

Reducing Referee Abuse – what is my role

October 30, 2023



An open letter to parents, other fans, coaches, players and administrators of youth basketball from the Ottawa Valley Board of Approved Basketball Officials.

Coaches, game and club administrators, parents, other fans and referees are all partners in creating a safe environment for our children and youth to play basketball.

A growing challenge in doing so is the problem of referee abuse. This has been so for many years now but is much more significant recently and it needs to stop. It is easy to find numerous articles on the Internet describing and deploring examples of referee abuse.

As an association the OVBABO puts a lot of effort into training our officials, including skills in managing behaviour issues of players and coaching staff. This is a priority for us and a point of emphasis this year; we have instructed our referees to not tolerate abuse. We understand that playing, coaching, and watching a sport like basketball can become emotional at times. And that's fine. But our officials should not be expected to deal with abuse. It is damaging to their mental health and is the leading cause of referees quitting. And it sets a poor example for the children and youth who are playing. These are not things any of us need!

You may ask what you can do. Here are some suggestions from the perspective of your referee association.

Parents and other fans

- Model excellence. Your children and youth look up to you and will model your behaviour.
- Be positive. Cheer for your players and teams.
- Of course you will have opinions on referee decisions; everybody does. But don't go hollering it out! Never ever make it personal! If the whole gym can hear you, there is a problem.

Coaches

- Model excellence. You can't expect your players and their parents to show respect for officials if you don't.
- Teach your players sportsmanship and respect as core values.
- Support officials to both players and families by encouraging personal accountability.
- Feel free to ask occasional questions for clarification or understanding - but only during dead balls.
- Ask questions; don't provide comments or editorials.

- Of course you will have opinions on referee decisions; everybody does. But don't use big demonstrative gestures or go hollering it out! Never ever make it personal! If the whole gym can hear you or see you, there is a problem.

Players

- When playing ... be a player, not a referee.
- Be kind; just like players, referees sometimes make mistakes.
- Let your coach deal with the referees.
- Never taunt or bait your opponents in any way.
- Consider becoming a referee.

League and Tournament Administrators

- Read and understand the OBA Zero Tolerance Policy as it concerns referee abuse.
- Have in place policy and procedures for disciplinary issues of players, coaching staff, parents and other fans, including referee abuse. Ensure all stakeholders are well informed and accountable.
- Collaborate as needed with OVBABO in management of referee abuse issues, should any arise
- Ensure coaches and parents are made aware of the serious concerns re referee abuse.
- Provide guidance to site convenors on how to control and report on fan behaviour.
- Ensure site convenors are old enough and mature enough to cope well with these issues.
- Distribute this message to all your stakeholders – players, parents, coaching staff, site administrators, etc.

Game administrators and site convenors

- Be observant and actively address fan behaviour that is abusive or otherwise problematic.
- Report any such problems to league and/or tournament officials promptly with explicit detail.
- Engage the support of coaches as needed.
- Read and understand guidance from league and tournament administrators.
- Don't let coaches or anybody else abuse the minor officials.
- Collaborate as needed with the referees.