Champion Officiating: "For the Sake of Winning"

This October, there are five Tuesday’s in the month, so today we are providing a BONUS note for OFFICIALS. This note is contributed by Nick Crème and Dobie Moser. Nick has officiated at the elementary, high school, and college levels. He created the CYO Officials Academy for the Diocese of Cleveland, which trains high school students to officiate youth basketball. Dobie Moser is the Executive Director of the Diocese of Cleveland CYO.

Nick will present a session on his “Official’s Academy” at the 2018 Play Like a Champion Sports Leadership Conference June 22-23, 2018.

I see basketball officiating as a tool to keep young people connected to God and to one another through athletics. When reflecting on the mission and goals for the CYO Officials Academy, God led me to the following: ”The goal is to use the basketball Officiating Academy to teach young people how to serve God!”

That message is at the heart of the 12-hour mandatory training. A small group of certified adult officials support, instruct, and evaluate our Academy officials. We meet them before the game, at halftime, and after the game to provide feedback on their officiating. Every Academy official is filmed, and we use game film to provide more training.

I didn't expect that our greatest obstacle would be coaches and parents behavior. Too many adults yell at or argue with high school teens officiating games for third and fourth graders. Negative parent and coach behavior in sports is well documented. To combat this, I went to coaches clinics and parent meetings to talk about the youth ministry part of the Officials Academy. The adults needed to know that without their support and appropriate behavior toward Academy officials, we could not continue. Coaches and parents needed to embrace a new understanding of winning: teaching young children and young adult officials how to know, love and serve God, by giving them opportunities and challenges through playing the game or officiating. Winning is defined by how our young adults turn out ten or more years down the road. What kind of Christians will they become? What kind of men and women will they become? What kind of wives, husbands,
When they become adults, today's teenagers will draw upon memories of how they were treated by parents and coaches in the CYO athletic community. Every parent, coach, and fan bears responsibility for treating young people with dignity and upholding the dignity of all (even officials!).

The heart of *Play Like a Champion* is a compelling Gospel vision that enables children to have access to play and to thrive with well-trained and respectful coaches. *Play Like a Champion* reminds us that we need ALL parties in youth sports to learn how to be together in new ways that benefit the lives, faith, and growth of children. Our Academy continues to grow to make that happen. Over five hundred teenagers have graduated from our *CYO Officials Academy*. More teens want to be officials and they return each year because they are having fun, they are appreciated, they are doing God's work, and above all, they are seeing God's Love!

### The Weekly Game Plan

Sport Administrators and Coaches, create a culture where respect for officials is expected. Be intentional about this by:

- Speaking with fans (sport parents) about the importance of respecting officials at all times, even if there is a questionable call!
- Encouraging your athletes to thank the officials following a competition.

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**Officials Prayer, by Nick Creme**

Heavenly Father, let my feet be swift, my legs strong, my eyes true, and my judgment pure. Protect me from physical harm and guard me against lack of concentration, and temperate outbursts from players, coaches and fans. When I tire, refresh me. When I grow weary, be my strength and guide. When the game ends, grant me the grace and peace of spirit to leave the fears and anxieties of this contest at the basketball court and not carry them home to my loved ones, lest they suffer because of me. Remind me that God doesn't care about who wins or loses, but He loves and cares about us.

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