

Insights, Perceptions & Attitudes of Athletic Directors: An ArbiterSports' Research Study.



ArbiterSports

The Only One That's All In One

Executive Overview

In the fourth quarter of 2021, ArbiterSports, with headquarters in Sandy, Utah, conducted research among Athletic Directors and their assistants and associates, to determine the perceptions, attitudes and insights into high school sports in general, and the wants, needs and concerns about the Athletic Director's profession in particular.

One-on-One interviews were conducted with this stakeholder group that lasted between 30 and 45 minutes with follow-up interviews conducted with this same group as needed. This type of Voice-of-Customer Research focuses on critical insights expressed by Athletic Directors that become re-occurring themes in their responses. These re-occurring themes become the basis for the findings in this report.

The conclusions herein are the results of five (5) re-occurring themes that were expressed by Athletic Directors as their most prominent concerns and insights in the high school sports industry. This is not to say that other themes and insights were not expressed and voiced as concerns, on the contrary, there were many insights provided, but many were disparate, some weren't re-occurring, while other themes had more than one mention or response, but not enough to be clear-cut and consequential.

For the most part, these One-on-One interviews were conducted in October of 2021 with their codification taking place in November of 2021.

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1 Athletic Directors and their associates want up to two (2) extra hours each day to focus on non-administrative aspects of their jobs which are the job characteristics they trained for and believed were important when they joined the industry.

Athletic Directors on a school and district level indicated the administrative demands of the job prevent them from spending more time with students, more time with coaches, and more time on the field. If they could just have an extra hour or two away from their computer to be closer to students, they could make a difference in the lives of student-athletes. With those two hours they would:

- Be the teachers and leaders they've spent their lives training to be
- Work with coaches to be transformational rather than just transactional
- Implement more professional development programs and resources for coaches, which will impact their students
- Spend more time focusing on sportsmanship, at every level, which is the root-cause of many high school sports problems today

Athletic Directors suggested the following means to those ends:

- Find and use technology to streamline athletic department operations
- But limit the number of technology providers within the athletic department
- Technology, software and dashboard fatigue are very real problems which is why it's critical to limit the number of software providers within the department
- Because of industry churn, software training and refresher courses are required, but not if they involve multiple and disparate systems
- **Ongoing software support and Help Desk services are essential; no technology should be implemented without comprehensive support**

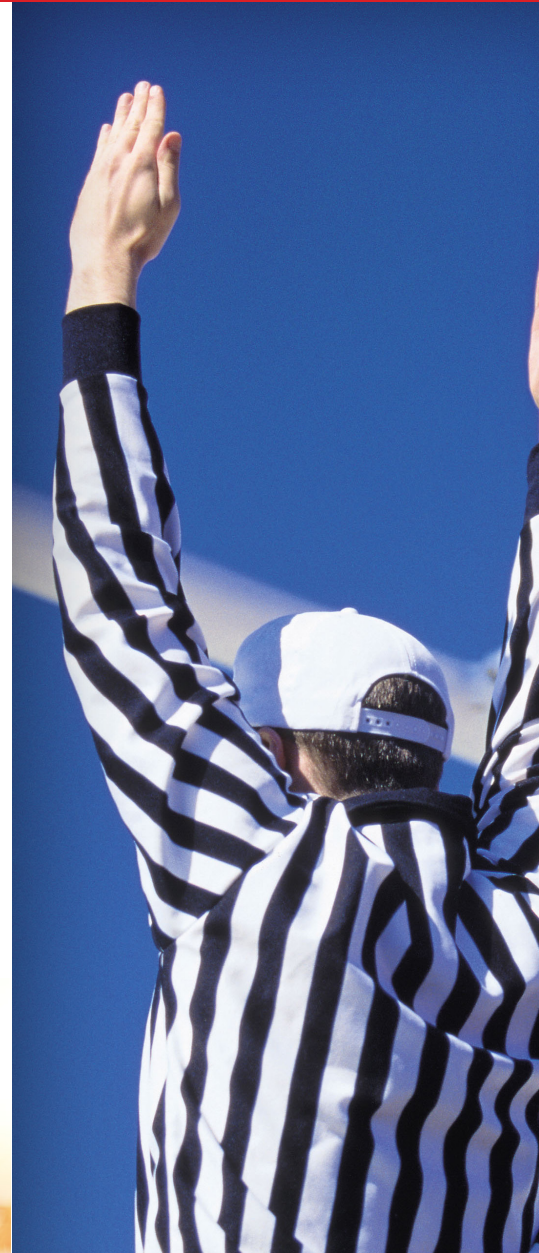


Athletic Directors want an extra two hours each day to attend to activities that they view as non-administrative.



2 A concern throughout the country is the mounting shortages of quality officials and referees. Athletic Directors believe that technology solutions are one of the best ways to resolve this problem providing the technology can save Athletic Directors more time to spend on this challenge and that the technology assists Assigners with their efforts.

- A common refrain among Athletic Directors and Administrators is the growing concern of finding referees. In fact, in some parts of the country, it's getting so fraught that there's a common narrative: No referees, no sports, no sports, no athletics, no athletics, no Athletic Directors. They believe technology can and should play a key role in reconciling the shortage of officials.
- Athletic Directors believe that scheduling and payment software can help alleviate this ongoing problem because for three primary reasons: (1) it saves them administrative and operational time that they can, in turn, use to address the shortage of officials; (2) the right software solutions will make it easier for Assigners to manage their roster of referees and delight the officials by providing them with fast digital payments and proper record-keeping; and (3) issues of eligibility, training, certification and testing, which they contend is a critical component of this type of software, expedites the entire workflow within the ecosystem which is essential to creating a frictionless work product of all stakeholders.
- **And, Athletic Directors believe that a simple to navigate, easy to use ecosystem workflow can go a long way in helping to eliminate some, but by no means, all of the barriers to entry that might be prohibiting an influx of new referee talent.**



Athletic Directors believe that eliminating, or helping to eliminate the shortage of officials will be the primary or secondary factor in creating peace of mind and optimism in their careers.

3 Athletic Directors believe that sportsmanship and bad behavior are directly correlated to the lack of officials with many officials saying, it's just not worth it anymore. For ADs, District ADs and Administrators who can resolve this issue, it will be career-changing and lead to greater opportunities, increased recognition, and longer tenure, if desired.

- The sportsmanship, fan and parent behavior problem is not geographically exclusive; it's problematic in every state, school district and school. Resolving it takes time and patience. But Athletic Directors believe it can be done. And when it can be accomplished, most concur that it can be a career-changing occurrence.
- As was mentioned previously, technology is one component that can help alleviate the shortage of officials by streamlining the operations within an athletic department and thereby creating more time for Athletic Directors to spend on sportsmanship, which is a known contributor to the shortage. Consequently, technology applications are the root to resolving issues of sportsmanship, which, in turn, is one of the leading drivers of success in the careers of high school Athletic Directors.
- **For Athletic Directors who are in the early or mid-stages of their careers, making progress in resolving the issues of sportsmanship and bad behavior will be major contributors to upward career trajectories.**

It's a complex equation, but using technology that helps to automate a high school athletic department, can free-up administrative time so that Athletic Directors can look to resolve sportsmanship issue which many believe can make a difference on their careers.



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Research was conclusive that nearly all Athletic Directors want a single software platform to manage sports, events, payments, registration and eligibility. However, they also believe that as long as the industry is segmented with bit software players, it will be difficult to achieve single solution status.

- When Athletic Directors were asked what they want most in the near future, many responded that they wanted more people in the ecosystem to use a single solution that would help automate and streamline the operations within an athletic department.
- Athletic Directors believe that data entry into multiple solutions, and the navigation of multiple software providers, is a common hindrance in districts and schools, and takes precious time away from what's important – working with student-athletes, providing professional development to coaches, solving real-world problems like sportsmanship and sport specialization.
- **Research clearly shows that high school Athletic Directors and District Athletic Directors want what matters most: To be teachers, leaders and game-changers, but that can only be achieved with less software platforms and less providers to navigate, support and train on.**

When Athletic Directors were asked what industry information they would like to be provided with, their top response was *How software consolidation can have a positive impact on high school sports in general, and athletic department operations in particular.*



5 When Athletic Directors were asked if they could change one thing, and one thing only in high school sports, their top answer was to resolve the issue of sportsmanship and bad fan and parental behavior.

- This further explains why Athletic Directors are adamant in their belief that if they can resolve the sportsmanship issue, it will have positive results in their career trajectory. Additionally, this is why they believe it is essential that they utilize technology to save them up to two (2) hours each day so they can focus on the resolution of this issue.
- The second most popular answer to this question was the need to resolve the shortage of officials and the belief by Athletic Directors that the problem is getting worse.
- This answer was tied with the response that all athletic departments need to be using the same technology platforms and the fact that disparate systems only create more software fatigue, more complexities, and greater wasted time.
- **And the other answer tied for the second greatest response among Athletic Directors was that high school sports was plagued by issues of entitlement and privilege and that too many parents and family members believe their children are deserving of scholarships when clearly they are not.**



It is clear that Athletic Directors are looking for insights and thought leadership content, information and research. Companies who play a major role in this space should be obligated to provide this information to Athletic Directors.

Arbiter Sports Athletic Director Research Findings Summary

The five (5) primary insights from these one-on-one interviews with high school Athletic Directors reveals that their concerns, wants and needs are summarized as:

- 1** The almost desperate need to find up to two (2) hours each day to spend more time with student-athletes and to resolve overwhelming and compelling issues of sportsmanship and bad behavior as well as searching for ways to alleviate the issues of official shortages.
- 2** A deeply-rooted concern throughout the country about the ref shortage. Athletic Directors believe that technology can contribute to this resolution if it can free-up more time for ADs so that they can focus on this issue.
- 3** Bad sportsmanship is a leading contributor to the lack of officials. Athletic Directors believe if they can resolve this problem, it will bolster their career and provide new opportunities for them; particularly if they are new in their positions, or in the mid-term of their career.
- 4** A single software platform that manages an athletic department is so important to Athletic Directors; yet they fear that with so many niche providers, it will be difficult to grant their request. Nevertheless, the industry should try to achieve this want and need.
- 5** Overwhelmingly, Athletic Directors want bad behavior and poor sportsmanship to disappear from high school sports. However, they fully understand that this will be difficult, but they are willing to try if only they had the extra time.

Contact ArbiterSports for more research findings and insights including our newly published study titled *The Shortage of Officials Has Plagued High School Sports For Many Years and the Problems Have Intensified: Insights From High School Athletic Directors, Assigners, and Coaches.*



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