
After Party

Have fun

I think officials sometimes forget to have fun. In my region, the officials rarely get any kind of monetary compensation for their hard work and years of dedicated volunteering to the sport. The level of excellence officials achieve as unpaid volunteers is, frankly, astonishing. Even after-work league kickball refs get \$20 per game.

If at the end of the day you aren't ultimately having fun, you're going to burn out. Derby needs all the officials it can get; I don't want you quitting before you've achieved your goals. Make sure you remember to have fun, make friends, build camaraderie, join social media chat groups, and enjoy the people around you. I personally have found that my close derby friends have become my "family of choice." They're some of the only people in the world I truly trust and truly love.

If you find you're not having fun, take a step back for a few weeks. Maybe un-volunteer yourself for a few committees. If you're signed up for an event, it's not the end of the world to let them know you can't make it anymore. Everyone who's been in derby long enough will be sympathetic if you tell them you're burned out and need to step back for a few weeks to help with your stress levels. Go back to doing only the things in derby you truly enjoy. Spend some non-game time with your derby friends. Re-discover why you love derby and manage to stay committed to this point in spite of the stress and boos from the audience.

ANECDOTE

Derby isn't fun when you want to improve your performance, but you feel like you're not getting better. When I feel frustrated and like I haven't gotten better in months, I take a break from that skill and focus on practicing something I'm already familiar with, or I practice something new.

Feel like you've been trying to call pack def for 4 months, and you're still frustrated by things you're missing? Switch to JR or OPR for a couple months. Or maybe learn how to Penalty Track at the next scrimmage.

One way I've learned pack def is from working games as a PT at events worked by higher level IPRs. I get to walk on my feet a few inches away from the pack and passively absorb the habits, sounds, signals, routines, and game flow of the experienced IPRs. SO slots often fill up first on a game crew. There's fewer slots and the competition is usually fierce for high level games. If you know how to NSO well, you can still work those games and gain experience in the ways that definitely helped me learn ref skills.

Solving toxic behavior

Solving toxic behavior starts with ourselves. First we need to make sure we're not part of the problem. Are we welcoming to all participants? Are we gossiping in mean ways? Are we treating everyone fairly while keeping in mind that not everyone responds positively to the same kind of informal joking as someone else?

- Insults and mean nicknames are not a substitute for true, supportive camaraderie and leadership
- NSOs, announcers, and other volunteers aren't subservient or less skilled than SOs
- Don't let personal relationships off the track interfere with practice or games
- Don't let your ego or the ego of others become a danger to safety
- Don't be the reason someone else quits officiating

Don't let anyone at practices or events mistreat you. Yes, it takes a little bit of tough skin to stomach criticism, but no one is allowed to bully, demean, or abuse others. No one. Not the president of the league. Not the HR of a game. Speak up if it happens. Even if you aren't the direct target of bullying, witnessing it is harm enough to you and everyone else present. Be the one who is brave enough to do the right thing, and stand up to abusive behavior. Defend the target of the behavior. Derby is a hobby. Defend the hobby. Protect others.

Many times I hear that a new official "just needs to build up thicker skin." That it's solely the responsibility of the new official to learn to be unaffected by any comments they encounter

during their career. I agree that sometimes a HR or NSO might come up to you with a question or request or comment or feedback, and they deliver it in a curt manner or are simply rushed when they give it — which might lead some people to feeling offended unnecessarily. However, none of that means that people are allowed to be abusive. All of us are expected to respect every other participant. Period.

Perhaps you'll just never fully align with the culture of your home league. If you can find a way to interact with them while still achieving your own goals, then maybe it's worth adapting your mental framing of the situation in order to accomplish your goals. There are others out there to have camaraderie with instead. Find officials and a community online or at other leagues where you can be a frequent guest official. With most leagues, as an official you don't have to spend 100% of your efforts on that one league. This is very normal. If you want a derby family and the leagues near you aren't that family, keep looking. You'll find your tribe out there.

TRAINER / SKATERS

One mistake I've observed in less experienced officials is that they adapt their impact spectrum to the opinions of the most powerful skater personalities in their home league — perhaps it's their spouse, perhaps it's the long-time league President. Essentially, what happens is if they call a forearm, for instance, and the league President disagrees and yells at the official, shames them, or tells them they're idiots, that official will then adapt their impact spectrum to whatever causes the least bullying and friction at scrimmages. They never really develop a true impact spectrum based on actions on the track because they're basing their impact spectrum on fear of retribution.

Officials cannot make fair calls if they're learning how to call penalties under this kind of fear. Make sure your officials are basing their calls on what they see on the track, not what will please the loudest voice on your BoD. Make sure their impact spectrum isn't based on avoiding retribution.

Reffing while short / female / non-binary

ANECDOTE

Early after I started officiating on skates, a Level 5 WFTDA ref traveled to Michigan and put on a clinic. At the time, if you wanted to be certified as a ref, you had to take a written test proctored by a certified official and you needed a skating skills assessment. One of the big draws of clinics like these was to take those tests, so you could apply to Ref Cert.

My friend and I signed up to go. We were early enough in our careers that we had no plans to apply for Ref Cert yet. We mainly wanted to attend the classroom portion and then take the written test. Taking the actual written test was the only way to know what was on the test and to learn what questions you got wrong.

We showed up. We listened to the lecture. We took the written test (no one ever passed their first attempt, right?). Then when it was time for the skating assessments, we said we weren't interested in that yet. The Level 5 looked a little sad and asked if we were sure. "Yep! We're gonna go get food." We left and came back. As we sat in the bleachers at a roller hockey rink, we happily munched our sub sandwiches and chatted. Eventually we became aware that everyone being tested was a cis male and everyone sitting on the bleachers watching was not.

We looked at each other and said "WE'RE part of the problem." We saw that we had lost that opportunity to demonstrate for others that the non-males can also be excellent – even if we didn't actually care to be tested at that time. The leadership example we could have set for others was also an important opportunity lost.

I decided then to do my best to not be a silent part of the culture of some leagues where the majority of new female/non-male skating officials aren't taken seriously. Especially if they are skaters or recently made the switch from skating. No matter if I'm staffed as HR or PBT or SK, every game I work I present myself as confident and deserving of equal respect — even if I'm still learning a new position.

Newer officials need to see a variety of genders and body types acting as a leader, so they know that no matter how they look or how they present that they too can aspire to leadership and excellence. They need to be shown more than just one example for what a Head Ref

looks/sounds/acts like. There's not just one template for what appropriate skating looks like for skating officials. There shouldn't be just one social clique who ALWAYS get the leadership spots and then only invite their friends to CH or work under them (no matter how mediocre those friends are). I make sure I try to show new folx the various paths that are available to them — not the path I myself took, necessarily, but the path available to THEM.

Looking back today at that clinic where I ate a sandwich instead of fighting the patriarchy, I'm pretty sure only two people in that hockey rink that eventually went on to become THR at a WFTDA playoff. Those two people are the Level 5 ref who taught the clinic and the friend I was sitting next to.

This document you're reading is written by a white, caucasian 5'6" AFAB femme-presenting woman born in Michigan in the mid 1970s. Though I hope most of my advice is applicable to everyone, I understand that some of us have different experiences than me and have fewer role models who look like ourselves. I have kept the less-represented types in mind in everything I do and write on derby officiating. I've deliberately reached out to other officials to make sure a variety of viewpoints are more closely represented in this document.

As I began to travel again after COVID, more than once I found myself giving in-game feedback. Quite frequently I'd hear in reply "Thanks Wishbone, no one my size/my height/my gender/who looks like me has ever given me actionable skating and positioning advice." And these were all people who'd been reffing for much longer than a year. I was astonished. It felt to me like nothing had changed since I was new in 2011, and that people who looked like me still struggled to find good mentors.

There's no reason someone 5' tall cannot be as effective as someone 6' tall. However, the advice I'd give for one of these individuals is not necessarily the advice I'd give to the other. Advice depends not only on physical size, it also depends on current skill with the rules and someone's current skating skills. All skating officials need mentors, but some ref for more than six years with officials of all levels and yet NEVER feel they get relevant feedback. I'm not exaggerating.

For some, it's not helpful if a 6' tall dude tells them to "get closer," so they can see into a scrum. If I get closer to a scrum, all that happens is the closest skater's shoulder takes up more of my field of view, especially if it's a MRDA game. An individual shorter person can skate faster than every other skating official on the track by all objective measures and STILL be told the reason they're not getting prime staffing is because they can't skate fast enough — even though they are actually skating faster than everyone else on the track if you sat down and timed everyone. This can happen because their stance and strides don't "look" graceful and effortless to the person making that unfair assessment.

Sometimes skaters, captains, coaches, other officials, all of us can develop an image in our minds of what an ideal SO looks like when they're officiating. Sometimes that image can be very, very narrowly defined. No matter how skilled you get, you may never look to some people like your skating is effortless-looking enough for them to perceive you as a good skater. And if they think you're not a good skater, they'll unfairly draw a connection from that to your officiating skills and subconsciously assume you also aren't a good official. It sucks that this happens to some of us due to our skating style and hip configurations and that they'll always criticize your skating and dismiss the accuracy of your calls. Don't let their narrow opinions be the reason you doubt yourself. Always get multiple points of view on this kind of feedback. People in leadership staffing games need to be encouraged to proactively assess their bias towards body types and body mechanics that don't align with their ingrained preferences.

ANECDOTE

I remember my first time as JR at a JRDA game. I was still at a point in my development where I felt like I wasn't making progress. I knew what a back block, multiplayer, and forearm looked like, but I just couldn't always "see" them in the moment. It always felt like the IPRs and OPRs were calling impact penalties that I didn't see happen.

As soon as that JRDA game started, I immediately felt like I could call and no-call those impact penalties way more easily than I had before. It seemed like every piece of advice I'd ever been given was suddenly working. At first I thought it was maybe because they weren't playing as hard and fast as the adults, and it was just easier to discern individual actions and assess them.

After a couple jams it occurred to me that I was the same height or taller than most everyone on the track. I didn't realize what a difference that would make in my ability to feel confident making calls. I (and probably others) had been convinced that I was just a slow learner when it comes to recognizing impact. I'd been told I wasn't a good enough skater to do the job.

The truth is I wasn't a bad skater. I had learned like everyone else had. It's just I had never been given locationing advice relevant to my body type, skating skills, and current stage of officiating development. It never even occurred to me that the suggestions I was being given for where to skate and look was inappropriate for me.

If you don't present as male, there is a tendency for some skaters to not be accustomed to tuning into your voice register during a game. They'll give you feedback that they can't hear you and that you need to be louder.

So let's say you practice being louder, and they still continue to say they can't hear you. Getting louder at this point will not help them hear you better, you'll only sound more "shrill" to them. If you are as loud as you can be, there might be reasons they don't hear you besides literal decibel volume.

- Make sure you're using a full lung's-worth of breath for your calls. In an "Jam 1: Before you read the rules," I talked about blowing your whistle from your diaphragm. Make sure your verbal cues and warnings are also coming from your diaphragm.
- If possible, get into the visible line-of-sight of the skater you're trying to communicate to. If you're issuing a penalty, point at them while you blow the whistle and say their color and number. If someone in stripes is looking at you, pointing at you, and mouthing words at you, you have a much greater chance of comprehending there's something being communicated that you need to pay attention to. In particular if they then repeat themselves.
- Higher frequencies are more "directional" than lower ones. Just like a subwoofer speaker can be placed nearly anywhere in the room, a lower frequency voice will simply spread wider. If you have a higher register, remember to always turn your face in the direction that needs to hear you.
- Making a "cup" shape with your hands only makes your voice more directional. This only should be used if you're trying to communicate to one person. And if that's the case, it's

probably a better idea to reposition yourself, so you're instead in that person's line of sight.

- The words “no pack” (and “pack is here”) are the most important words a skater can hear during a jam. Everyone needs to hear it, but they also need to understand it when they hear it. If there seems to be a pattern of people saying they can't hear your No-Pack or OOP warnings, one way we can help is to use a specific cadence and melody of rise and fall in notes and emphasis when we make a call, especially when you say “no pack.” Instead of “no pack” all one volume, maybe try extending and emphasizing the second word. Extend the vowel sound somewhat, “no pAAAck!” And then make it sound the same each time you give the verbal cue. Skaters will start instinctively responding to that sequence and rhythm of notes, even if they don't really understand the words at a conscious level. Different cadences and syllable emphasis can work better depending on the venue and acoustics.

Any vocal register can be told they sound shrill or mean or bitchy or angry when you yell. As officials, we definitely need to be cognizant of our tone, but keep in mind this can also be a common skater misinterpretation of a less-than-familiar voice. People can grow accustomed to the sounds of the officials they usually work with or they are accustomed to the volume of calls when they're in their practice space without fans and announcers. You don't sound familiar or the venue acoustics don't sound familiar, so they can interpret this as sounding “mean.”

Whether or not that's the case, there's still things we can do to help skaters interpret our calls appropriately.

- Stay calm
- Don't rush your calls
- Enunciate
- Maintain a neutral facial expression

TRAINER / SKATERS

Don't always have the most experienced ref in the area as HR of all your games. Encourage diversity in faces your region sees in leadership roles. Seek out some newer, up-and-coming skating officials to apply to HR your local games and to apply to multi-game events, AND PLEASE doubly encourage the non-male skating officials. Non-male skating officials still do not have the numbers of mentors available to them as male officials. Derby needs to retain

officials. Stop being a silent complicit part of the reason non-male skating officials quit reffing. And if you secretly trash talk female or femme-presenting refs, I see you. You're part of the problem.

Do better, roller derby. Don't be part of the problem. Even if you identify as male — especially if you identify as male — YOU CAN HELP TOO.

Here's some things we all can do, no matter what gender we present to the world:

- Don't staff exclusively all male-presenting SOs on the inside and all female-presenting individuals on the outside
- Consider situations where the longest-serving ref isn't necessarily the ONLY official capable or deserving of leadership spots.
- Seek out non-binary, gender fluid, and female-presenting officials to work other leadership roles at your games
- Politely remind others when their actions and words aren't inclusive
- If you have a choice, choose to work with leagues and officials who actively promote diversity opportunities

Qualities of an excellent official

- Keeps the game safe
- Maintains impartiality
- Contributes to efficient game flow
- Uses correct verbal cues, hand signals, and whistles which follow published guidance from governing bodies
- Understands where they are in their learning curve, and seeks appropriate experiences and training for their current skills and knowledge
- Demonstrates leadership and integrity both on and off the track, including social media
- Has an overall pattern of growth, even if they're struggling with a particular skill right now
- Communicates professionally and empathetically
- Arrives prepared to practice, scrimmage, games, clinics
- Understands and enforces the rules and procedures based on the latest version of governing body documentation

- Maintains adept track awareness
- Composure under stress
- Completes any required paperwork accurately
- Applies feedback
- Gives appropriate, relevant, actionable, empathetic feedback
- Completes all items needing follow through after the game
- As Skating Official
 - Applies sensible locationing for all staffed positions
 - Aligns discretion and impact spectrums appropriately
 - Awards points fairly and confidently
- As Head Official
 - Protects the safety of all participants (including emotional safety)
 - Communicates with crew ahead of time and throughout the event
 - Demonstrates a model of knowledge and leadership for everyone to follow
 - Able to delegate and triage vital tasks
 - Provides appropriate feedback for game management
 - Resolves errors and disputes fairly
 - Completes all post-game duties efficiently

Certification

As of 2024, this is definitely optional, especially if you have no plans to officiate outside of your local region. Some of the best SOs I know have never been WFTDA certified. In the past, some WFTDA postseason events had minimum certification requirements, and many multi-day events ask for someone's certification level. True, but it's rarely required in most instances.

There's a lot of work that goes into getting certified. If you don't have aspirations to work WFTDA Champs, you'll have to self assess if the time you spend on getting certified couldn't better serve you doing something else. I served multiple years on the WFTDA cert committee, so I absolutely believe there's value in it. The greatest value it has, in my opinion, is to help motivate officials to strive for personal excellence. It also encourages mentorship and helps to level set the expectation for good officiating on the track across multiple regions.

There's a downside to cert, too. The person standing next to you with a certification patch on their sleeve may not actually be more skilled than the other person standing next to you who

doesn't have a patch. That patch can't tell you which of those two people's advice to listen to more and which to be more skeptical about. Sometimes people even use their certification level to bully other people. Try to remember to judge people by their actions, not a piece of cloth on their sleeve.

As of 2024, WFTDA publishes a number of resources on becoming a Certified WFTDA official. MRDA and JRDA also have programs for recognizing and certifying officials. I've included links to these in the Appendix. The exact requirements for these processes change regularly, so I won't discuss the current requirements.

I encourage all officials to exude excellence, no matter if we have a patch of cloth on our sleeve.