked to her about needing more protection.

"Yet go out onto the field and you attack a referee, it's a misdemeanor. And that's not quite fair," she told WKYC.

The argument for or against a fan going on the field to be escalated from a misdemeanor or a felony is bad enough.

But let's get to the root of it all.

Why is a parent or a fan going on the field or court to confront - either verbally or physically - an official anyway?

I welcome any parent or fan to email me a legitimate reason why this is acceptable behavior.

Fan behavior has gotten progressively worse over the years, to the point where we've gone from "C'mon ref, are you blind?" or shouts of "Be consistent" to "I'll see you in the parking lot."

And yes, I've heard fans make that kind of threat.

It's no wonder why the numbers of officials are down across the area and state, if not the nation.

Who wants to sign up for a few dollars an hour - especially when you consider the travel to and from a game - to get verbally and/or physically abused?

In truth, a lot of the behavioral issues from the stands come down to two points - 1, Fans often think when calls don't go their team's way, the official or officials have a personal vendetta against their team, players or coach; or, 2, They simply don't know the rules of the game.

A few decades ago I did hold my basketball officiating licence. And I always enjoyed fans screaming "Three seconds... three seconds..." when a player plays catch with himself off the backboard and rim,

missing repeated point-blank shots.

The player is guilty of being an awful shot - not a three-second violation, as the count resets every time a shot goes up.

But I digress.

Even if a fan feels their price of admission gives them the right to spend a few hours berating an official, there is absolutely no right to approach an official on the field of play with intent to verbally or physically assault.

I'll take it a step further. While the legislation specifically addresses assault on the field, there's a big problem if it happens off the field, too, whether it's in the parking lot or the local grocery store.

In January, the OHSAA released a letter entitled, "[Dear Mom and Dad: Cool it.](#)" It addressed parental harassment of officials.

The current legislation, if passed, would make assaulting an official punishable in Ohio with up to a year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine.

But the damage is much greater.

Whether it happens on youth levels, junior high or high school, the message it sends to the kids who see it happen is far more damaging. It either A) embarrasses the kid, seeing his or her parent acting that way; or B) it teaches the youngsters, who look up to their parents like no other, that it's OK to behave in that manner.

Either is sad.

The fact is that legislation has been introduced to protect the safety of those who referee games.

The embarrassment is that the legislation was needed in the first place.