

Factors that Affect Retention of Sport Officials  
A Synthesis of the Research Literature

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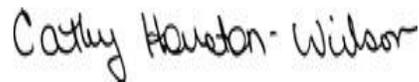
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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this synthesis is to examine previous research on factors that affect sport officials' intention to continue officiating. There is currently a shortage of sport officials across several sports worldwide, especially at the amateur level. The studies examined within the critical mass discovered common factors that positively and negatively affect sport official retention. Having a passion for the game, the social aspect of officiating and the perceived lack of organizational support were recurring themes that were cited as affecting sport officials' intention to continue. Previous research recommended how officiating associations could improve their recruitment and retention of sport officials. However, future research should examine if these recommendations positively affect the retention of sport officials.

*Keywords:* [sport officials, recruitment, retention, organizational support, referees]

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### Factors that Affect Sport Officials Intention to Continue

Governments in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom have implemented sports policies designed to increase the level of participation in sports among youth (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013). These policies are positive for today's youth but require an abundance of sport officials to oversee these sport contests. Sport officials at the high school and recreational level have a tough job. First, they are expected to know all the rules of their respective sport. During the sport contest, they are in charge. Therefore, they have the power to order players and coaches to carry out or omit any act that enforces the rules. If there is a gray area in the rules, the sport official also has the authority to make a decision to resolve the issue (Umpire Manual, 2014). Perhaps most importantly, they are responsible for the safety of the players, coaches and spectators at the sport contest. Clearly, sport officials have a lot of responsibilities.

Very few sport officials make enough money to do it professionally. For example, during the 2016-2017 school year, New York State high school officials made between \$56 and \$93 a game, depending on the level (modified, junior varsity, varsity) and sport (Officials' Fees, 2016). In comparison annual salaries for the four major professional sports: National Football League (NFL) \$25,000-\$75,000, National Basketball Association (NBA) \$100,000-\$300,000, National Hockey League (NHL) \$72,000-\$255,000 and Major League Baseball (MLB) \$120,000-\$300,000 (Trex, 2009). Although amateur sport officials work part-time for 2-3 hours a night, a couple of times a week after their day job, they are held to the same standards as professional sport officials by

coaches, players and fans. These part-time sport officials are expected to make the correct call every time at the amateur level, even though professional sport officials have been known to make incorrect calls (Trex, 2009).

While amateur sport officials work sport contests for a fraction of the money professional sport officials earn, they often experience similar abuse. Numerous studies have been conducted that examine the types of stress that sport officials have to endure. Forbes and Livingston's (2013) study of attrition and retention of Canadian ice hockey officials found that the top stressors stemmed from threats of physical abuse, confrontations with coaches, problems with other sport officials and the verbal abuse received after making a controversial call. Additionally, a study by Anshel, Kang and Jubenville (2013) found that sport officials most severe sources of stress came from making an incorrect call, being out of position, having a problem with their partner and verbal abuse from coaches. This is important to recognize because currently there is an international problem involving a shortage of sport officials. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, on average only two of ten sport officials return for their third year of officiating (Scandale, 2017). Canadian statistics showed a 15% decrease from 1998-2005 in adults who volunteered to be sport officials. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported in 2010 that more than half of all sport officials (51.9%) were involved for less than five years and less than one-third of sport officials (27.2%) have 10 years or more experience (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013). Clearly there is a problem in retaining sport officials.

Sports are important extracurricular activities that engage youth and help teach them life skills. Unfortunately, with the number of sports contests increasing, more and

more sport officials are deciding to stop officiating them. If this continues to occur, schools could be forced to play less games. A reduction in the number of sports contests offered could negatively affect the child's participation level, development and overall experience. Previous research has examined why sport officials have quit but more recent research has tried to understand why sport officials return to officiating (Rainey, 1995; Rainey, 1999).

Using the critical mass of literature on this topic, I will explore what factors have been determined to affect the retention of sport officials. This information will inform recommendations for how officiating associations and sport administrators can assist in the retention of sport officials. The factors that are explored in this paper encompass sport officials love and commitment to their sport, the positive social aspects of officiating and the effect of organizational support on retention. This analysis will include sport officials from a variety of sports and will not narrow its scope down to just one specific sport. The research reviewed will focus on sport officials from the high school, college, semi-professional and professional level to give a clear picture of what factors contribute to their retention. During my search for research studies to include in my analysis, I have focused on studies that examine positive and negative factors affecting retention while also providing recommendations for officiating associations to incorporate into their recruitment and retention strategies to combat the shortage problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this synthesis is to explore factors that affect the retention of sport officials. There is a shortage of sport officials and this synthesis seeks to identify ways to better retain them.

## **Operational Definitions**

The following operational definitions are used in this paper:

1. Sport officials – “referees, umpires and judges” (Livingston & Forbes, 2017, p.44)  
 “who are those tasked with maintaining order and adjudicating sport contests”  
 (Livingston & Forbes, 2016, p.1)
2. Retention – decision to “return to work” as a sport official next season (McCole et al., 2012, p.85)
3. Sport Contests – athletic competition in the following sports: Australian rules football, basketball, diving, figure skating, football, gymnastics, ice hockey, rugby and swimming
4. Officiating Associations – governing bodies that handle the “managerial matters” for their sport officials (Kellett & Warner, 2011, p.477)

## **Scope of Synthesis**

This synthesis will examine research studies on sport officials from a variety of sports and differing levels of competition. This synthesis does not examine administrators’ or coaches’ opinions, attitudes or beliefs about sport officiating. The study will focus on the factors sport officials perceive as having an impact on their experiences with officiating, whether positive or negative – and how such factors affect the retention of these sport officials.

## **Chapter 2 Methods**

### **Search Procedures**

Articles included in the critical mass for this research synthesis were found through the SportDISCUS database which I searched using The College of Brockport’s

Online Library. The key words I used to search for my articles included “sport officials,” “recruitment,” “retention,” “organizational support,” and “referees” to garner results. I searched for articles in two ways, by using two search terms together and also by searching some terms individually. While searching for articles, I decided to include only those that were peer-reviewed. Due to the narrow body of research available on this topic, I also searched for articles by authors who had done previous research related to this topic. Doing so allowed me to find quality articles that were about both sport officials and factors that influenced their retention.

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

Next, I had to narrow down what articles were most relevant to my synthesis topic. First, I made sure to select only research studies because they provided factual data and not just opinions from a singular point of view. I also made sure to only include peer-reviewed journals to ensure the studies were credible. Next, each study chosen for inclusion had to specifically address factors that affect sport officials’ retention at the high school, college, semi-professional or professional level. Additionally, the studies selected focused on sport officials’ experiences in a variety of sports, including but not limited to basketball, ice hockey, rugby and Australian rules football. Due to the worldwide shortage of sport officials and narrow body of research available on this topic, research articles pertaining to sport officials in countries other than the United States were included. I only chose articles that focused on the experiences and perceptions from the sport officials’ point of view since they are the ones experiencing these issues that factor into the decision to quit officiating. These articles could be focused on both the past and current experiences of those who currently work as sport official. These criteria

helped me to select articles that best relate to my synthesis topic. At the conclusion of my search, I ended up with 11 research studies on the topic for inclusion in this synthesis.

### **Data Analysis**

After the selection of articles, I created an article grid to help clarify and organize the data (see Appendix A). The article grid summarizes the participants studied, methodology used, results found and concluding discussion from each article. The findings of these studies were examined and lead to a recurrence of certain themes: passion for the game, the social benefits of officiating and a perceived lack of organizational support. The findings related to these themes will be discussed in the following section.

## **Chapter 3 Results**

This section examines the findings of 11 research articles that studied factors that influence the continuing participation of sport officials. Positive factors included passion for the game and socialization while negative factors included a lack of organizational support. The positive themes start with sport officials' passion for the game, since it's a motivating factor in deciding to become a sport official (Hancock, Dawson & Auger, 2015). From there sport officials are exposed to the social world of officiating, which includes camaraderie with fellow sport officials and encouraging interactions with coaches, players and parents. The most prevalent negative theme was the perceived lack of organizational support of the officiating associations, which left sport officials feeling marginalized and as though they were being treated unfairly. This section begins with the positive themes that enhance the officiating experience and concludes with the negative themes that take away from it.

## **Passion for the Game**

There are a couple reasons why individuals decide to first become and then remain a sport official. One of the more popular factors is their passion for their respective sport. Hancock et al. (2015) found that intrinsic motivations, including passion for one's sport, was a recurring answer that sport officials across 18 sports gave as a reason to why they began and continued to officiate. They initially hypothesized that sport officials from different types of sports would have different motivations. However, after the study they acknowledged the influence of intrinsic motivations, such as passion for one's sport, shouldn't be a surprising universal motivating factor. The reason an individual's passion for the game is a powerful motivating factor is because officiating is voluntary and therefore the sport official must be motivated to begin and continue (Hancock et al., 2015). This can manifest itself in the individual simply wanting to stay active in and serve their sport. Similarly, Livingston and Forbes (2017) found that 69 out of the 76 (90.8%) sport officials they studied had previously participated as an athlete in their sport. Of those 69 sport officials, 48 expressed that the reason they decided to start officiating was because of their "love of the game", wanting to "give back" or "stay connected" with the sport (Livingston & Forbes, 2017, p.53). This notion is particularly common at the amateur level where sport officials enjoy feeling as though they are still part of the game (Kellett & Warner, 2011).

The question is how does passion for the game affect the retention rates of sport officials? Ridinger, Kim, Warner and Tingle (2017) answered this when they developed their Referee Retention Scale (RRS). Of the seven-factor model they used to assess referee retention, intrinsic motivations were found to be the second most important factor

in sport officials' responses, after organizational support. Additionally, less experienced sport officials cited officiating for the enjoyment of the game as more of a motivating factor than experienced sport officials (Symonds & Russell, 2018). This is important because the less experienced sport officials are the ones who officiating associations are having more trouble retaining (Scandale, 2017). Therefore, sport officials' passion for and relationship with their respective sport is a strong motivating factor when first starting out as a sport official.

### **Social World**

An often-undervalued aspect of officiating is the social world that sport officials become a part of. Similar to a player being part of a team, sport officials experience social benefits from being part of their officiating association. This is especially important due to the fact that officiating can be an isolating activity, particularly when the sport official is working an athletic contest by him/herself. Therefore, early on in officiating, the social benefits are important for retention. It helps to make new sport officials feel more comfortable about officiating, as one umpire noted he was "a bit nervous whether to go and umpire but when I went down the first few nights of training, I just liked the people there and that's it" (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007, p.222). This improves a sport officials' self-esteem and performance because they get to socialize with sport officials that they will work sports contests with. Other umpires noted that this created a "morale boosting" that helped their performance (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007, p.222) From the officiating association's point of view, if their sport officials feel good about themselves and their performance, they are more likely to enjoy their officiating experience and want to continue as a sport official.

The ability for a sport official to have someone on their side that they can relate to is important for coping with the stress and abuse they encounter. Anshel, Kang and Jubenville's (2013) study of high school, collegiate and professional sport officials in the United States found that the most severe sources of stress came from making an incorrect call, being out of position, having problems with a partner and receiving verbal abuse from coaches. In Australia, rugby referees cited that fellow referees can be like another family that offers support during training and games, while providing advice on how to deal with difficult situations and help improve their skills (Baldwin & Vallance, 2016). The importance of this support system is magnified when you consider how much time sport officials give to officiating. Therefore, the camaraderie between sport officials can positively affect their intention to continue officiating. Kellett and Shilbury's (2007) study of Australian Rules Football umpires noted that several umpires cited the social interaction as the main reason for coming back. These umpires expressed that the fellow umpires in their officiating association were good to each other, which played a big role in them remaining in the profession.

This is especially important during sports contests, when there is rarely support from the officiating association. In these instances, sport officials are exposed to stressful situations that can negatively affect their officiating experience and possibly dissuade them from continuing. However, this is where the support of fellow sport officials has its biggest impact. Livingston and Forbes (2017) identified key individuals that played an important role in sport official retention and found that 65% of their participants cited a fellow sport official as their primary source of support. Sport officials in this study viewed another sport official as someone they could go to for guidance between sports

contests to give advice based on their personal experiences. Furthermore, when working as part of an officiating team, sport officials commented on how either themselves or other sport officials would support each other when making difficult decisions during a sport contest (Livingston & Forbes, 2017).

Sport officials also benefit from their social interaction with players and coaches. At the amateur level, where certain sports can be part of the social community, sport officials mentioned how gaining respect from players and coaches positively affected their sense of community (Kellett & Warner, 2011). This interaction helps soften the line between sport official and player, which increases the sport officials' enjoyment level. The interaction with players and coaches also helps lessen the isolating side of being a sport official, especially when working a sport contest alone (Kellett & Warner, 2011). Therefore, the social aspect of officiating not only helps welcome new sport officials to the group but offers them support during challenging times, which positively affects their sense of community and intention to continue.

### **Organizational Support**

When an individual decides to become a sport official, to do so they must join an officials' association in their area. An officials' association has several duties with the two most important being to train their sport officials and assign them to sports contests. It is important for the officials' association to support their sport officials by helping them improve and by treating them fairly. However, the current research shows that these are areas where sport officials believe their officiating association is lacking, which ultimately negatively impacts their intention to continue.

An area of concern for sport officials is how they often feel marginalized. Unfortunately, sport officials are regularly overlooked, especially at the amateur level. However, when they are blatantly disrespected by game participants and the official's association does nothing to support them, it negatively affects the sport officials perceived organizational support from their officiating association. In Forbes and Livingston's (2013) study of Canadian amateur sport officials, one female basketball official described a "low point" as being called a lesbian by the losing coach and having her officials' association do nothing to support her after she followed the proper steps in reporting the incident. Furthermore, sport officials often feel a lack of respect from their own officials' association that can affect their intention to continue. Livingston and Forbes (2016) study of factors that contribute to the retention of Canadian amateur sport officials resulted in hearing stories from several sport officials about previously leaving officiating due to a perceived lack of organizational support. A gymnastics official spoke of retiring once due to a lack of respect from her officials' association but returned because she missed it, which speaks to the motivating factor of passion for the game (Livingston & Forbes, 2016).

It appears as though the perceived lack of organization support starts with the training process as sport officials who quit cited it as being problematic in their retention (Warner, Tingle & Kellett, 2013). Sport officials mentioned how they felt the training process was too focused on the knowledge of the rules and proper mechanics while failing to prepare them for problems they would experience with players, coaches and fans. Additionally, many sport officials mentioned how they received little-to-no training after games or in a words of advice situation, besides a few officials' association

meetings. This speaks to the sport officials frustration regarding a lack of regular learning opportunities after they've finished their initial training (Warner et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this lack of feedback left one sport official feeling as though they were "sent out to the wolves" and "set up for failure", which negatively affects retention (Warner et al., 2013, p.322). Several sport officials in the Warner et al. (2013) study stated how being assigned a mentor could have prevented their departure from officiating. They felt a mentor could have helped with continued learning and improving their overall officiating experience. The idea being that officials' associations are failing their sport officials by not providing continued teaching, feedback and mentorship, which makes it hard for new sport officials to reach their capacity and thus negatively affects their willingness to continue (Warner et al., 2013)

It is also apparent that officials' associations have a lack of consideration for sport officials as they get older and more experienced. Experienced sport officials complained of having nobody to mentor them to help them get to the next level (Livingston & Forbes, 2016). As sport officials gain more years of experience, they often get slotted into officiating certain levels of competition. However, since high level sport officials usually work only high-level sports contests, sport officials stuck at the lower levels feel as though they have nobody to mentor them and lend support going forward. This makes these experienced sport officials feel undervalued, which can lead to quitting if there are not visible opportunities for advancement to higher levels (Livingston & Forbes, 2016). It is important for officiating associations to maintain a sense of value in officiating for experienced sport officials since they report it to be a high motivating factor (Symonds &

Russell, 2018). Unfortunately, these occurrences speak to the politics and inequity that take place in officials' associations.

A majority of the perceived inequity from officials' associations stemmed from the assigning of games. In many cases, sport officials felt that the assignments were based on favoritism, politics and familiarity rather than merit (Warner et al., 2013). When it seemed as though game assignments weren't based on skills and abilities, some sport officials felt as though they weren't getting the chance to prove themselves. This negatively affected their desire to continue because it seemed as though nobody cared about their improvement and ability to move up the ranks (Warner et al., 2013). Furthermore, the frustration lead to a "us and them" mentality between the rookies and veteran sport officials receiving the assignments that negatively impacted the sense of community, which is usually a positive aspect of officiating that helps increase retention (Kellett & Warner, 2011, p.478). Another factor that fed into the "us and them" mentality was the difference in financial reward. When sport officials first began officiating they make the same amount per game because they're officiating the same level of competition. However, when some sport officials start to move up the ranks and officiate higher levels of competition, their compensation increases as well. This again negatively impacts the sense of community among sport officials because some are earning more money than others due in part to having the opportunity to officiate a higher-level sport contest (Kellett & Warner, 2011).

### **Summary**

Current research has indicated what factors have an effect on sport officials' intention to continue. These factors include sport officials' passion for the game, the

social aspects they experience through officiating and the lack of organizational support they receive from their officiating association. The next section will discuss how passion for the game and the social aspects of officiating can be used to better recruit and retain sport officials. Recommendations of how officiating associations can better support their sport officials are given as well. Additionally, I will examine the limitations of this synthesis and where future research could expand on this topic.

### **Chapter 4 Discussion**

This synthesis examined the factors that affect the retention of sport officials in amateur, semi-professional and professional athletics. Through analyzing and organizing the data, it became clear that the most important factors are having a passion for the game, the social aspect of officiating and the perceived lack of organizational support from officiating associations. The results showed that sport officials begin and continue to officiate because they want to stay involved with their sport and they enjoy socializing with other sport officials, players and coaches. These are factors that officiating associations should emphasize when trying to recruit new sport officials. However, officiating associations also need to do a better job of supporting their current sport officials, who complained about their training, development and how sports contests were assigned. The critical mass of articles gave recommendations to officiating associations on how to better manage sport officials, which can help increase retention rates.

#### **Recruitment Practices**

Currently, sport officials are recruited in two ways: either through seeking an officiating position on their own or they are recruited by current members (P. Titlebaum, Haberlin, G. Titlebaum, 2009). Due to the ineffectiveness of this recruiting strategy,

officiating associations need to focus their recruiting efforts on a specific group of people: athletes. In Livingston and Forbes (2017) study, only seven of the 76 sport officials who were studied had never participated as an athlete in the sport they were officiating. Since officiating associations are having a problem retaining sport officials, they should look to recruit current and former athletes. Obviously, these individuals already have a passion for the game and former athletes may be looking for a way to stay active within their sport. Officiating would also give former athletes an opportunity to continue to compete and be challenged through sport. Officiating associations need to be more aware of how the competitive nature of sports and the challenge of officiating is something that is attractive to former athletes (Warner et al., 2013). In regard to current athletes, of the remaining 69 sport officials in the study, 31 (40.1%) began officiating while they were still competing in their sport (Livingston & Forbes, 2017). This shows that there are current athletes who want to get involved in officiating and would already have an idea of the problems that would arise with coaches, players and fans, which some sport officials felt they weren't prepared for (Warner et al., 2013).

It could also stand to reason that current and former athletes may be better equipped to deal with the sources of stress that sport officials encounter. Anshel et al (2015) found that the most severe sources of stress came from making an incorrect call, being out of position, having problems with a partner and receiving verbal abuse from coaches, which are similar to things an athlete experiences. Athletes have to cope with making mistakes, having problems with teammates and being yelled at by coaches. This makes them more resilient, which is an important trait among sport officials. Livingston and Forbes (2017) also examined resilience in their study and found that sport officials

were highly resilient. Of the 1,073 active sport officials who responded to a resilience scale, 92.2% had resilience scores at or above the population norm (Livingston & Forbes, 2017). Therefore, if officiating associations recruit current and former athletes who are already more resilient, it could help increase their retention rates.

### **Emphasizing Social Aspect**

Individuals who are thinking about becoming a sport official may be dissuaded by the idea that officiating is an isolating profession, especially if they are a current or former athlete seeking to stay in a team environment. However, the research has shown that sport officials are a welcoming group that helps and supports each other (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007). Therefore, officiating associations have to do a better job of promoting the social aspects of officiating when recruiting and training new sport officials. This can start during the recruiting process by having current sport officials introduce a friend or family member to officiating and help them become part of the sport officials' social community (Warner et al., 2013). These mentors can help promote the benefits of officiating while also making it more attractive to the prospective sport official since they already have somebody to mentor them (Warner et al., 2013).

The social aspect of officiating must start during the training process by giving new sport officials the opportunity to interact with all the other sport officials in the officials' association, not just their fellow newcomers. Doing so will help the new sport officials build a camaraderie with the experienced sport officials, which is an important factor in their retention (Baldwin & Vallance, 2016). Furthermore, interacting with fellow sport officials is a way for sport newcomers to learn how to cope with the stresses of officiating (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007). Research studies examined in this synthesis

indicated that sport officials have a desire to continue to learn and improve, which socialization contributes too. Livingston and Forbes (2017) found that socialization between sport officials not only helps them continue to learn but more importantly, stay motivated.

More research needs to be done on the direct effects of mentoring and socialization on sport officials retention. Previous research has examined the impact of a sense of community (SOC) on retention for groups other than sport officials. McCole, Jacobs, Lindley & McAvoy (2006) examined the impact of a SOC on summer camp employees' retention. The study found that a positive SOC helps to retain seasonal workers (McCole et. Al, 2006). Similarly, sport officials are seasonal workers who, for the most part, officiate as a second job. Therefore, it would stand to reason that a positive SOC would also influence their decision to continue to officiate next season. In terms of fellow sport participants, athletes share similar experiences with sport officials. Both parties have to cope with verbal abuse, conflict with other game participants and making mistakes. However, both athletes and sport officials experience the positives of sport participation such as the SOC. Some athletes want to stay a part of the social community so much that they decide to become sport officials (Livingston and Forbes, 2017). Remaining involved in the game through officiating helps keep that social space to interact in place, which is a factor in creating a SOC. When athletes have a positive SOC, their sport experience improves (Warner & Dixon, 2011). This compliments Kellett and Shilbury's (2007) findings on the importance of a SOC to sport officials' retention by showing that a SOC is important to positive sport experiences. Sport organizations want their participants to have a positive sport experience because it will improve the

likelihood that they return next season. Therefore, officials' associations must be more proactive in creating opportunities for their sport officials to socialize aside from sport contests. Doing so will help build camaraderie and a support system between sport officials. This in turn improves a sport officials' experience and positively affects their intention to continue.

### **Better Organizational Support**

There are several ways that officials' associations can better support their sport officials. Officials' associations need to start by treating their sport officials with a degree of respect that matches how necessary and important they are to the sport system (Forbes & Livingston, 2013). Unfortunately, some players, coaches and fans won't ever understand this idea. However, in order to try and make more people understand, officials' associations could organize meetings where coaches, players, parents and sport officials are all present. These meetings may help to clarify the expectations of each group while also helping build a rapport that leads to more productive communication at sport contests. Hancock himself has been involved in these kinds of meetings and thought they were generally "positive" and "helpful" (Hancock et al. 2015, p.37). Most importantly it would humanize sport officials, which could lead to a reduction in the amount of verbal abuse directed toward them during sport contests. This would help to reduce the amount of stress they experience, therefore positively affecting their intention to continue (Hancock et al., 2015). This process needs to stem from the officials' association wanting to better support their sport officials and increase their chances of having a positive officiating experience. Unfortunately, there are instances when sport officials are treated with an egregious lack of respect by other game participants. Sport

officials understand that abuse is a “normal” part of officiating (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007, p.219). However, when the abuse crosses the line of what is acceptable, the officials’ association must have their sport officials’ back. If they fail to do so, it leaves the sport official feeling disrespected by their officiating association, which can lead them to deciding to quit (Livingston & Forbes, 2016).

Training new sport officials is one of the most important responsibilities of an officiating association. However, sport officials feel that the process needs to be improved (Warner et al., 2013). Officials’ associations need to be open-minded to the opinions of their sport officials as it is their responsibility to support them and give them the tools to succeed. In doing so, sport officials will feel more valued and respected by their officiating association, which increases retention (Livingston & Forbes). Specific changes to the training process starts with what is taught to a new sport official. Sport officials who decided to quit felt that they were unprepared to deal with issues they would experience with coaches, players and fans (Warner et al., 2013). This lack of ability by the sport officials to handle these types of situations factored into them deciding to leave officiating (Warner et al., 2013). Therefore, if officials’ associations provided training on how to handle abuse from coaches and fans during sport contests, retention rates could increase.

Another criticism of the training process was how the officials’ associations didn’t provide any continued learning opportunities after the initial training sessions (Warner et al., 2013). This is somewhat hypocritical of the officiating associations because they want confident, competent sport officials but fail to provide them with continued training. Several sport officials who quit, commented on how regular

opportunities for continued learning, in addition to being assigned a mentor would have improved their officiating experience and increased their likelihood of continuing (Warner et al., 2013). Therefore, it would benefit officiating associations to implement regular training and mentoring activities to improve new sport officials confidence levels (Symonds & Russell, 2018).

Officiating associations need to improve their game assigning process since sport officials felt that assignments weren't always based on their abilities (Warner et al., 2013). This is important because the perceived fairness of the assigning process is a key factor in retaining sport officials (Ridinger et al., 2017). Officiating associations can start by making the assigning process more transparent. This begins with them thoroughly explaining to sport officials what factors go into assigning a game. Additionally, officiating associations could utilize multiple game assignors as opposed to one. Doing so may help reduce the idea that the assigning of games is based on favoritism, politics and familiarity (Warner et al., 2013). Officiating associations need to improve the transparency of their decision-making processes because when they are unclear, it has a negative effect on sport official retention (Warner et al., 2013).

### **Limitations**

At this time, the amount of research available on what factors affect sport official retention is limited. Most of the previous research conducted on sport officials examined the types of stress they experienced and how it affected their intention to continue. However, previous research failed to understand what factors promoted retention and if there were other factors than stress that led sport officials to quit. However, because sport administrators are recognizing that there is a shortage of sport officials and that it will

continue to create problems if not resolved, further research should be expected on this topic. This is foreshadowed by the vast majority of the studies utilized in this synthesis coming from within the last five years.

Due to the limited amount of research on this topic, data from several countries and different kinds of sports had to be used in this synthesis. Therefore, it must be recognized that the experiences in these studies may slightly differ based on the sport officiated and in what country the sport is popular. For example, rugby officials in Australia may feel it's harder to move up the officiating ranks due to the sport's popularity and the number of individuals who officiate it. On the contrary, it might be easier to officiate higher level and better paying rugby matches in the United States because it's not as popular in America, so rugby officiating associations are smaller in number.

Different levels of sport officials were examined in this synthesis due to the limited amount of research. Therefore, data was taken from amateur, collegiate, semi-professional and professional sport officials. While different levels of sport officials will place an importance on the same factors, the degree to which may vary. For example, the financial reward of officiating was not discussed much due to amateur, collegiate and semi-professional sport officials not citing money as a reason to continue officiating. However, professional sport officials probably place a higher priority on financial reward as it relates to their intention to continue because this is how they make their living. On the other hand, amateur and semi-professional sport officials may have more problems with their officiating associations level of support due in part to those officiating

administrators working on a part-time basis, which doesn't allow them to devote as much time to their sport officials as professional officials' associations can.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Due to the shortage of sport officials being a relatively new problem, which influenced the limitations of the critical mass, more research needs to examine this topic. As officiating associations make changes to help recruit and retain more sport officials, data needs to verify if the changes have a positive effect on sport officials' intention to continue. For example, do former or current athletes spend more years officiating than other sport officials? Does improved and continued training, through the use of a mentor, reduce the attrition rate from year 1 to year 2? Future studies can document what type of individuals officiating associations are recruiting and how the way they are trained has changed, which could provide a template for other officiating associations struggling with sport official retention. It may be wise to examine sport officials from only one sport at a time. This may clarify what retention factors certain officiating associations need to focus on more than others depending on the sport.

### **Conclusions**

Studies have found that having a passion for the game and the social benefits of officiating are important factors in retaining sport officials. The research analyzed in this synthesis makes it clear that officiating associations are the biggest problem in sport official retention and therefore have to improve their policies and practices to help improve it. Recommendations include developing mentoring programs for new sport officials to ensure continued training, assigning games based on merit and organizing more social interactions for sport officials to ensure SOC. While the critical mass of

research suggests these ideas will increase sport official retention, future research is needed to understand the effectiveness of these strategies.

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## Appendix A

## Article Grid

Author	Title	Source	Purpose	Methods & Procedures	Analysis	Findings	Recommendations
Anshel, Kang & Jubenville (2013)	Sources of Acute Sport Stress Scale for Sports Officials: Rasch Calibration	Psychology of Sport & Exercise	Develop and calibrate the Sources of Acute Stress Scale for Sports Officials (SASS-SO) using the Rasch model	Surveyed 3871 HS sports officials about perceived intensity ratings for sources of stress experienced during game-situations	Means and standard deviations for the scores of the 13-item acute stress scale were compared	The results support using the SASS-SO to assess sources of acute stress among sports officials based on the officials' perceived stress intensity level	Referees receive instruction on time management practices. Other possible coping strategies such as disengagement/detachment and wishful thinking may help reduce emotional distress, but may eventually not resolve the stressful situation
Baldwin & Vallance (2016)	Community Based Rugby Referee's Experiences with Recruitment and Retention	International Sports Studies	Examine factors that influence the continuing participation of community-based rugby referees in NSW, Australia	Conducted 6 focus groups of 5 referees with discussions regarding why they started to and continue to referee	NVivo 10 qual. data analysis software to identify concepts and themes. Used coding/axial coding	Camaraderie, level of enjoyment and success experienced were factors in remaining involved	Referee associations need to promote social context, maintain strong levels and better reward referees to ensure continued involvement

Cuskelly & Hoye (2013)	Sports Officials' Intention to Continue	Sport Management Review	Explored the efficacy of organizational support aimed at increasing retention of early career referees (ECR)	Phases: Develop a survey, pilot study and a time-lagged quasi-experimental field-based study. 242 early career referees participated in last phase	Pre-and post-surveys examining mean and SD scores for intention to continue officiating and perceived organizational support (POS)	Organizational support had no effect on the intention of ECRs to continue officiating	Conduct similar study with larger sample group. Need to further develop and redefine the concept and measurement of organizational support. Qual. research methods may provide valuable insights
Forbes & Livingston (2013)	Changing the Call: Rethinking Attrition and Retention in the Ice Hockey Officiating Ranks	Sport in Society	Reexamining qualitative responses (from their 2 previous studies) that contributed to officiating dropout under the lens of POS	Examines literature that focuses on officiating attrition in ice hockey. Then reframes the problem through theory of perceived organizational support	Utilizing the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, a secondary analysis of the previous qualitative responses was done	Officials felt a high degree of marginalization from their local hockey associations and low levels of POS	Conceptualize the phenomenon as a product of the characteristics of the individual participants themselves and their interactions and experiences within the organizations they serve
Hancock, Dawson & Auger (2015)	Why Ref? Understanding Sports Officials'	Movement and Sports Sciences	Assess motivations to become	514 respondents to a 35-question	ANOVA. The mean score of the results for	Officials began and continued for intrinsic	Researchers can conduct in-depth investigations (e.g., interviews) with sport officials to gain a

	Motivations to Begin, Continue and Quit		and remain an official	survey targeting sport officials' reasons for beginning, continuing and terminating officiating in their respective sports	each item were examined between and within group differences	reasons. Officials differed in their motivations for quitting	deeper understanding of their motivations as they relate to retention and attrition.
Kellett & Shilbury (2007)	Umpire Participation: Is Abuse Really the Issue?	Sport Management Review	What Australian Rules football (ARF) umpires think about abusive behavior and find rewarding about umpiring	Interviewed 22 umpires of professional and semi-pro of ARF	NVivo software for themes and coding	Referees reframe abuse as part of job. Social interactions between referees is key reason for continuing	Social rewards of umpiring should be stressed in recruitment. Social world should be incorporated into umpire training and retention
Kellett & Warner (2011)	Creating Communities That Lead to Retention: The Social	European Sport Management Quarterly	Identify factors that lead to or detract from the	Interviewed 22 ARF umpires using a semi-	NVivo software and coding. Then independent researcher	Lack of Admin Consideration and Inequity impacted the	Beyond the boundaries of this study, more research is needed to determine if those who quit were

	Worlds and Communities of Umpires		sense of community (SOC) for umpires	structured approach	assisted in condensing codes to themes	development of a SOC	unable to find a sense of community
Livingston & Forbes (2016)	Factors Contributing to the Retention of Canadian Amateur Sport Officials	International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching	Understand what motivates individuals to remain active in officiating, their resilience, perceptions of the support they receive	1073 active officials from 37 different sports provided individual responses to resilience scale and survey of POS	Quant data – IBM Stats software and then standard deviation. Thematic analysis for qual. data	Officials were highly resilient compared to pop. norm, Younger officials had higher level of POS	Organizations should review their policies, processes, and practices, to understand why such differences exist and to create a more supportive environment
Livingston & Forbes (2017)	Resilience, Motivations for Participation, and Perceived Organizational Support Amongst Aesthetic Sports Officials	Journal of Sport Behavior	Examine resilience, participation motivations, and perceptions of organizational support for those officiating aesthetic sports	Seventy-six (62 females, 14 males) Canadian officials completed measures of resilience, motivation, and POS responses to a series of open-ended questions.	Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, Open-coding	Highly resilient and motivated to participate because of their love for the sport and desire to stay connected to the sports' social communities.	Sport administrators need to understand and recognize the importance of the social supports and communities that officials develop through participation

Ridinger, Kim, Warner & Tingle (2017)	Development of the Referee Retention Scale	Journal of Sport Management	To develop a valid and reliable instrument to measure variables that can predict referee retention	3 Phases (1) Instrument Development (2) Field Test (253 respondents) (3) Main Study, survey was sent to 979 referees from two state-level high school athletic associations	Exploratory factor analysis after Field Test. Confirmation factor analysis on refined Referee Retention Scale (RRS)	The referee experience is affected administrator consideration, intrinsic motives, mentoring, SOC, stress and continuing education.	A key retention factor is to develop procedures for assigning games that are fair and for administrators to consider the individual needs of each official.
Symonds & Russell (2018)	Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation of Small College Officials	Journal of Sport Behavior	Examine the motivations of sports officials from the National	1,461 NAIA officials completed an online survey containing demographic questions	Descriptive Statistics, MANOVA, ANOVA	Less exp. officials were higher on intrinsic motivation	It may benefit sport organizations to develop training programs, mentoring activities, and merit-based advancement

Warner, Tingle and Kellett (2013)	Officiating Attrition: The Experiences of Former Referees Via a Sport Development Lens	Journal of Sport Management	Examines the experiences of former referees so that managers can better understand strategies that might encourage more referees to be retained	15 former basketball referees from across the United States were interviewed over the phone or in-person. Officials were solicited through emails provided by a state association	Interviews were transcribed, and the data was coded. Green's sport development framework was used to organize the data	Referees experienced difficulties through the retention and advancement development stages which was linked to their eventual departure	Mentoring programs and creating social spaces for referees after games are simple solutions that sport managers can implement. More intentional and continual training, which addresses the requisite communication skills needed to deal with abuse, is needed
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