

Do You Yell at Referees?

- By [Joe Haefner](#)

A couple of weekends ago, I got a chance to watch my old high school team and the treatment of the referees by the opposing coach boggled my mind. He was constantly on their case even when he was leading by 20 points in the 4th quarter. As the game ended and his team had won by 15 points, he yelled at them and started to follow them out of the gym. This just drove me nuts! I didn't even notice the refs during the game. I was rooting for the losing team and I didn't have a complaint. I also heard that the same varsity coach was screaming at a very timid pair of referees during the Freshmen game. During the game, he started out sitting at the top row and reached the 2nd row by the end of the game. And the funny thing was that his team only had 3 fouls in the first half and 2 fouls in the second half. Yet, my high school team had 12 fouls in each half. He was obviously trying to intimidate the referees.

What kind of example is this setting for kids?

This instantly made me think of a line Don Kelbick said to me a few years ago about coaches who have bad behavior, "99% of the time, those coaches are good people. They just have bad role models." They see the coaches on TV jumping, yelling, and screaming so they think they should be doing the same thing.

I don't condone terrible sideline antics by college and pro coaches, but I can understand the psychological games they have with the referees when their jobs and the lives of their families are at stake.

However, when it comes to a high school coach who barely gets paid or a [youth coach](#) who does not get paid, we should be setting the right example!

Mistreating and yelling at referees can hurt your team a number of ways:

- Poor Coaching - If you concentrate on the referees' calls that means you're not focused on your team which means you will miss teachable moments for your players.
- Won't get Answers On Calls - When you need to question a call or talk with the referees, they might not listen. This could cost you the game.
- Get Calls Against You - If you constantly badger referees, some will purposely start making calls against you. This is especially true at the youth and high school levels of basketball.
- Bad Team Play - Players often copy their coach's actions. If you are mistreating the referees, your players probably will too. This will lead to your players getting on the bad side of the referees which will never help in getting a fair game called. Also, when they blame the officials rather than taking responsibility for poor play, this can lead to a negative mind state for the whole team.

And we can pretend that you do get some calls by yelling at the referees, this is still setting a bad example for your players...

What kind of example are you setting by yelling at the refs?

By setting this example, you are showing your kids that it's ok to yell at people. In fact, you make it seem like a good thing. You are demonstrating that the proper method to get your way and change a person's behavior is to yell and scream at them. Don't you

think that the very successful and happy people in this world use different methods to persuade and change behavior? There are much better tactics to persuade people. And frankly yelling, throwing fits, and screaming is VERY childish behavior. I know you see BIG TIME coaches doing this on TV. But let's face it and be real about this. It's very childish and immature behavior.

What you need to realize is that you have a very strong effect on these kids. 20 years from now these kids will remember certain things you tell them word for word. These kids WANT to play basketball. Teachers would do anything to have the type of power, influence, and control that you have over these kids. Like it or not. You are shaping the beliefs of some of these kids and you are making an impact on their future. Many of them look up to you. You have incredible influence over them.

With this influence and power comes a large responsibility that you need to accept and embrace. I urge you to think very hard about the example you set for your players. It's the right thing to do.

6 Tips for Treating Referees

1. Treat them with respect. Our players see the way we treat the referees and we should teach them to respect others and learn to communicate without yelling uncontrollably. Referees are humans and they like to be treated with respect. Talk to them. Ask questions in a non-aggressive tone.

Not to mention, it's very important to teach today's young people how to respect authority. It also teaches players not to blame others and to be held accountable.

2. Create a dialogue and learn their names. Referees will respect you and like the fact that you're talking to them like they are a human being. It's also a good idea to learn their first names, so you can effectively address them during the games. The chances of them responding or listening increase if they hear their name.
3. Chat with them in the pregame. One thing I always like to do is talk to the referees in the pregame warm-ups. I might even give them a heads up that I like to ask questions on calls, so I can teach my players and I would appreciate it if they took a few seconds to explain the calls to me when I ask them about a call. Morgan Wootten also says this is a great time to get a point across about the rules of the game.
4. Apply the golden rule. If you treat the referees like you would want to be treated, you'll develop a quality relationship with them. Most often, this will lead to more calls in your favor.
5. Question their call in an assertive, but non-aggressive manner. If you question a call in a reasonable tone, the refs will be more likely to listen to criticism. If you're yelling and screaming the whole time, they'll probably tune you out.
6. Create a great environment for them at your home games. When you host a game, you should greet them and make them feel as comfortable as possible. It's important to make sure beverages and food are provided to the refs as well. This great treatment can go a long way. It's also beneficial for you and your administration to make sure that your fans create a great atmosphere, but in a positive manner. No heckling and berating the referees.