

Nova Scotia

N.S. minor basketball league bans spectators for the weekend due to abuse of officials

Dozens of officials have quit over the last year



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A minor basketball league in Nova Scotia is banning spectators from games this weekend after repeated incidents of abusive behaviour toward officials. (tothzoi001/Shutterstock)

The Metro Basketball Association, a minor basketball organization in Nova Scotia, is banning spectators from weekend games in an effort to educate coaches and parents about their behaviour toward officials.

Chris Lurette, the league manager, said there has been an increase in "concerning behaviour" each week since the beginning of the season.

"These incidents seem to have become too common in our gyms each weekend, and we need to curb this behaviour immediately," Lurette said in a letter distributed to all teams.

Banning all fans from the games will be strictly enforced as officials have been asked not to start games if anyone else is in the gym other than those listed on game sheets.

"The disrespect shown week in and week out toward officials and facilities is unexplainable," stated Lurette. "For those parents and spectators who have decided to yell at an official or a school custodian, we hope that this weekend offers an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of their behaviour."

In the letter, Lurette says the incidents have had a direct impact on the association with 12 officials opting to stop officiating this season. Another 25 officials did not come back from last year.

"Abuse of officials is just becoming more severe and there are more occurrences that are happening, almost to the point that it is becoming normal," said Matt Boyle, a veteran basketball referee who is the Halifax-area assigner for officials. "The rate of these incidents is alarming and this step the organization is taking is to spread some awareness."

Wide array of abuse

Boyle says the issue of abuse of officials is very serious and there has been a wide variety of it.

"Officials are physically being abused or bullied, there have been threats of physical abuse after games," said Boyle. "People have even been labelled racist and those kinds of comments are super harmful on people's mental health."

Boyle says last weekend there were eight instances where spectators had to be removed from the gym.

The rate of incidents has become alarming. In 250 games, there have been over 50 complaints filed regarding coach and fan behaviour.

Reaction mixed

Parents have had mixed reactions. Stephen Wentzell's daughter plays with the Cole Harbour Rockets.

"When I first heard about it I was actually very upset because I was going to miss my daughter's game, and those games on Saturday have kind of become my favourite thing that happens all week," said Wentzell, whose daughter just started playing in the league this year.

"But after thinking about it a bit I think I'm totally on board with this drastic measure to try and get it under control. Something had to be done."

Kelsey Green has coached in the league and has had three kids play in it, including one that still plays. He does not support banning parents from games.

"I think it's heavy-handed and poorly thought out," Green said. "I've been in gyms for years and I haven't seen anything that would lead me to believe all parents should be banned."

Comments 'way over the top'

Ed McHugh has refereed over 4,700 games over 51 years and is still officiating. He supports banning parents from games for a weekend.

"The comments are personal and they're hurtful, and they're abusive. They aren't just parents saying, 'Hey ref, you missed a travel.' The language is far worse and it's way over the top, full of anger."

When play resumes in the new year, spectators will again be allowed into the gym, but the situation will be monitored closely to see if further action is required.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Paul Palmeter is an award-winning video journalist born and raised in the Annapolis Valley. He has covered news and sports stories across Nova Scotia for 30 years.