

MEN IN STRIPES

referees underappreciated by teams and fans

BY CALVIN FREEMAN

I don't think people realize how much referees care...I've lost sleep over games where I thought I didn't do a very good job."

This is what Shawnee Mission South's Athletic Director of four years and counting, John Johnson, had to say when talking about his experience as an official. Johnson is a retired referee who spent 28 years in the business. He officiated a number of sports at a variety of levels but mainly worked in football and basketball. Johnson spent the majority of his career calling high school games that went as high as the 6A state tournaments but also put some time in at JUCOs and lower level Big 8 games (now the Big 12.) Johnson eventually stopped officiating so he could watch his son play and for other family reasons.

"It was a way of staying connected to the games," Johnson said. "I miss it, I really miss it."

As far as Shawnee Mission South's direct involvement with officials, the connection goes even further than the AD's office. The Sunflower League recently adopted a new commissioner by the name of John Dehan. Dehan is an SMS graduate from the class of '83. As the Director of Officials, Dehan became the boss just this year following the retirement of Mike Etnire. Etnire held the spot for over 20 years. According to the *KC Star*, Dehan has already shown that he is passionate about what he does and has high expectations for all officials in the Sunflower League.

"No matter the level of the game, that is the most important game these kids have that day, and we as officials should treat it like the Super Bowl, World Series or the Final Four," Dehan told *The Star*.

Refereeing is something that any student even mildly involved with sports has some degree of interest in, whether it be yelling at the men in stripes from the stands or actually being a referee part time themselves. In a recent survey, "referee" was the fourth most popular kind of occupation held by employed students at SMS.



PHOTO BY HANNAH HOLLANDER

Sophomore baseball player Matt Cashman started umpiring at the 3&2 baseball fields two summers ago and admits, that while it can be frustrating, it was something that he enjoyed doing and helped him gain perspective on how difficult the job can be.

"It was pretty decent money and yeah, sometimes the little kids and parents were a real pain, but, it was nice having a job that was outside and had something to do with baseball," Cashman said.

In the end, it is their job and varsity officials make \$75 a game, but it's a little far-fetched to think that they do it simply for the money. Umpires generally seem to be out there because they are interested in the sport that they're calling and in the heat of the moment, that can easily be forgotten. Johnson acknowledges that it's "the nature of the fan" to dislike and demand perfection from officials but it's also important for the two sides to make an effort to "humanize" with each other. The message that Johnson is trying to spread to every student and Crowd Control member is that referees are people too, and they're involved because it matters to them and they're also trying to enjoy the game, just in a different way.