

18 TIPS FOR BEGINNING OFFICIALS

FROM THE EDITORS OF *REFEREE* MAGAZINE

1

YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES

Sometimes they are dreadful mistakes, but we must accept them as an environmental hazard in an avocation that calls for us to make a multitude of split-second decisions under very stressful conditions. To expect perfection is too heavy a burden for any person to carry and ultimately will take the joy out of officiating for even the best official.

2

KNOW YOUR ROLE

You are part of a bigger package, don't showboat. When you need to sell a call, it's OK to give an emphatic signal. But actions designed to draw attention away from the players and onto officials are unprofessional and unacceptable. Use the standard mechanics and signals for the level of play at which you're working.

3

YOU DON'T CARE WHO WINS

One of the many sports myths accepted as fact is that the officials are predisposed to favor the home team. But an official should never use calls to favor either team for any reason. Impartiality is the foundation on which the officiating house is built. Officials must be blind to factors that have nothing to do with the game, including who wins or loses.

4

OFFICIATING IS AN AVOCATION

For all but a few of us, officiating is an avocation, not our profession. Recognizing that will help keep your life in better balance. It takes time, hard work and study to become a successful official. But an official must not put officiating ahead of what's really important: family and work. Devote more time and energy to your family and your job than you do to officiating.

5

OFFICIATING BUILDS SKILLS FOR A LIFETIME

The qualities that make a great official are also the qualities that make a person a good employee, spouse, parent and friend. Teamwork, loyalty, sacrifice, study, decision-making, fair mindedness, accountability and honesty are just a few of the positive skills and qualities that can be learned, developed and implemented through officiating.

6

YOU REFEREE WHO YOU ARE

Your officiating personality is driven by your everyday personality. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But remember that extremes are often detrimental in officiating. For example, if your job involves supervising people, remember that you can't treat fellow officials, players and coaches the same as you do your employees. If you're in sales, you may have to tone down your personality on the field or court.

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PREPARATION IS KEY

You can't come into the season cold and expect success. Spend the proper amount of time reviewing the rulebook, casebook and mechanics manual so you're prepared for game situations. Get in shape before the season so you're ready to keep up with the players and to lessen the chance of being sidelined by injury. Also, make sure your uniform is clean and in good condition, and any officiating gear is in proper working order. The time you spend preparing to step on the field or court is vital to your success on the field or court.

8

STRIVE FOR ATHLETICISM

Be neat and sell yourself. There is a strong correlation between your appearance and whether you're accepted as an official. Height, weight, cleanliness and body language all play roles. If you don't look like you belong on the field or court, you are likely to have more problems than an official who looks the part.

9

HAVE GOOD BODY LANGUAGE

Body language will do you in quicker than a lack of knowledge. Sometimes it's less a matter of what you say than how you say it. In officiating, body language often speaks louder than words. Even a correct call will cast doubt in the minds of participants if you don't appear decisive. During dead-ball periods, don't stand with your arms folded or shoulders slumped, which gives the impression you're bored or would rather be anywhere else.

10

ANTICIPATE THE PLAY NOT THE CALL

That sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. If you can "feel" what's coming and adjust your position or your visual focus to the right area, you'll see the play better and you'll have a much better opportunity to make the correct call. Good umpires know when to expect a squeeze play. Top basketball referees recognize the times a team is going to apply full-court pressure or change its defense. Football officials know when to expect a deep pass or a quarterback sneak. In soccer, you know when a team will play kick-and-run and when teams will attack the defense methodically. All of those things help you anticipate the play, not the call.

11

BE PROFESSIONAL

Treat your games like a business setting. You're there to do a job, so maintain a professional comportment. Shake hands, speak respectfully and clear, get right to your work and don't cross any boundaries in regard to familiarity.

12

BE CONFIDENT WITH YOUR WHISTLE

If you're going to blow the whistle, blow it hard. In almost every situation in virtually every sport, the rules dictate that an official's whistle causes play to cease. Since that is the case, you might as well blow it hard. The concept holds true for non-whistle sports. Make sure everyone knows it when you call time. A strong blast of the whistle conveys the message that you're sure play should be stopped. A weak toot casts doubt about your confidence and judgment.

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PLAYER SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT

The rules not only empower but also require officials to penalize rough play. Even if a potentially dangerous situation is not specifically covered in the rules, an official is obligated to make whatever correction is necessary to ensure player safety. That entails everything from the weather to the playing surface to conduct of participants. In this overly litigious age, erring on the side of safety is not only the morally correct course but the one that will help keep the official out of court as well.

14

ALWAYS HAVE A PREGAME MEETING

Just as athletes must warm up before competing, officials must prepare themselves for the job ahead. Even if you work with the same partner or crew day after day, a pregame meeting provides valuable reminders about how certain situations will be handled. Involving every crewmember or varying the routine helps prevent monotony.

15

EYE CONTACT IS A MUST

All eyes must be on every play. Eye contact is an important part of communicating with your partners, yet there are countless horror stories where eye contact didn't occur, resulting in wrong calls. Ever see one basketball official signal a "block" while another tries to sell a "charge"?

16

GET THE ANGLE

Even with the many TV replays and various camera angles, television cannot always get the most advantageous angle to see each play. Work hard to master your mechanics and see every play.

17

DON'T MAKE EXCUSES

Even if you have the best possible excuse for making a mistake, the error won't be corrected because you have an alibi. Instead of wasting time and mental energy coming up with an excuse, your first course should be doing whatever the rules allow you to do to rectify the situation. Next you should learn from the mistake so you won't make it or have to come up with another excuse again.

18

LOOK THE PART

Appearance counts when you seek the respect of players and coaches. Properly wear your uniform. If your jacket has a zipper, pull it up to a normal, comfortable height. If you have button shirts, button them up as you would a normal shirt. There's no need to keep half your buttons undone or roll up your short sleeves to show off. A clean, properly worn uniform will help you look the part, which can lead to acceptance of the judgment you use to make your calls.