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# Referees rally around colleague Mike Cashman

*By [Mike Cane](#), Herald Writer*

The first time someone encouraged Mike Cashman to become a basketball official, Cashman was repulsed.

"I can't stand those guys," thought Cashman, recalling his days as a basketball player and coach. "That'd be the last thing I'd ever do."

But Cashman ultimately gave in, at first promising himself that officiating would merely be a convenient way to rehabilitate an injured knee. A decade later, after developing unbreakable bonds, he feels much differently about the value of officials.

When Cashman started officiating, he immediately learned how difficult it is. He had no idea how much knowledge and preventative work the job required, he said.

Something else astonished him too.

"The thing that surprised me the most, that I wasn't prepared for," Cashman said, fighting back tears and a quavering voice during an interview last week, "is just the camaraderie that these guys have. These guys are really like a family."

Known for his side-splitting sense of humor and genuine compassion for others, Cashman is a beloved member of the local officiating family. If he were healthy, this winter would be Cashman's 10th consecutive season officiating youth basketball in Snohomish County. But a debilitating injury caused by a faulty artificial hip has left the Everett resident hoping he will eventually be able to walk normally again, and unsure if he will ever officiate another game.

Since May 2009, Cashman has endured numerous surgeries related to his ailing hip. The process started simply enough with a standard hip replacement procedure. Everything seemed fine. Cashman, who runs a magazine marketing business, officiated his normal load of games during the 2009-2010 high school

season.

However, in May 2010 Cashman suffered three extremely painful, unusual hip dislocations in a two-week span. The next month, Cashman went in for another surgery — to replace the first artificial hip with a different one — and doctors discovered something terrible: The original fake hip was defective.

The result was a severe infection and the destruction of tissue surrounding Cashman's hip. Warned by his local doctor that further complications could result in paralysis or even death, Cashman went to the world-renowned Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

In late July, Cashman had a device called a spacer — not an actual fake hip — implanted. Since then he's been taking daily doses of antibiotics to fight off infection and getting weekly blood tests. Cashman is scheduled to return to the Mayo Clinic on Oct. 20, where one final hip surgery, he hopes, will fix the problem once and for all.

While Cashman's health is improving, his mounting medical bills are overwhelming. He expects that his out-of-pocket costs related to the hip problem will approach six figures, most of it stemming from the Mayo Clinic surgeries. A lawsuit is pending against the manufacturer of the defective hip, which has since been recalled, but it will likely take several years to reach a settlement, said Cashman.

In his time of need, Cashman's officiating family stepped in to help. A benefit dinner to help Cashman pay his enormous medical expenses is set for 5 to 10 p.m. Thursday at Shawn O'Donnell's American Grill & Irish Pub (122 128th Street SE, Everett). Seattle-area radio personality Pat Cashman, Mike Cashman's brother, will host the event.

Longtime local basketball official Kevin Erickson, a past president of the Snohomish County Boys Basketball Officials Association, helped plan and promote the benefit for Cashman. Erickson called Cashman the backbone of the association.

"I think it's just his caring and empathy for everybody" that make people appreciate Cashman, Erickson said. "When you first meet him you get his humor and you go, 'Oh my god! This guy is funny.'

"But when you get to know him, underneath that is this kind, compassionate person."

Cashman is among the best, most consistent officials in the area, Mountlake Terrace High School boys basketball coach Nalin Sood said.

“I wish there were more people like Mike Cashman,” coach Sood said. “He is the face of Snohomish County basketball officials.”

The Hawks coach also praised Cashman for his constant generosity and kindness. After Sood's mom died of brain cancer last year, whenever Cashman officiated a Mountlake Terrace game he made a point of striking up a conversation with Sood's grieving father.

Based on Cashman's impressive credentials as a player — Cashman was an honorable mention All-American and Hall of Fame inductee at Willamette University, was drafted by the Los Angeles Lakers in 1975 and played two seasons of pro ball in Belgium — it would be easy for the 6-foot-5 Bend, Ore., native to draw attention to himself. He rarely does.

“He's always about others,” Sood added. “It's about time something is about Mike.”

At first, Cashman rejected the idea of a benefit in his honor. However, in the end, he agreed to it, partly because he will get a rare chance to see many former players and students he got to know when he taught and coached basketball at Lake Washington High in Kirkland.

The way local officials rallied around Cashman is “pretty phenomenal,” Cashman said. “It's unbelievable, to the point of almost embarrassing.”

Although his physical condition won't allow him to officiate this winter, Cashman was elected by peers to be president of the local girls basketball officials association, an administrative role.

Following his next surgery in Minnesota, Cashman, who currently walks with a cane, hopes to regain some normalcy in his life.

Will he ever officiate again?

“I hope so,” said Cashman. “I have every desire to.”

*Mike Cane: [mcane@heraldnet.com](mailto:mcane@heraldnet.com). Check out the prep sports blog Double Team at [www.heraldnet.com/doubleteam](http://www.heraldnet.com/doubleteam) and follow Cane on Twitter at*

*MikeCaneHerald.*

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