

Library to focus on civility at ball field

Mediator and referee will discuss how fans can control emotions during games

By **JANENE HOLZBERG**
For The Baltimore Sun

When her younger daughter was playing college soccer and her husband was working as a referee, Cecilia "CeeCee" Paizs witnessed the same scenario many times from the sidelines:

Parents, furious over a bad call, would yell at officials, players and other parents during their children's sporting events.



Cecilia Paizs

"My own husband even yellow-carded me once under the 'hothead rule,'" she said, referring to a caution warning for unsportsmanlike behavior. Paizs, a mediator and family law attorney, said

her warning came after she loudly objected when a player grabbed another player from behind and swung them off the field.

To help parents learn to step back and assess their actions with cool heads, Paizs will present "Conflict Resolution Techniques on the Sidelines" at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Miller library branch. The talk is part of a continuing Choose Civility initiative on sports.

A week later, at 7 p.m. Feb. 10, NFL referee Terry McAulay will speak on "Emotional Intelligence in Sports" at the Miller branch. The title, he said, can be an oxymoron.

"Spontaneous emotional reaction is one of the great things about sports and it's something that's always been there, and I think that's OK, though we know there
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Terry McAulay is in his 17th year as an NFL

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 must be limits," McAulay said.
 Christie Lassen, the county library's public relations director, said a 2013 survey of Choose Civility symposium attendees showed demand for addressing civility in sports.

"It's about changing the culture of sports, and that will take time," Lassen said. "Our goal [at the library] is always to be the beginning of a conversation and to see that the conversation continues."

Paizs, who owns and operates the Mediation Center, an Ellicott City law firm on Courthouse Drive, says, "Parents have difficulty seeing a game for what it is instead of through their eyes as a parent.

"Where you're looking makes a difference to what you see," she said, noting most people are focusing on their own kid.

"If a referee's attention is drawn to the right and the offense you witnessed occurred on the left, it's not going to get called," she said. "Mistakes are made; it's part of the game."

Paizs said she came to be a mediator in a peculiar way.

"I was working in 1999 with a private investigator in Canada on an international kidnapping case — in which my clients' 7-year-old daughter was eventually returned — and that company was mediating over the Internet, so I decided to take a course," she said.

Years later, she decided to make mediation an integral part of her family law practice. She currently is serving as council

chairwoman of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Section of the Maryland State Bar Association.

"Mediators are often attorneys and retired judges who are looking for less confrontational methods" with which to resolve conflicts, she said.

Paizs said she will suggest during her talk that parents either make mental notes or type reminders on their smartphones about infractions they observe while watching a game, and wait to resolve their disputes at a later time, when emotions are in check.

"I've never seen a referee change a call due to a parent yelling at them," she said. "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."

She also said she favors having a point-of-contact parent assigned to hear grievances at games, a practice she said has been implemented by the Washington Area Girls Soccer League to discourage rude behavior.

But Paizs foresees a major obstacle to delivering her message: "The people who need to hear this [talk] the most and to learn how to use nondefensive language probably aren't going to come," she said, since they don't realize they have an attitude problem or behavioral issue that could affect their children.

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Cecilia "Cee-Cee" Paizs

parents do" and could end up modeling this unacceptable behavior in other aspects of their lives — in school, on the job, or with their friends, she said.

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McAulay, a Glenwood resident and former NSA software engineer, has a slightly different take on managing the passion exhibited by spectators in professional sports.

"If we try to sanitize or eliminate human reaction we won't be successful. It's an opportunity to release yourself from your day-to-day problems," said McAulay, who's in his 38th year of officiating and his 17th season with the NFL.

He also serves as coordinator of football officials for the American Athletic Conference.

McAulay, who will give a slide presentation and play videos of college and NFL games to illustrate his talk, said his experience as an NFL referee is "from a world that very few people have insight into."

He plans to "talk about what we do and

how we do it."

"What happens on the field filters down to the audience and can intensify poor reaction by fans," he said.

"It's up to [us officials] to manage the high emotions of the participants. These are the greatest athletes in the world playing in unbelievably emotional circumstances, and they sometimes come within an eyelash of getting out of control.

"It's very important to keep them focused, which we do sometimes with a smile, sometimes with a stern look, or with nice words or firm words," he said. "The players know what we're supposed to do, and they expect us to do it."

"Creating a positive environment goes a long way" toward achieving the right tone in professional sports, he said, "but we can't dictate what people [in the stands] say and do."

Both speakers will take questions from the audience after their presentations, which are suitable for all ages.

For more information or to complete required preregistration for these events, contact the Miller branch at 410-313-1950 or go to hclibrary.org.



Terry McAulay