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BALTIMORE SUN

Keeping score important, sometimes thankless task

By Zack Newman and howardcountysports@patuxent.com
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Don Shea (left) and Tyson Laverick keep score during an Oakland Mills JV girls basketball game against Glenelg on Feb. 6.

Don Shea (left) and Tyson Laverick keep score during an Oakland Mills JV girls basketball game against Glenelg on Feb. 6. (Staff photo by Sarah Pastrana)



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Having spent the greater part of four decades roaming the sidelines at Oakland Mills, guiding the school's boys soccer program to eight state championships, Don Shea has been through more than his fair share of pressure situations.

So during those offseason months, when he takes his seat courtside at Oakland Mills as the official scorekeeper during basketball games and wrestling matches, it's no surprise that he's as calm and collected as they come.

"As long as you dot your 'i's' and cross your 't's,' you are invisible," Shea says. "There's not much pressure."

For as much as Shea may downplay it, though, his role, in conjunction with the other individuals at the scorer's table, is an integral one.

Between the scorekeeper and bookkeepers, they are responsible for recording every detail, from substitutions to points to fouls and everything in between.

"There are only a few people within the entire gym that watch every second of every play," Shea said.

"Even coaches will turn around and talk to their players. The only people that watch every play is [the bookkeeper] and I. We have to watch every possible thing."

Shea has been an Oakland Mills scorekeeper for more than 10 years now and said he's found that communication is the most important thing at the table.

"You get darn paranoid to make sure that the people taking the books notice what's going on," Shea said.

"We'll talk to make sure. Like 'That's the third team foul, right? (or) Hey you got the score, 18-16, right? Do we agree?' ... The more talking you do at the table, the easier it goes."

Marriotts Ridge senior Christina Mathis kept the book for the Mustangs' girls varsity basketball team for two years.

"You have to keep up with what the referees say, what's happening on the floor, to keep up with the people doing the clock and talk to the coach," she said. "So you have to communicate with a lot of people during the game and keep track of absolutely everyone. It's not an easy job."

With the level of difficulty, each bookkeeper and scorekeeper must have their own motivation to do a job that provides little material reward.

The bookkeepers are generally student volunteers. The scorekeepers, according to Shea, are paid \$37.42 per game.

For Atholton scorekeeper Scott Brenfleck, 39, it's the thrill of the competition that keeps him coming back.

"The best part of it is being here in the environment and enjoying the atmosphere," Brenfleck said. "There have been a couple close Friday night games; it's just exciting to be here. It's nice to see the Atholton crowd get into it and cheer on the team and to see school spirit."

Brenfleck teaches art and photography classes at Atholton High School and has been keeping the scoreboard in line for home basketball games for 14 years.

Shea keeps the scoreboard in check at Oakland Mills when he's not coaching or teaching Native American Studies and sociology. Shea said that his position as scorekeeper allows him to connect with the students in his class.

"You can make a connection with the kids who are on the wrestling team; you can make a connection with all of the kids who come to the games," he said.

For others, it's a way to stay involved with the sport they love.

Mathis played basketball for two years for Marriotts Ridge, but a torn hamstring her sophomore year and other medical issues prevented her from returning.

"It's my favorite sport, and if I can't physically be a part of it I might as well be here in a way that's helping other players," she said. "The best part of this is still being able to be part of the team without actually playing and being able to be with my friends that I played with for two years."

Being at the scorer's table doesn't yield much in the way of positive recognition, but it can bring criticism. Brenfleck says you have to develop thick skin.

"When it's a close game, and there's only three or four seconds on the clock, it gets really hairy," he said.

"If some sort of mistake happens, you just miss something, or there's some error with the equipment, people are all over you."

But as Mathis points out, the experience is well worth it.

Learning to be responsible and accountable, along with having to coordinate schedules with the team's other bookkeepers, has taught her lessons she'll be able to use down the road.

"You learn to be responsible in general and keeping your time in a way that is manageable, which is definitely going to help in college," she said.



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