

# Pushed to the limit

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Maybe this week Richard Thomsen can catch up on his sleep.

When the blizzard blew into southern Alberta Wednesday night, Thomsen, who works for the City of Lethbridge, was kept up all night sanding the roads in and around the city.

"I slept for maybe four hours and then had to be up again and out in Raymond first thing in the morning," recalled Thomsen, who doubles as a basketball official, one that was kept hopping this week with three tournaments in the area.

Thomsen and his colleagues were dashing through the snow the last three days to the Raymond Sugar Bowl, the Magrath Christmas Classic and the Lethbridge Community College Kodiak women's Classic. Fifty-one games were played at the three venues, with the last contest wrapping up Saturday afternoon at the LCC.

With fewer referees working in southern Alberta, Thomsen and company were spread thin.

"We're down to maybe 20 bodies this week," Thomsen noted, adding some guys are on holidays and busy with family over Christmas. "Way back when, the Sugar Bowl was the only thing happening during the week. There was no problem covering that, but now there's so much more going on. And again, there's not enough bodies to cover it all."

Ordinarily this region would deploy 55-60 officials over the hectic basketball season. However, numbers this year are down somewhat and only 48 refs are working games anywhere south of Calgary and from the B.C. border to the Saskatchewan border.

# Basketball officials logging long hours

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"For some games it sure would be nice," Fettig said. "Raymond, Cardston, Magrath and LCI, even W.R. Myers in Taber, they all like to run. Run, run, run. And at the high school level they're still out of control some of the time so there's a lot of turnovers and bumps and contact. And when you're racing to keep up to them you might not be in the right place to make a call. It would be a lot easier with three."

Thomsen added: "We've had three for most of the finals of these (Christmas) tournaments the last five years, and we'd like to have that all the time but there's just not enough bodies."

Both Thomsen and Fettig pleaded that their profession is in demand for younger, fresher officials. Both hint to former college and university players to get involved in reffing once their playing days are over.

"People have it in their head that everybody is

screaming at us and yelling at us during the game," Fettig said. "They might be screaming at us, but we don't hear that. Every once and a while a coach will go over the line and you'll have to deal with that. But we all know it's nothing personal and that's it's part of the game."

However, Thomsen said sometimes enough is enough.

"Maybe we do need to follow the hockey thing where if a parent is too much we just have to show them the door and get rid of them," he said. "Maybe that would get some of the younger kids interested in officiating, because once you get into it it can be really fun."

A senior official in southern Alberta will work anywhere from 100-120 games a season.

"Say you do a game out in Milk River. That's at least an hour's drive each way, so by the time you get out of the gym and back home you're looking at after midnight until you get to bed," Fettig explained. "Morning comes pretty early."

"December is always a bit busier than the other months," explained Bob Fettig, a veteran official of 28 years. "But you don't really think about it that much, maybe because we don't have time to think about it. Yeah, we're busy. But if I wasn't doing this then what else what I be doing?"

Refereeing basketball games nearly every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday night have been a ritual for Fettig for nearly three decades, having travelled thousands of kilometres across southern Alberta from Milk River to Vulcan to Medicine Hat to Crownsnest Pass.

"It's so much fun being around the kids," said the senior official. "That's why the coaches are here and that's why we're here. We're not here for the moms and dads or the coaches. We're here for the kids, and the student-athletes today are really good kids."

And they're becoming better athletes, too. They don't make high school athletes like they used to, with the size and athleticism of some of the players today — especially in these parts. While men's games at university and college level see a three-person officiating crew, both Thomsen and Fettig agreed some of the 4A boys' games in high school should introduce a three-person crew.

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