

In a perfect world, local associations would work in harmony with their state associations and everyone would reap the benefits. Money would be plentiful and no one would grouse about whose job it is to do what. But let's get real. If local and state associations are gears in the same machine, will everything run smoothly?

# WELL-OILED MACHINES?

By Jerry Grunski

## It's an old story: It's not *my* job — that's *your* responsibility, not mine.

When it comes to officiating, there's a need for training efforts, there's a need for recruiting efforts and there's a need for an environment that encourages and sustains those efforts. Ultimately, who is responsible for ensuring those needs are met? Local associations? State associations? Probably both. But can those two very different administrative entities work together for the common good?

Although there are likely hundreds of examples of state and local associations working together, each with varied degrees of success and failure, two cases stand out: in Illinois, where recruiting and retention problems are an ever-growing hurdle, and Georgia, where an alliance of local associations has found strength in numbers.

### Low on Fuel?

"It took us a long time to get into our current situation, a long time to recognize we've got problems and it looks like it's going to be even longer coming to a solution," says Ed Stanley, a 34-year football official from Lisle, Ill. "A lot of people are standing around wringing their hands."

A recruitment and retention challenge in Illinois is the problem to which Stanley refers. After seeing their memberships dwindle for years (see sidebar) local associations are feeling the crunch of numbers.

Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Assistant Executive Secretary Dave Gannaway says the IHSA is trying to be proactive about the problem without overstepping its boundaries in dealing with independent contractor officials.

"The need is there," says Gannaway. "We've dropped by 4,000 officials in 12 years, and we're not sure of the reasons. Attrition is getting close to the danger point in some sports."

Gannaway says the IHSA is helping local associations in that effort by reducing the registration fee for new officials to \$20 rather than the customary \$35. "We're trying to recognize and support the efforts of our members and associations to help with the shortage problem," says Gannaway. "We've budgeted \$5,000 to subsidize training, mentoring and recruiting programs that local associations may implement," says Gannaway. "An association must submit a plan, execute it, and generate a follow-up report to receive a stipend."

The \$5,000 budget rankles Stanley, however. "Do the numbers. If just half of the 58 local associations in the state develop a single program, either in recruiting or training, that amounts to an outlay of only \$172 per group. Quite slim pickings — (it's) a make-believe incentive,"

Stanley says.

Gannaway answers, "Do we have enough money to offer

all the associations? No, we don't. But we have a good pool to start with. I'd love to have \$3,000 to give every association, but that's not the reality. Right now, we have a start."

Another effort to attract newcomers is through high schools, going to physical education classes with an introductory "come on" presentation. That step is an extension of a program developed by Stanley, who's also an assignor. Stanley and a cohort, Chuck Veselits of Arlington Heights, Ill., visited 28 high schools with a carefully crafted overhead slide presentation. The trouble was there was no way to measure the longterm impact. There were no follow-up orientation sessions to facilitate actual registrations. The result: Stanley says only 10 new officials signed up through that effort.

"I don't know how to solve our retention problem," says Stanley. "Maybe it's time for the states to sit down with professional recruiters. As local officials, we're not equipped to handle the problem."

Stanley echoes a familiar sentiment. "We keep hearing that training will solve our recruitment and retention problem," he says. "And we keep hearing that it's the responsibility of the local associations. Yes, our primary goal is to train officials, but not recruiting. The state seems to feel that just by saying it, they can make us responsible for it."

But state associations cannot have too much involvement without jeopardizing officials' status as independent contractors. States can make conditions favorable for local associations and individual officials to conduct recruiting efforts and training, but to step in and take control of such activities raises questions about behavioral control and the overall type of relationship the state association has with the officials. In effect, it risks having a government agency declare officials employees of the state association instead of independent contractors.

San Francisco attorney and official Don Collins, who has studied independent contractor law as it pertains to officials, says, "The state (associations) probably want to be

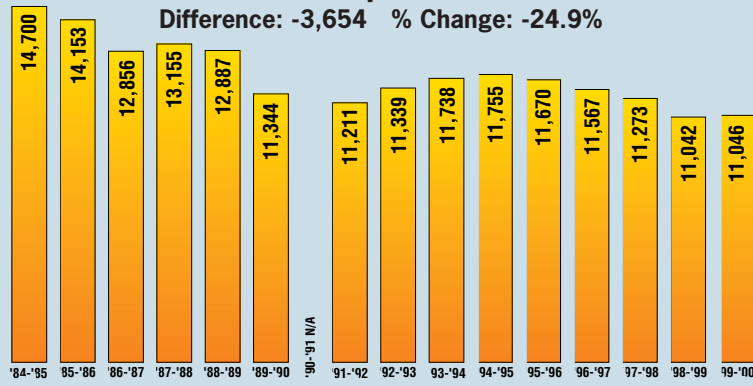


## Where'd Everyone Go?

An officials shortage is the number one challenge facing the IHSA and the state's local associations. To get an idea of how bad it's gotten, take a look at these numbers showing officials in all IHSA sports as well as baseball, basketball and football, the three sports with the largest number of officials. The numbers were compiled from the high school year of 1984-85 to last school year:

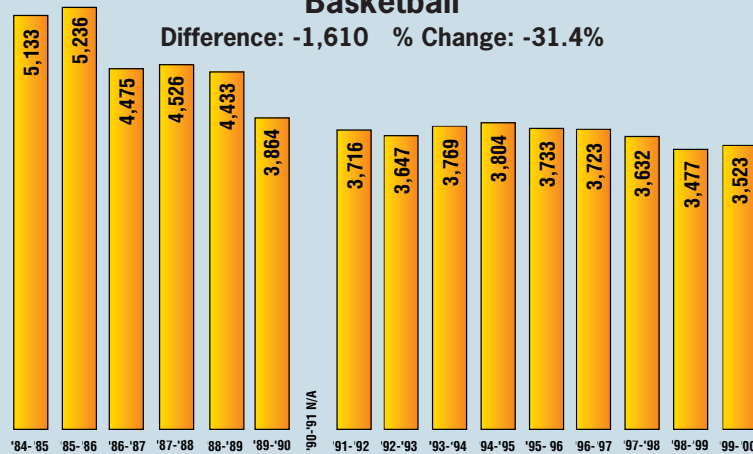
### All Sports \*

Difference: -3,654 % Change: -24.9%



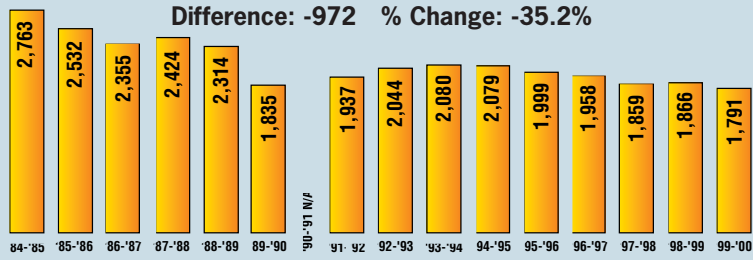
### Basketball

Difference: -1,610 % Change: -31.4%



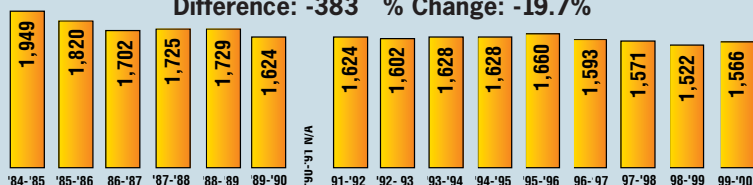
### Baseball

Difference: -972 % Change: -35.2%



### Football

Difference: -383 % Change: -19.7%



\*All sports include, in addition to baseball, basketball and football, gymnastics (-40.5%), soccer (+8.4%), softball (-2.2%), swimming (-33.7%), track (-20.2%), volleyball (-15.8%) and wrestling (40.7%) SOURCE: IHSA and Ed Stanley

as hands off as possible with recruiting because it could conceivably be viewed that it's part of the hiring process and some board of labor could say, 'You helped recruit these people, your cash funnels down to them; as far as we can see, you employ them.'

"Some states may be spooked by that, while others may not. Some might say, 'We're going to work with the officials to recruit and train and everything else,' and others might say, 'We can't afford to take that stand.' It really could put them at risk to be out of pocket for a lot of money."

In the case of officials, independent contractor status isn't always clearly defined and many states, not wanting to give the appearance of an employer/employee relationship with their officials, simply stay away from training and recruitment/retention issues.

So does that mean that the onus for recruiting and training falls to the local associations? "Those are really two separate areas," says Gannaway. "We'll encourage people to become officials and we'll do all we can to support the local associations to do what they need to do to get new officials. To really make a difference, you've got to go down to the grass roots anyway. It's like going to church. How do churches grow? The members bring in more members. If there are 10,000 officials and everyone recruits one more person, suddenly there are 20,000 officials. That's something I can't do myself."

One thing Gannaway can do is find out why officials are leaving the avocation. He says exit interviews are being planned. "We're going to send out a survey to find out why people don't re-sign to become officials," Gannaway says. "It's just quality control."

In the Chicago area there is a consortium of sports officials associations called the Inter Association Council of Athletic Officials (IACAO) that came about 30 years ago when local associations and the state association found they needed to work together to solve mutual problems. (*Editor's note:* Author Jerry Grunski was a football



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**Dave Gannaway**  
IHSA Assistant Executive Secretary

official in Chicago and involved with the formation of IACAO.)

Schools balked at hiring two sets of officials for doubleheaders, and assignors sided with them, not wanting to increase their jobs in securing officials. The defense was the usual "budget constraints." But officials themselves, on a broad scale, were tired of having to work preliminary games in addition to the premier varsity contest, both in basketball and in football.

A gathering of association representatives was held, one man per group, in 1971, and a twin proposal arose from that meeting. School principals agreed to use two sets of officials for doubleheaders and IACAO agreed to set up clinics to train newer officials.

Since IACAO inaugurated its training program, IHSA has come up with mandated programs for instruction and for licensing. Officials must attend a state-sanctioned clinic once every three years or go on probation and face suspension.

"As far as education goes, we don't see that as any different than licensing a person to drive a car," says Gannaway. "There are certain minimum requirements that have to be met."



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**Ed Stanley**  
34-year football official and assignor

## A New Blueprint

Like the Illinois example, officials in the Atlanta area found strength in banding together. And in so doing, they made their relationship with the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) stronger.

There were seven basketball associations in the state's major city that competed for games. "As a result of sectional school rivalries and pitting schools against associations, many schools got the reputation of hiring 'home boys' for officials," said Dr. Ralph Swearngin, deputy commissioner of activities for the GHSA. "We needed to change the way assignments were distributed in the big city."

Competition for game assignments was unsavory because

associations would cut their fees or work tournaments gratis to gain favor with schools. "In some places schools could get varsity basketball officials for as little as \$20 a game, and that was ridiculous," said Dick Williams, a prominent basketball official from suburban Dunwoody. "Not only that, but if you called a technical against a coach, you could be sure your association would have next season's assignments jerked away. There's no doubt that people bent over to favor the hiring school," Williams added.

About five years ago Williams and a few others got on the phones and talked about ways to diminish what Swearngin called "turf wars" among those seven associations.

As a result, an informal cadre of representatives from those groups met to explore avenues of peace. They called themselves "The Alliance," and once formed they discussed other goals such as standardizing fees, promoting three-person crews, upgrading regional clinics, beefing up security at games and having a voice in tournament assignments. The initial aim, however, was to establish equitable ways to distribute game assignments, to pry them away from the whims of individual schools.

Seeing that united front of officials as a major step in consolidating a number of issues, Swearngin met with the 14 representatives (two from each association), and together they set up strict geographical territories for each officiating organization.

Fees have since been raised and standardized. The state office now dictates that basketball officials must be paid at least \$80 for a two-person doubleheader. Ordinarily, girls' and boys' varsity basketball games are played back-to-back on Friday nights. Schools that use three officials per game, and many have adopted that practice except for tournaments, must provide officials with \$33 per game.

The thing is, by extending themselves in a cooperative way toward the state office, Atlanta's Alliance forces were able to obtain a number of upgrades, not just for basketball but for other sports as well. Football officials now operate in five-person crews more often than before, for instance, and their fees are now governed by state mandate too.

It is not all peaches and cream,

## NFHS — A View From the Top

Administrative layers — levels of bureaucracy — abound in competitive sports. For the individual official there's not only the local officials association and the state association, but the NFHS to consider. What part does that national group play in helping the officiating machine run smoothly?

"As far as officiating goes, we try to provide information," says NFHS Assistant Director Mary Struckhoff. "But we're a federation (of the state associations), not an association, so it's really up to the individual states as to what they'll accept. We're putting together an officials education

program, but we could develop the greatest training program in the world and some states may not choose to use it."

Struckhoff says that the NFHS is focused on developing training programs and materials and making them available and affordable for the states, as well as facilitating communication among the local officials associations.

"We're trying to create a national network of local associations through their states and through the NFHS using the Internet," says Struckhoff. "It's going to take time, but it's another thing we can accomplish from the

national perspective."

Struckhoff acknowledges that there's an officials' shortage "probably all over the country," but she believes there's no substitute for one-on-one recruiting stemming from individual officials themselves. She says, "There's no doubt the states need to be active and need to realize there's a (recruitment and retention) problem. We all need to do our part — the states, the local groups and the NFHS. We all need to do something and no one should just sit back and point fingers.

"I don't think people always realize the importance of officiating



MARY STRUCKHOFF

and of quality officiating. In that vein, there's probably not enough money being allocated (to improve officiating). We need to be better marketers and convince people that with better officials, you'll get better games."

though, in the Peach State. Williams says that progress does include more varied and more substantial required clinics, with floor demonstrations and separate tracks for officials with less than three years' experience. "But there are still issues about mileage allowances — our own association demands a flat \$25 fee for one car — plus the whole concept of officials having to toil through a doubleheader should be reviewed. It just kills some of the older guys, and even relatively robust officials, if they're honest, will admit to coasting through that first game," Williams says.

Another Georgia basketball official, Don Williams from Lilburn (no relation to Dick), said that the increased fees and geographical allocations for games have brought numerous eager officials into the ranks. "They know they'll get games if they work hard. They also know they'll get into the state tournament if they're sharp (Swearngin inserted 17 fresh faces in the tournament last year, scouting half of those selected at summer camps). Building that positive officiating environment is key toward solving other challenges, especially recruitment and retention.

The picture's not perfect, but immense strides have been made, due to The Alliance's persuasive stance and Swearngin's receptivity. "Accommodation has been the key word, and coaches feel they're getting a fair shake too. Nobody's out to pit one officiating group against another anymore to gain an advantage," Don Williams adds.

## Working Parts

So what can we learn from those case studies? The key thing to remember is that everyone has the same goal: better officiating. But no single group or individual can make that goal a reality. State and local groups need to understand each other's constraints — whether they have to do with money, manpower or independent contractor law.

Both the Atlanta officials and the Chicago officials found success when they banded together to form "federations" of local officials associations in the form of IACAO and The Alliance. While many might look at that as an extra layer of bureaucracy, it is less a layer of bureaucracy and more a layer of representation that, at least in the two previous examples, turned a negative, competitive officiating environment into a positive setting of cooperation and accomplishment.

While there will always be individuals, and even whole associations, who bemoan the situations they are in, it is the individuals, like Stanley and Gannaway in Illinois, Swearngin and the two Williams' in Georgia, as well as groups like IACAO and The Alliance, who will bring about positive change. It's not always a well-oiled machine, and there will be disagreements as to the best ways to accomplish goals, but when everyone starts with the same goal — better officiating — and everyone does at least *something*, the gears will keep moving.

*(Jerry Grunski was a football official for more than 40 years and has been a Referee columnist since 1986. A retired educator, he lives in Evergreen, Colo.)* ☺