



OFFICIALS
— MENTORSHIP —
PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program is to provide a formal, structured system to develop new and inexperienced MHSAA officials through mentorship by veteran MHSAA officials.

The objectives of the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program are:

- To offer officials guidance and direction early in their officiating careers
- To promote individual development through the transfer of skills, knowledge and insight
- To assist Local Approved Associations in the development of a qualified talent pool
- To provide an additional resource for officials' feedback
- To contribute to official satisfaction and retention
- To develop an internal pipeline for succession planning
- To create a mechanism for the development of future leaders in officiating

Mentoring is critical to a new or inexperienced official's development and involves much more than critiquing their performance in a contest. Rather, mentoring requires time, effort and a desire to make others better. Mentoring in the right way, and for the right reasons, reinforces officiating fundamentals, creates an ongoing support system that allows mentees to better face the challenges of the sport and strengthens recruitment and retention efforts.

The mentor/mentee relationship is crucial for keeping new officials in the avocation and reinvigorating veteran officials. A formal mentoring program creates positive outcomes on both ends of the officiating spectrum. It is often said, "The best way to learn is to teach." This is the vision for the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program.

STUDENT LEGACY OFFICIALS PROGRAM

The Student Legacy Officials Program is a great opportunity for high school students to learn technical skills and character-building lessons while earning some money in the process. This program also provides a number of benefits for other officials, associations, assigners, schools and the MHSAA.

Because this program involves students as young as 14 years old, it is even more imperative that mentor officials utilize the techniques in this guideline. These will allow student officials to develop their skills and abilities in a monitored setting and will give them the best opportunity for success in the officiating avocation. The MHSAA and Correct Call Officiating Outfitters would like to assist student officials in getting off to a good start. To help, first time Student Legacy officials will receive a \$15.00 gift certificate toward the purchase of their uniform needs. The MHSAA suggests that local associations look for ways that they can alleviate the up-front costs of officiating by providing assistance for uniforms, toward registration fees or to discount association membership dues.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Because of their proximity to the individual officials, local associations have the best ability to provide education and guidance through the development of an effective mentor programs. Associations should encourage mentorship and use it as a way to recruit new officials to their group. They should reach out to local schools to find potential students that would qualify as officials in the Student Legacy Officials Program and who might benefit from learning under the direction of experienced association members.

Associations should develop a local mentor program that incorporates the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program suggestions and includes additional goals and requirements specifically tailored for their organization. They should actively participate in the pairing of mentors and mentees, set standards and benchmarks for success and periodically review with participants to determine the effectiveness of the program. This may include:

- Requiring a before, during and after season evaluation form
- Providing pregame and postgame topic lists for discussion
- Creating a banquet event for special recognition of participants
- Developing a mentor-mentee committee where assessments of the program can be discussed and improvement ideas can be presented

Pairing Officials

Pairing the right mentor with the right mentee is essential to a new official's success. Individuals that take on the mentor role should do so for the right reasons. Their motivation should be:

- **To develop a new generation of officials.** There may be no better honor than the ability to point to successful officials knowing that you played an important role in their growth and advancement.
- **To improve their own game.** Mentoring forces you to stay up-to-date on rules and mechanics and getting into those rulebooks and manuals might remind you of something you've forgotten or overlooked.
- **To rediscover their passion.** Working with someone new and not-yet-jaded may give you a newly inspired and refreshing outlook on officiating.

7 Steps to Success

Step 1 – Set a Path

Jumping into a program without preparation is a recipe for failure. After making the decision to formalize a mentor program, associations should first determine what goals they have for their group and how the development of a mentor program will help to achieve them.

Look at the makeup and health of the association. Ask yourselves how the mentor program will change or reinforce these areas. Then, set goals. Whether it be growth, diversity, or just recruiting “young blood”, have an idea in mind of the expectations moving forward – one year, five years, and ten years down the road.

Step 2 – Gather Information

Associations first have to know what the issues are they face and why the issues exist before they can tailor a program on how to address their needs. This means looking to other associations, state and national data, and – most importantly – the association membership to answer questions of recruiting, training, and retention. Use other's methods for success and learn to avoid other's mistakes.

Step 3 – Develop a Team

The “Recruiting and Mentorship Coordinator” position is a required position in the association's leadership. This is a position dedicated to the recruitment and mentorship of new officials. But this position, alone, cannot sustain a viable mentor program. It requires the support and participation of the board and the membership at large. This support may include earmarked funds, allocation of resources, or hosting special events.

Step 4 – Identify Good People

The first thing an association must do to find good mentor candidates is to eliminate others. Some people are simply not meant to mentor new officials. This can be because they don't have the time to allocate to mentoring; or it could be because they clearly aren't qualified because of their own relative inexperience, their officiating skill level, or because they don't have the necessary disposition. It is better for a new official to have no mentor than to have a bad mentor.

The people you seek as mentors must consist of the whole package:

- **They must have the time and willingness to put in the effort required.** This often entails working with the mentee, a significant aspect of mentoring comes while observing them from outside of the contest. This also includes staying in regular contact even when a game or contest is not being played. While mentors mostly come from the pool of current officials, some of your greatest resources may be retired officials within the association. Lean on these experienced people and offer incentives for them to remain with the association in a mentor capacity.
- **The process cannot be beneath them.** Officiating mentorship programs require close, in-person guidance and supervision. Mentors may be required to forgo some higher level assignments in order to observe or work with mentees at subvarsity contests so that these new officials can gain officiating experience with immediate feedback from an experienced official. Officials should be willing to leave their regular partner/crew or work at a level lower than they traditionally work for the benefit of the overall officiating community.
- **They must be patient and approachable.** Mentors should be prepared to receive a lot of menial questions on the fundamentals of officiating. They must be willing to encourage, listen to and answer questions fully without displaying frustration or annoyance at the ignorance of the mentee.
- **They must be a leader.** Mentors should consist of people that are distinguished and revered by the membership. They don't need to hold leadership positions but should be an authoritative figure.

They must have extensive skills and knowledge about the sport for which they mentor, and they should be able to provide insights into the “do’s and don’ts” within the association and officiating.

- **They have to be able to teach.** Teaching is about finding the right combination of style and substance to provide quality, accurate information to the student (the mentee). Effective communication skills are vital to offering mentees beneficial information and feedback. Providing all the information in the world doesn’t do any good if it can’t be understood by the person receiving it.

Step 5 – Draft a Plan

The MHSAA is happy to provide guidelines, incentives, and help where we can; but it’s essential that the details of each program are planned and implemented by the local association. Each association understands what is best for its members based on each group’s dynamics and circumstances. The Recruitment and Mentorship Coordinator and team should work to develop a plan. They should solicit input from the general membership for opinions on the process for selecting and pairing mentors and mentees, standards above the minimums set by the MHSAA (if any), and the progression officials move from being mentees to a becoming mentors themselves.

Step 6 – Be Fixed but Flexible

Realize that recruiting and retention efforts are a slow, deliberate process. Don’t expect to hit your recruiting goals overnight and be willing to see the process through. Set benchmarks at the outset to discuss whether major revision considerations need to be addressed, but always consider the program’s purpose in any changes made. It is important to remain focused on the goals and expectations set during program development, but associations should also feel comfortable to make adjustments when necessary – even midstream when an urgent need arises.

Step 7 – Reevaluate

Regular evaluation is important as noted in Step 6, but a full and complete reevaluation of the program is critical to ensure that the association is on the right path, that goals are being achieved and needs are being met. The association should establish a time when the committee or board examines whether the program is meeting the predetermined criteria for “success.” This can be at a regular or ad hoc meeting, but it is suggested that this is done at the conclusion of each school year.

The association should collect data through questionnaires and surveys and get anecdotal information through interviews and discussions. Have mentors and mentees provide feedback from their experiences. Offer them the ability to tell you what they think works, what doesn’t and what areas can be improved. Assemble this information and create recommendations for modifying the program moving forward.

ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Mentors have many responsibilities in their participation in the program. Before the season begins, mentors should discuss with their mentee(s) the importance of quality officiating for the development of student athletes and programs and the values and philosophies an official should possess. They should discuss the human element of officiating and prepare the mentee for instances when mistakes in judgment are made. The mentor should have a comprehensive review of the rules and technical aspects of the position. Finally, the mentor should assist the mentee in setting goals for the upcoming season, the following season and a few years out.

Mentors can take on any number of mentees in a particular sport as long as they can put in the required time and effort necessary to meet the standards and goals of the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program. This may be easier in some sports where the crews are made up of three or more officials such as basketball and football and where the mentor leads the crew consisting of multiple mentees. Mentors will pair with a mentee for the entire season and a mentor-mentee pairing may carry on for any number of seasons. The traits of good mentors can be focused into the E.P.I.C. mentor method.

Engage

Being available and involved are the most important aspects of quality mentorship.

A mentee should be comfortable discussing all facets of officiating with the mentor. Of course, this includes complicated rule sections, practical enforcements and mechanics; but they should also be able to discuss with the mentor game compensation, administrative/coach relationships and the effect officiating has on their family life.

The mentee should also recognize this program is designed to ultimately make them better officials, and that may require they be told some things that are tough to hear. This may include that they need to be more committed, that they misapplied a rule, or even that they need to improve their health and wellness. A key to a quality mentor-mentee relationship is that communication be open and honest.

Mentors and mentees should speak regularly, including meeting in person to have lunch or a cup of coffee when possible. They should go beyond the minimum requirements of the program and develop a personal bond – not just a professional colleague relationship.

Protect

Officials can't please everyone all of the time.

Criticism is a natural part of an official's job, but for a new official, extreme (and often unwarranted) criticism out of the gate can be discouraging and detrimental. In the short term, this often leads to the official becoming rattled and unable to recover – which leads to further potential officiating problems or errors. Many officials leave the avocation within the first few seasons because they are never able to establish themselves as credible and end up officiating in fear of making mistakes.

Part of a mentor's job is to give the mentee the ability to work without this fear. This doesn't mean they needed to be coddled; but especially early on, they should feel they have the freedom to work on the technical aspects of the job without having to jump right into handling situations with coaches and players. Early in a mentee's development, a mentor should be looking for ways to insulate them from these unnecessary pressures. When the mentor and mentee are working together and a coach begins yelling at the mentee, the mentor should step in and stop it. When a coach wants to discuss a disagreement with the mentee, the mentor should be present. And when a coach wants to complain to the mentor about the mentee's performance, the mentor should deflect the criticism and emphasize his protégé's hard work and effort.

Inspire

It's all about the team.

It takes a special person with the desire and dedication it takes to be a sports official. Without encouragement from time to time, this desire can be extinguished. Part of a being a mentor is the ability to provide reassurance and support. The fruits of a mentor's labor are directly reflected in their mentee's desire, attitude, and behavior.

A good mentor motivates those around him to want to be their very best. This requires providing both constructive criticism and uplifting praise. A mentor should not shy away from providing a mentee with areas of improvement but should do so in a way that offers teaching moments and gives them the tools to progress and develop. Mentors should provide compliments in the areas where the mentee excels and teach them to build on their weaknesses through those strengths. Finally, a mentor should encourage the mentee to reciprocate this same feedback on the mentor's performance. Often times, mentors are so focused on encouraging the development of others, they may fail to concentrate on continuing to work on their own shortcomings. Allowing the mentee to provide give-and-take helps to keep the mentor motivated and also starts the mentee on the path to becoming a mentor themselves.

Counsel

Officials are expected to be perfect in their first game, and only get better.

We all understand that the first part of this adage is impossible, but the second half is essential. Nothing can take the place of experience, but wise advice from a mentor helps to mitigate the mentee's on-the-job learning. Mentors should provide sound advice, strong reasoning, and valuable feedback. In order for a

mentor's words to be meaningful, though, the individual must be credible. While a component of credibility is the experience a mentor has, a larger portion is observed in the example they set.

A mentor should be known as honest and forthright. They shouldn't criticize other officials maliciously or behind their backs. This candid approach lets the mentee know the information they receive is reliable because the person they receive it from is reliable. A quality mentor has a "practice what you preach" mentality. They don't expect anything from their mentees they don't model themselves.

Following the completion of a contest, the mentor should debrief with the mentee on issues they experienced, things they did well and suggestions for improvement. They should allow the mentee to provide a self-evaluation of their work and provide at least one takeaway for the next contest.

Recommendations and Guidelines for Mentors:

- Take mentee officials to other contests (professional, college and high school) to observe and study other officials.
- Discuss with the mentee the importance of a good personality and disposition.
- Discuss arrival and departure from a contest facility.
- Help the mentee understand the importance of well-placed no-calls and using common sense and fair play.
- Teach them how to avoid being a "rule book lawyer" or some that over-officiates.
- Discuss the importance of communication and reliance on crewmates.
- Explain how to handle situations with coaches and players, and how and when to handle unruly spectators.
- Show the mentee how keep his/her composure and keep emotion out of officiating.
- Talk about what is an official's responsibility during physical altercation or fights.
- Maintain a log that includes running comments about the mentee's development and encourage him/her to keep a log of notes and comments of his/her own.

ROLE OF THE MENTEE

Mentees should look at their participation in the MHSAA Officials Mentorship Program as a privilege and an opportunity to seek guidance from a trusted and experienced confidant. Seeking advice from your mentor displays a level of respect that encourages further participation by our veteran officials and reinforces the goals the program seeks to accomplish.

Mentees must perform several roles in this partnership, and they should take those responsibilities seriously. They represent the mentor, the association and the officiating community at large; and as such, the mentee should work diligently and express and desire to improve their knowledge and competency. They should be willing to accept constructive criticism and incorporate suggestions into their work. A mentee should develop self-awareness of their skills and abilities and set realistic goals for their progress.

Ideal mentees will exhibit the following characteristics and traits:

- Eagerness to learn
- Willingness to work as part of a team
- Displays patience
- Takes calculated risks
- Maintains a positive attitude

While the mentor is primarily responsible for the content of the mentor-mentee interactions, it is the mentee that determines the quantity, frequency and capacity of the relationship. The quality information a mentor provides is only as useful as is accepted by the mentee. In this respect, it is the mentee that determines the amount of guidance and direction he or she receives. A good mentee will take the initiative to ask for help or advice and seek out more challenging opportunities and assignments. The mentee doesn't just receive feedback and implement suggestions – they should actively participate in the mentor-mentee relationship so that they can help the mentor today and their own mentees in the future.

Recommendations and Guidelines for Mentees:

- Allow the mentor to take the initial lead in setting the structure of the relationship. Accept and respect the opportunities, limits and course he or she provides you. Act with courtesy toward your mentor and respect for their plan for your progress.
- Do not automatically expect to be involved in the mentor's personal life or become close friends. Be your authentic self but treat the mentor-mentee relationship as strictly professional until the mentor established a more friendship-based connection. Be considerate of intruding in personal or sensitive areas of the mentor's own life.

- Be considerate and respectful of the mentor's time. Make sure that you are punctual and try to stay within predetermined time frames when outside of contest settings. Be prompt in responding to phone calls or emails. This shows that you are respectful to time considerations and also prevents you from missing time-sensitive messages.
- Set clear objectives and attainable goals for your officiating career. Seek guidance and advice on aims, plans and strategic ideas for achievable results.
- Be an "active listener". Ask for clarifications and examples when needed, but avoid unnecessary interruptions. Take notes and ask good, purposeful questions.
- Remain open to feedback and take initiative to request it. Constructive feedback is critical to an official's personal and professional growth and development. Show that you are open to new ideas and suggestions to reach your greatest potential. Individuals prefer feedback in different ways. Discuss with your mentor if you prefer feedback in a direct manner, through the use of examples, with/without humor etc., but don't be easily offended if it isn't exactly what you expected.
- Seriously consider all the advice you receive. Don't brush off suggestions as "irrelevant" or "beneath" you. Don't be a "Yeah...but" official – one that accepts the mentor's suggestions but then dismisses them with an explanation or excuse. Arguing your case only makes you look closed-minded and unwilling to accept criticism.
- Express appreciation to/for the people that provide you mentorship (formal and informal). Give warranted praise and thanks to them directly and avoid negative comments to others. Disagreements with the mentor's values, behaviors and attitudes should first be discussed with the mentor and then with the sponsoring association, if needed. Keep these issues in-house.
- Be prepared to move beyond the mentor-mentee relationship. While many last several years, mentees should be willing to move onto other mentors, or become mentors themselves, when the connection has served its purpose. Stay in touch with the mentor to share your progress and express your gratitude. Be certain to end on a positive note and lean on former mentors to assist you in the future.