

THE TENNESSEAN

HIGH-SCHOOL

TSSAA collected \$21K in ejection fines this past year — in middle school sports



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The TSSAA collected tens of thousands of dollars in ejection fines from coaches and fans this past season.

And that was just at the middle school sports level.

The TMSAA, which operates under the TSSAA, reported \$21,000 in total fines issued for coach and spectator ejections in 2023-24, according to figures released at this week's TSSAA Board of Control meetings.

Of that number, \$11,000 in fines were issued to ejected coaches and \$10,000 to fans who either came onto the playing surface or were ejected. Each ejection carries a \$250 fine.

“In a lot of cases, education-based athletics has gotten out of perspective for a lot of people,” TSSAA executive director Mark Reeves said. “If you're (a fan) getting thrown out of a middle school game or you're coming onto the field, your perspective is out of whack.”

The figures were reported as part of the TMSAA's 2023-24 revenue. The TSSAA has not released its annual high school revenue yet, but it reported 198 ejections between head coaches, assistants and fans in 2023-24.

Fan ejections accounted for 115 of those.

“Coaches ejections were down from last year. (Fans are) the people we have the most issues with — people sitting in stands, the bleachers,” said TSSAA assistant executive director Gene Menees, who oversees officials and the reporting of unsportsmanlike incidents.

Player ejections are also rising. There were 767 ejections in 2023-24 compared to 571 the previous year. There were 474 player ejections in 2013-14.

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This is the first year the TSSAA has fined fans who get ejected. Encouraging better behavior from fans and coaches has become a National Federation of State High School Associations initiative aimed at reversing a national shortage of referees.

On Wednesday, the Board of Control heard an appeal from a basketball official who was suspended indefinitely in January for initiating a physical altercation with a fan who verbally assaulted him at a concession stand after a junior varsity game between Dobyns Bennett and Morristown West. Legal charges against the official were later dropped in Hamblen County Court and expunged from his record.

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The TSSAA denied the official's appeal to officiate Tennessee high school games in 2024-25. The official can appeal at next June's Board meeting. Video of the altercation was played twice during the meeting.

Reeves said it was the first time he's seen a situation like that since he's been with the TSSAA.

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TSSAA officials are instructed not to eject fans directly. Officials must notify an administrator about the behavior first. If the fan must be removed, that's the administrator's job, Menees said.

"In an ideal world, adults would act how they're supposed to act," Menees said. "In reality, it's the (fine that can improve behavior)."

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Ejection fines go toward the TSSAA's general revenue. The TSSAA distributes \$27,000 each year as part of its A.F. Bridges Award, which gives 27 schools \$1,000 each for having no reported unsportsmanlike conduct incidents.

Most schools Reeves has heard from are pleased to have the fan fines in place, he said, and are banning ejected fans from games until they pay the fines themselves.

“I wouldn’t disagree with that (policy),” Menees said. “If I’m a school, why am I going to spend my hard-earned money because someone can’t behave correctly?”

Beginning in the 2024-25 season, the TSSAA will raise ejection fines for coaches to \$500 for a first offense and \$1,000 for a second.

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