

OFFICIAL STATEMENT

BY MARK KNUDSON

The Gold Crown Foundation is changing the way games are played – and called

If you've ever met our Irv Brown, a former NCAA basketball referee and one half of the "Deans of Denver Sports" (along with talk show partner Joe Williams), chances are he's asked you these two questions:

"Where'd you play ball?" and "Do you want to officiate?"

Irv thinks anyone with an interest in sports should follow his footsteps and take a look at getting into the best-paying part-time job available – becoming a referee. He might be right. Count former Denver Nuggets player and head coach Bill Hanzlik among the believers.

Besides being well known from his playing and coaching days, and from his TV work on Altitude Sports, Hanzlik's passion for the game has served thousands of young athletes since 1986 – that's when he and business partner Ray Baker introduced the non-profit Gold Crown Foundation.

When Gold Crown programs began, Hanzlik and Baker set out "to fill a void." Several school districts around the region were downgrading or even discontinuing sports at the middle school level. Lots of kids didn't have schools to play for any longer. Gold Crown made certain

they had a team. While basketball was always the main focus, Gold Crown stepped up and created leagues for volleyball players, as well as outlets for golf and lacrosse. They built the Gold Crown Field House and with the help of the Colorado Rockies and sponsors put up the baseball field "All Star Park" in Lakewood. They currently service more than 20,000 young athletes every year.

In more recent years, Hanzlik and his team at Gold Crown have seen another void in need of filling, one that "was only going to get worse," he said. They saw a serious lack of well-trained game ▶

GOLD CROWN



FOUNDATION



MICAH PAULDINO,
DIRECTOR OF SPORTS OFFICIALS
FOR GOLD CROWN OFFICIATING

est. **1986**

- YOUTH SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NEARLY 20,000 BOYS AND GIRLS



officials. In 2012, Gold Crown decided to take a dramatic step to do something about it.

"We've always been about looking at what's going on, what could we potentially have a problem with," Hanzlik recalls. "We control the facility, have leagues, and all that. No problem. The one issue that we were subbing out was the refereeing. We just didn't like the thought of not being more in control of some development, [including] who's going to be there, the follow up after a game and all that. So we brought it in house."

Gold Crown joined forces with Micah Pauldino, a 10-year veteran high school and college basketball official who – while still actively working college games himself – was assigning youth

area game refs through his company, Mile High Sports Officials. Through Gold Crown, Pauldino is now assigning game officials for six different sports.

"Our niche is basketball," Pauldino notes, "But it's usually a middle school athletic director who has five different sports, and he doesn't want to have to make five different phone calls. So we've taken on the job of doing all their sports."

With what Hanzlik called "a gazillion games" going on at Gold Crown Field House and elsewhere, the demand for quality game officials was continually rising. The problem from his standpoint was that too few of these game officials had any sort of proper training before stepping on the court.

"These folks are thinking about becoming referees," Hanzlik said as he described the lack of training local, would-be officials received prior to Gold Crown getting involved. "And it's 'How do you become a referee?' Then it was 'read this book, let me know when you're done, and we'll put you on a game.' Basically zero professional development."

With Pauldino in the fold, Hanzlik and Gold Crown executive director Kevin Petty monitored the first-year progress of the program during its trial run and liked what was happening. The quality and overall professionalism of the game officials showed noticeable improvement. They decided to go full steam ahead. Pauldino's company became part of Gold Crown. ▶

GOLD CROWN FOUNDATION A BRIEF HISTORY

- 1986** Founded in 1986 to offer girls basketball camps
- 1994** Expanded to year-round basketball operations
- 1998** Opened Coca-Cola All Star Park in Lakewood, Colo.
- 1999** Added junior golf programs
- 2000** Added volleyball programs
- 2002** Broke ground on Gold Crown Field House
- 2003** Added technology and art classes, the first "non-sports" programming
- 2003** Opened Gold Crown Field House

“Officiating is one of the biggest cost components of running youth sports anything,” Petty notes. “For us, with the volume of games that we do, it started to make sense from a cost control perspective – that and we thought we could make an impact on the quality of officials.”

Gold Crown pays entry-level game officials over \$20 per game, with games typically lasting less than an hour. With that many games going on, it’s a strain on the budget for a non-profit.

“It’s not a money maker for us; it’s not,” Hanzlik emphasized. “We’re in the red on this, but it’s that important to us.”

While they aren’t making money, having more control of the expense is a benefit to the foundation.

The idea was important enough to enlist the expertise of not only Pauldino, but of veteran football and basketball official Randy Campbell and his staff of game officials from the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference, along with NBA referee advisor Jim Wischmeyer, to help train and evaluate the new referees. As things progressed, Gold Crown saw their efforts gaining more and more traction. They launched the Gold Crown Officiating Academy, which consists of three-day camps that prepare young would-be referees for all that the job entails. The next one comes up in December.

“We go Friday night, Saturday and Sunday,” Hanzlik says. “It’s everything about becoming an official. Conflict resolution, on-the-court training, and all the technical things you need. And during that weekend on Sunday you’ll actually shadow an experienced official. You’ll run a game with him. The next step is

you’ll actually referee a game with an experienced official and that official will ‘rate’ you and you’ll actually make some money while you’re shadowing.

“This whole evolution of professional development is what we’re about.”

Gold Crown also holds clinics and employs other ratings systems that help these startup refs gradually improve and earn a higher-paying status. The development process never stops.

“We’re a full-service officiating service,” Petty notes. “We don’t just assign officials to games.”

“Eventually our goal is to be the provider for high school games,” Hanzlik stated. The Colorado High School Activities Association is very much on board with the idea and is monitoring the progress. “High school games have a problem, too, because it’s a good ‘ol boy network. It needs to have more of a ratings system.”

As part of the effort to reach this goal, Gold Crown has ventured where no others have gone before. They convinced the administration at Metro State University

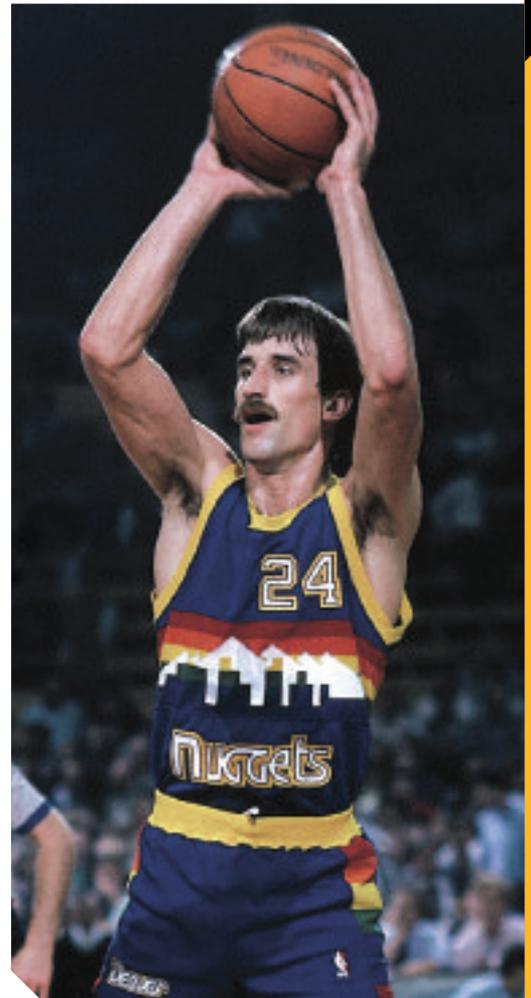
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IT’S EVERYTHING ABOUT
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THINGS YOU NEED.

– **BILL HANZLIK**

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to work with them and begin offering an actual two-credit college course on basketball officiating. The “Gold Crown Basketball Officiating Class” is offered each fall at MSU and has a dozen or so students enrolled this term. Nuggets GM Tim Connelly and RMAC Commissioner Chris Graham are among the numerous featured speakers in the class.

“Micah started looking at some of the colleges, and saying, ‘college kids, hmm...’ So I said, ‘Hey, let’s try to teach a course down at Metro,’” Hanzlik – who is a trustee at the school – recalls. “So now we have a two-credit class that’s going on right now. We ▶



have 16 kids signed up for it; it's 13 weeks and meets Tuesday and Thursdays. Micah has done a great job with it. We're doing stuff on court and the whole thing. It's difficult, but if you go through this class right, once you take and pass that test you're certified to referee high school basketball in 45 states."

When a new official has passed the Gold Crown Officiating Academy training or the Metro class, they also get a patch to put on their striped shirt to display their certification. "We want to brand it, a brand that has a little meaning," Hanzlik says.

"We're providing employment opportunities," Petty adds. "So one of the things that's important is we're showing these guys how to be good employees at 17, 18, 19 years old. Hopefully some of them stick with it for 10 years, but if not, hopefully in the two or three years that they did work, they've gained some sort of skill that's going to help them wherever else they go. It's no different than some of the life skills we try to instill in our participants."

The first GCOA grad to take big steps in a potential officiating career is former Highland's Ranch player Faye Muller, who played collegiately at UNLV. Muller began doing youth games for Gold Crown and is now working the junior college ranks. "It's just a matter of time for her," notes Pauldino.

One of the young people Gold Crown is most proud of is Trevor Coffman, a senior on the Legacy High School basketball team who has gone through the officials program and is working games as a part-time job.

"The Gold Crown classes really helped me truly understand the rules and helped



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me go from looking at the game from a player's perspective to a ref's perspective," Coffman said. "Working with experienced officials helped me learn how to take the skills I learned in training and apply them to real life situations."

Coffman bought his first car last December after earning more than \$3,000 from Gold Crown.

Gold Crown is now responsible for providing officials for upwards of 30,000 games every year from their pool of nearly 1,000 certified refs. An official that works multiple sports on a part-time, year-round basis can earn around \$30,000 for a calendar year. They're actively looking for more young people like Coffman to participate.

"More so than wanting to corner the market," Petty says, "I want to disrupt this. I want the officiating to be a different landscape than it's been traditionally. When you just go with the traditional 'put a warm body out there with a whistle' it's becomes kind of a nasty place. And it shouldn't be. It should be part of what youth sports as a whole is all about." **MHS**

ANYONE INTERESTED IN BECOMING PART OF GOLD CROWN'S OFFICIATING PROGRAM SHOULD VISIT GOLDCROWNOFFICIATING.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION.