

While the focus of the Commonwealth Games is rightfully pointed toward the competitors who make the events what they are, there is a workforce of people who are necessary in order to hold the team sport tournaments.

They are the officials, without whom most competitions would not be possible.

Coordinating the small army of people who referee the basketball games is Charles Redd.

Imagine recruiting and assigning men and women to officiate between 210 and 250 basketball games held in a span of just over 48 hours. It's a tall task, but one Redd enjoys.

A basketball official himself who lives in Roanoke, Redd calls high school, recreation and AAU basketball throughout the year. He's been treading the hardwood for 48 years.

"I love it," Charles says of officiating basketball. "You couldn't do it if you didn't love it."

The Commonwealth Games is one of the few tournaments where he does not don stripes and a whistle and take to the court.

"I get to every court at least twice a day. I talk to the guys, find out if they have everything they need. I fill in on the table if someone working there needs a break," he says.

Redd coordinates 87 on-court officials and 10 clock operators. He also handles the Commonwealth Games track and field meet.

Making it to all the courts is much easier now that the Games are held at Liberty University. When Redd started coordinating basketball officials for the Games, basketball courts were used in schools in and around Roanoke, from Glenvar in western Roanoke County to Breckenridge Middle School in central Botetourt County.

"Those were long days," Charles says. "I would try to get to every gym at least once a day but it was hard, even starting early and finishing late in the evening."

The Games now use 10 courts, with seven in the same building, the LaHaye Center. The other three are nearby, with one in the new basketball arena and two more in the Liberty Christian School gym located adjacent to the LU campus.

The proximity makes getting to the games easier for the officials themselves since they are housed in a dormitory on campus, providing the pandemic does not take an unforeseen turn for the worse.

"Last year we couldn't offer the officials lodging in the dorm because of the pandemic, but hopefully we'll be back to doing that this year," Redd says.

Gathering a group of basketball officials large enough to cover a tournament with 125 teams in 20 gender and age groups is a labor of love for Redd.

“I use guys from Roanoke and Lynchburg, obviously, but I also have connections that allows me to bring in guys from Charlottesville, Northern Virginia, Richmond, Maryland, D.C., the beach area and even North Carolina,” he says. “They love it. They love working together and the fellowship.”

Charles also serves the with providing volunteers and gate keepers at the Commonwealth Games Track and Field events. Virginia Amateur Sports added Charles to the Wall of Honor at the 2021 Games for his service

Officials in all sports recognize the camaraderie as one of the greatest benefits of taking up the avocation. Redd says that’s especially true in the Commonwealth Games. He has worked as the officiating coordinator one and off since 2003, including the past 11 years. Since retiring from the Army in 1990, Charles has made officiating his life’s work. He calls several sports, including working 35 years as a football official.

“I was ordered to start officiating while in the Army in Germany,” Redd says.

That might seem to be an unusual order, but an officer was unhappy that a team of players from his unit was unable to play a scheduled game because of a lack of officials.

“I was the A&R (athletic and recreation) NCO for the unit and we had a team that didn’t get to play. The commanding officer told me to find out what I need to do to become a referee because he didn’t want his men to ever have to miss a game again because of no referees. So I started my career by accident,” Redd says.

That accident has worked out in his long term favor. Virginia Amateur Sports and the Commonwealth Games are benefitting from it as well.