

Protecting the Zebras

Alumnus Alan Goldberger, an attorney and lifelong referee of amateur sports, advocates for officials who, in this day of hypercompetition, are often under threat.

By the time Alan Goldberger entered law school, he was already officiating high school football, baseball, and basketball games. Four decades later, he has combined two of his passions and emerged as a leading authority on the legal rights of sports officials.

As Goldberger CLAW'74 sees it, officials today, from Little League to the major leagues, face greater liabilities—to say nothing of physical threats—than at any other time. All 50 states now have rules that dictate when a player may reenter a game following a concussion. New Jersey passed a rule last year forbidding high school athletes from baiting an opponent with discriminatory remarks. Athletes so accused can be disqualified from the game and receive a two-game suspension. Those decisions, of course, rest with the presiding officials.

“They’re under a microscope of constant instant replay and YouTube and public sniping,” says Goldberger, citing last year’s killing of a volunteer soccer official in Utah. “Anything in the way of bad sportsmanship that appears on television on Friday night will undoubtedly be duplicated at youth sports on Saturday.”

Goldberger is the author of *Sports Officiating: A Legal Guide* (Referee Enterprises, 2007) and coauthor of *Sport, Physical Activity, and the Law* (Sagamore Publishing, 2002), a college textbook. He frequently defends sports organizations, officials, and coaches, and he counsels national sports and officiating organizations. And he’s a regular speaker at annual conferences conducted by the International Association of Approved Basketball Officials, the American Bar Association, and the National Association of Sports Officials, which in 2011 honored Goldberger for his contributions to the officiating profession.

“The bottom line,” he says, “is that the officials have saved more lives and prevented more fights and made more games safe, fun, and fair than everybody else in the sports industry combined.”

— Christopher Hann



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