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Youth sports referees across the US are quitting because of abusive parents



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TODAY

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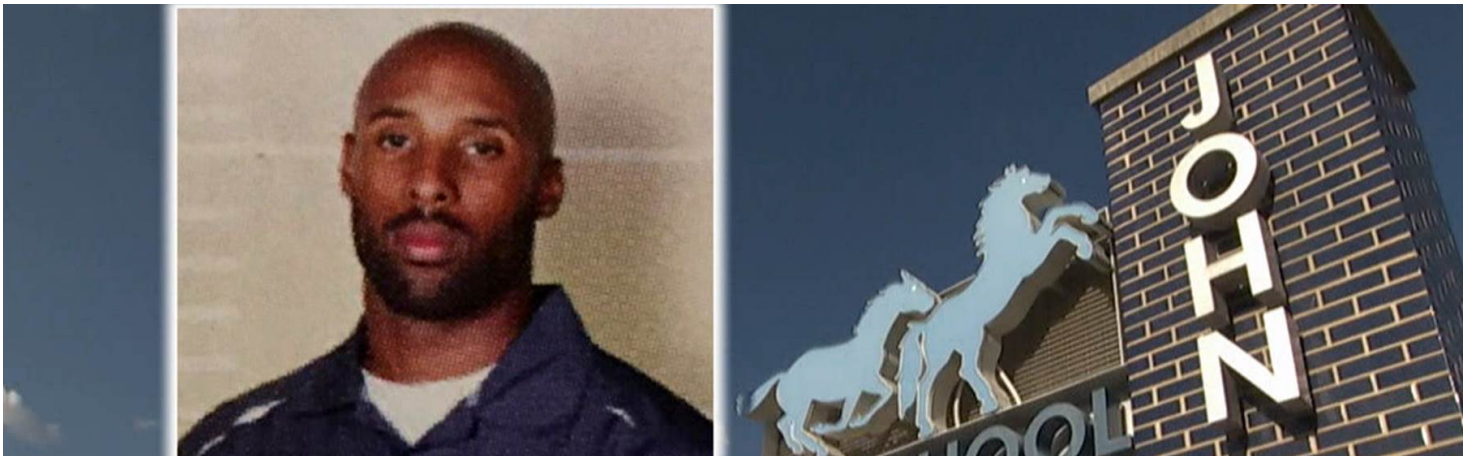
Youth referees across the nation are packing up their whistles and going home in response to increased instances of verbal and even physical abuse from volatile parents and coaches.

The shrinking pool of officials has become a national crisis that threatens to alter the landscape of youth sports as leagues scramble to find enough referees to hold games.

Eighty percent of high school officials are quitting before their third year, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations, which launched a **national recruitment effort** last year to attract more officials.



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In multiple states, games are being cancelled or postponed due to a shortage of referees. In South Carolina, 70 percent of new officials in youth soccer do not return after their first year, according to the [SC Referee Association](#).

"They need to remember that many of the officials at this level are doing it to give back to kids, remember that the kids don't play a perfect game, coaches don't coach a perfect game and certainly our officials aren't going to officiate a perfect game," NFHS executive director Bob Gardner told Gadi Schwartz on TODAY Thursday.

Scenes of parents behaving badly at youth sporting events have repeatedly gone viral online, and the confrontations occasionally involve physical assaults on officials.

In January, a police captain in Wichita, Kansas, was [charged with battery](#) after he was shown on video pushing a 17-year-old referee at a youth girls basketball game.

A high school football coach [pleaded guilty to assault](#) in 2015 for ordering his players to hit a referee during a game.



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In addition to rowdier parents, officials also have to deal with being trolled online when video of their calls can easily be taken on a cell phone and posted on social media.

"Now your every call, your every movement is, via social media or other forms, judged by thousands, sometimes even before you get home," said Dwayne Finley, who has been officiating games in California for 20 years.

Other factors such as low pay, aging officials and the continued expansion of travel and club teams that compete for officials with public school programs have contributed to the crisis.

Finley believes there's a simple two-step solution. Parents need to behave better, and those who think they can do better should sign up to become officials.

"If it was so easy anyone could do it, put on a whistle, go to training, and we'd love to have you come into the fraternity or sorority of officials and you can see it's not as easy as it looks," he said.