

# What If?

The easiest shot to take in high school sports – or all levels of sports for that matter – is one that attempts to show up the game officials. Whether it's coaches, or players or spectators; everyone has an opinion about every call, and they're all increasingly becoming less inhibited about showing it.

The people with the poorest view of the play physically, certainly the poorest view of the play from a perspective standpoint, and generally with the least knowledge of the rules and their application; are the quickest to loudly belly-ache, gesture, and just flat out act out poorly when they don't like a call.

The non-verbal communication alone – the mimicking of the throwing of a flag or an official's signal, first by coaches, then by players (and not always in that order) – catches the wave and feeds the fans in the stands like fresh meat being given to a pack of piranhas.

And it doesn't stop there, the whining finds its way online after the game, sometimes even during the game, where know-it-alls brave enough to spew their venom, but so cowardly they hide behind a screen name (even those participants who claim to be game officials) turn a holding, or a yellow card, or a lift, or a pick off, or a block-charge call into a matter of life-or-death.

OK, it's a well-known fact that criticism of an official's call goes with the territory. When you put on the stripes, you know it's coming, and you need to have the backbone to deal with it.

But let's turn the tables for just a



Positive communication between coach and official can go a long way in influencing the behavior of players and spectators.

minute. A game of what if. A game of man bites dog.

What if the official got in the face of a 14-to-17-year-old football player and mocked him for not doing what he thought he should have done on that play, gesturing wildly to show him what he thought was the error of his ways?

What if the official ran over to the bench, or the dugout, stood next to the coach and looked out over the field and told the coach – “you know what coach? Even though we're 30 to 40 yards away, you really can see better over here.”

And what if an official went up to the top row of the bleachers to grab that loud, obnoxious fan; escort that person down to the playing surface, place that person in the spot the official was occupying and handed them the whistle?

Of course, there would be an even larger outcry of outrage. Officials can't do that!

But what if the officials treated others they way others treat them. What if the man bites the dog back? I think

there would be a little less, maybe even a lot less, of the abuse these people have heaped upon them.

The real answer to this is rooted in the principles of sportsmanship. At least at the school level, administrators can describe and demand the behavior they want of their coaches, players and spectators. Coaches need to deliver and model good sporting behavior, and in turn, the players will follow. If these first two groups would stop showing up the officials, the fans would be less likely to be outwardly critical as well. And our games would be better off for it.

— John Johnson  
MHSAA Communications Director

*This commentary first aired on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, broadcast on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – mhsaanetwork.com.*