

Contra Costa County looking for referees, officials and umpires

By Jon Kingdon

Who hasn't sat in the stands or in front of a television watching a sporting event and not shouted their disapproval at a call made by an official and said for all to hear: "I could do a better job than that guy (or gal)!" Well, now there are ample opportunities for anyone who would like to back up their words.

There is a shortage of officials in all sports, according to Dave Cutaia, a man who wears many hats as the president and CEO of Contra Costa Athletic Assigners, an Arena Football League official and the officiating on-air analyst for ESPN. "We are looking for officials not only for football but also for basketball, soccer, baseball and softball. The shortage of officials is not just in Contra Costa, it's in the Bay Area, the state of California and in fact the entire country," says Cutaia. "With my travels with ESPN and ABC sports and working arena

football, I see that everyone is facing the same dilemma – there are not enough officials. In fact, there are areas where coaches have to officiate the lower level games."

Refereeing and umpiring are jobs that require a thick skin and personal motivation. Down through history there have been movies that have celebrated almost every sport and its participants. What did the umpires get? A 1960 movie called "Kill the Umpire" starring William Bendix.

Longtime official John Morris, who works as a bailiff, will be entering his ninth year as a football official and has also worked as a basketball referee and baseball umpire. When Morris' athletic career came to an end, he was looking to stay involved in sports in any way he could: "I started out umpiring in baseball and this led me to the group that was working in football and basketball and it grew that way. I've come to love the camaraderie, the exercise and the relationships you build

that go past the field ... and it gets me out of the house."

For Cutaia, "The best part about being an official, I think that you will find with most people it's the sense of accomplishment, doing something with the game along with the camaraderie. The financial aspect, these days may be more important now for many people than it was before, but it's just a really great avocation."

There is a wide range of physical demands for each sport. There are no physical conditioning requirements though officiating does demand that you must be in reasonably good shape. "Basketball and soccer are the most taxing physically with so much running," says Cutaia. "You are running in football but there are breaks between plays."

There is a constant evolution in each sport as the rules continue to be fine-tuned and updated which does take a commitment by the officials, says Morris: "It's a constant

learning process to stay up on the rules and unique game situations." There is an average of 3-5 meetings a season, a clinic, and officiating scrimmages as part of the training.

Doing the job well as an official does not happen overnight. It's a learned process where you don't get thrown into the deep end of the pool, says Cutaia: "In every aspect of officiating, in all of our sports, we have a person that works directly and coordinates and trains the new officials. We don't throw a new official out there without a veteran. In many cases, these veterans act as mentors for the new officials because they've all been there before."

If fans are not going to be allowed in the stadiums and gymnasiums, it's going to be a unique situation this year for the officials, though not necessarily for the better, says Cutaia: "Fan behavior has been a deterrent for some officials but that is being addressed directly by the

schools, but most of the officials prefer to work in front of the fans because that's part of the atmosphere."

Morris accepts that he is going to be yelled at by coaches and parents: "You go in there knowing it's going to happen. While I hear the fans, I don't hear the fans. I hear the noise, but I don't necessarily hear the boos."

Depending on the level of the game ranging from youth sports to the varsity games, fees range from \$45 to \$81 per game. A new official can average from \$180 to \$240 a week. Any man or woman who is interested in applying to work any of these sports must be at least 18 years old. There is no deadline to apply but the sooner people apply, the more training they will have prior to onset of the seasons. If you want to apply or have any questions, email Dave Cutaia at Cutaia@aol.com.

SMC athletics confronts coronavirus

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The Saint Mary's athletic department had been planning on reopening July 1 but the new county guidelines have delayed that opening. It will be a week-to-week decision based on when student-athletes will return to campus for voluntary workouts. There is a great deal of effort

being expended by the administration to be able to hit the ground running when the student-athletes arrive on campus, said Matoso: "Right now, our main focus is seeing our teams return when they are allowed to and then begin to phase them and our staff back into school."

With the cutback in financial resources, each of the WCC schools are looking to

save money wherever they can. "If we can avoid getting on a plane, we will, and then travel by bus," said Matoso.

There are no shortcuts being taken to eliminate the potential health hazards, said Matoso: "We may or may not continue to play in front of people. Our full intention is that we are going to be playing this fall. We are going to make it as safe an environ-

ment as possible for our student-athletes, the visiting teams, and our fans."

If there is one positive that Matoso takes away from everything that has gone on so far over the last four months, it's how everyone in the athletic department has handled the adversity: "It's been so impressive with what all of our coaches and administrators have done with our kids.

I was really impressed with the maturity of all our student-athletes. It was an emotional time and they all handled it really well and I'm happy for the spring kids that can come back. We have missed all of our student-athletes and we're ready to get it going."

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