

News Release
For Immediate Release

For more information:
Sara Soli, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer
612-817-1909
ssoli@nscsports.org

Referees needed – all sports, all levels!

Local youth, amateur, and professional sports leaders are collaborating to increase referee numbers and improve their experiences at games.

BLAINE, Minn. (1/7/2022) – The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission is leading a collaboration of local youth, amateur, and professional sports groups to address the ongoing situation facing sports today, the sheer lack of available referees.

The collaborative group is working under the Play Together MN name. Many members of this group recently worked together with guidance of the State of Minnesota to ensure safety and protocol during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Together we were able to create consistency and protect our youth athletes, referees and coaches during one of the most challenging times any of our organizations had faced,” said Todd Johnson, Executive Director of the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission. “And together we believe we can recruit more referees and provide them with the support and education to rebuild the depleted industry.”

Youth and amateur sports have continued to share in the ongoing trend from previous seasons where there were simply not enough certified referees available to cover games across the state. In the state of Minnesota, according to data provided by Minnesota Youth Soccer Association and Twin Cities Soccer Leagues, soccer referee registration is down 18% from 2019 and down 33% from the peak in 2009. The 18% decline in 2021 is the largest, by far, of any certification year on record. “Our organization is deeply committed to working with our member clubs to celebrate officiating as a critical part of the game. While the number of officials has declined in recent years, we are taking steps to reverse this trend and look forward to supporting officials who wish to embark on this journey in a variety of ways,” said Matt Tiano, Twin Cities Soccer Leagues.

Executive Director of Minnesota Hockey, Glen Andresen is straightforward, “The bottom line is that to play youth sports, we need officials. We are starting to see a severe drop in the number of officials in several areas of the state which has resulted in the cancellation of games. It’s imperative that we do everything we can to make sure our officials are respected and welcomed if we want them to keep our kids playing and keep them safe.”

The referee shortage is impacting all levels of youth and amateur sports. In a St. Paul Parks & Rec 2021 adult softball league, only 32 out of 154 games had an umpire. So far in their winter basketball league, there were not enough referees for approximately 25% of their scheduled games.



“North Country Region is fortunate to have some of the best volleyball officials in the nation reside in Minnesota. Unfortunately, multiple outside factors have driven some of our volleyball officials away from the game including parents who are threatening, coaches who overstep and bully, and an overall negative atmosphere around our youth sports,” said Beth Modaff, Officials Coordinator for North Country Region – USA Volleyball. “These factors, especially, have also resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of new officials. North Country Region is working diligently to promote all the positive aspects of officiating and support and protect our officials so that we can continue to see our cadre of officials grow and thrive.”

“MYAS serves as the central clearinghouse for youth sports in Minnesota, specifically in baseball, basketball, and football. Since the start of the pandemic, it has become increasingly more difficult to provide coverage for the designated assignors that MYAS works directly with in the sports we serve. We have seen a significant drop in the overall roster of umpires that work youth baseball games,” said Dawson Blanck, Executive Director, Minnesota Youth Athletic Services.

There are many benefits to becoming a referee. Regardless of sport, the position has great flexibility, income opportunity, and is a way to stay connected to sport. Referees can also develop important skills like leadership, relationship building, effective communication, punctuality, situation management and conflict resolution.

Play Together MN has a website for those interested in becoming a referee: (<https://www.mnsports.org/resources/become-an-official/>). Additionally, the group will be hosting a one-day Referee Expo in February at the National Sports Center. This will include a panel of experts to help show the value and impact referees add to the game.

Play Together MN Members (including but not limited to):

Minnesota Youth Athletic Services	Minnesota Recreation & Park Association
Minnesota Youth Soccer Association	Minnesota Hockey
Twin Cities Soccer Leagues	Minnesota Ice Arena Managers Association
USA Volleyball North Country Region	National Sports Center
Minnesota Twins	Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission
St. Paul Saints	

Benefits of Becoming a Referee:

1. Stay close with the sport(s) you love
2. Great way to stay physically active
3. Teaches you discipline and patience
4. Get into a great network of professionals
5. You get paid well for your time

Referee Expo for those interested in learning more

Where: The National Sports Center, Welcome Center, 1700 105th Ave. NE, Blaine, MN 55449

When: 9:00-11:30AM on Saturday, February 12, 2022

What: Speak with youth sports groups recruiting referees and listen to a panel of referees, athletes, and professional sports staff discuss the importance of referees in sports.