

# A Family Approach to Recruit, Train and Retain

By Tom Conroy

The shortage of sports officials has been felt throughout the country from major cities to small towns. In Franklin Furnace, Ohio — population 1,660 — basketball official Chris Meenach has noticed the growing dearth of officials.

To combat a growing crisis that could jeopardize the ability



Jacob (left) and Jayson (center) Meenach have joined their father, Chris, in officiating high school basketball.

of schools to hold games, Chris has taken to mentoring the next generation starting with those closest to him: his two sons. His younger son, Jacob, 24, works alongside his father at the high-school level, while his older son, Jayson, has quickly risen through the ranks and has made his first foray into collegiate officiating.

Jayson began officiating shortly after graduating high school, having spent his childhood watching his father, a 31-year veteran of football and basketball officiating. Eight years later, Jayson recently finished his first season as an NCAA D-III official and has several state high school tournament assignments under his belt.

"I'm extremely proud of what Jayson has accomplished," Chris said. "Selfishly, I'd like to keep working with him. But I know that the big picture is him advancing to higher levels."

The Meenach family knows the struggles of officiating all too well. According to Chris, the difficult assignments for new officials and a retention rate of less than 50 percent for first-year officials have contributed to the shortage in their area.

"New officials are often working lower levels where parents and fans can be out of control," Chris explained. "Everyone thinks it's so easy to do what we do while watching from the stands."

Chris attributes Jayson's success and fast rise to his calm demeanor and attention to detail.

"Jayson comes off with a laid-back personality when officiating. He's respectful to coaches and players and communicates well."

Even with his skill set, Jayson was as trepidatious as any young official might be during his first tournament assignment.

"He was definitely a little scared during his first tournament," Chris said. "But I told him what I tell every young official: 'Don't get discouraged by your first bad call or game.'"

Jayson splits his time between officiating basketball and working an overnight security job just over the border in Kentucky. His goal is to eventually become a full-time D-I official, or to go "as far as the job takes me."

"For some new officials, it's just another job and means to make money," Jayson said. "For me, officiating is about trying to preserve the integrity of the game and giving the kids a fair shake. I'm always looking for ways to improve. The sky's the limit with officiating if you stick with it."

Tom Conroy is Referee's assistant editor. □

## Staying in the Game



**Jordyn Keeney**  
Age: 21  
Cedar Bluffs, Neb.

Jordyn Keeney wanted to stay involved in basketball after playing in high school, so she followed in her father's footsteps and picked up officiating. Now a senior at Nebraska, Keeney keeps up a part-time officiating schedule at both the high school and small-college women's levels. Having previously played high school basketball, Keeney recognizes and appreciates the new perspective on the game in a way that she previously did not have as a player at Cedar Bluffs High School.

"Working as an official, I have a new appreciation for the game," Keeney said. "You just go out there and do the best job you can."

SOURCE: OMAHA.COM

## A Mother's Love for Her Son



**Christina Snead**  
Age: 41  
Godwin, N.C.

Christina Snead, the first woman to work a North Carolina high school state football championship game, has been playing sports almost her entire life, but a life-changing incident in 2003 led to donning officiating stripes for the first time.

While pregnant with her son Brandon, complications arose during birth that left Brandon with health issues that require around-the-clock care at a healthcare facility where he's been since he was three months old. Christina took up officiating shortly thereafter to help work through this difficult challenge. Fifteen years later, she still draws inspiration from Brandon whenever she steps on the field.

"He's my life. He's the one that pushes me," Snead said. "I tell him every time I see him, 'Never give up.'"

SOURCE: THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

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