

Remove Before Flight: The Pre-game

Like a pilot leading a pre-flight check ... the referee should take control of the pregame crew discussion. Here are some tools to help with a comprehensive two and three person crew pregame talk.

It doesn't matter how many years of experience an airplane pilot might have ... before EACH and EVERY flight the "pilot in charge" reviews a comprehensive checklist before even firing up the engines or taxiing out onto the runway. Even if they have flown thousands of times before in the same aircraft, with the same co-pilot ... they still take the time to do their "pre-flight checks" to increase the likelihood of a smooth and uneventful journey.

While a basketball game might not require the same meticulous and rigid checks and balances it does merit a methodical approach to preparing the crew for any eventual situations and problems on the court.

- **The "R" Takes the Lead:** If you are assigned as the Referee (or crew chief) it's YOUR responsibility to lead the pregame discussion. Take this as responsibility above and beyond the normal game assignment. Just as the referee (typically) will toss the ball to start the game – you should initiate the pregame / locker room talk as well. If the "R" fails to initiate that conversation — you (as a crew member) prompt them – gently and appropriately. "Hey Mr. R, what types of things should we discuss before going out there tonight," might be a good way to start that dialogue.
- **Five Minutes is Better than None:** While I truly believe a good pregame takes about ten minutes to be covered properly – if you only have a few minutes, take advantage of them and use it wisely. It's better to prioritize a few key items than walk onto the court without any discussion. If only five minutes, make sure to talk about the big items – like PCA's, line coverages, last second shots, etc.
- **Don't Go By Memory:** Pilots use checklists ... and so should you. You should not be embarrassed by pulling out your favorite list that can be quickly reviewed by the crew. Some folks have long multi-page documents and others have 3x5 cards with a few key items. IAABO provides a nice laminated card to our members each year. The one that I use is a hybrid from the IAABO card and items that I feel are important.
- **Be Visual:** Whether it's a chalkboard in the locker room, a small magnetic board, or a dry-erase coaching board — make sure to "visually" discuss important areas of concern. Most pregame cards have a small court diagram already incorporated into them. (see sample above) Using a couple of pennies to represent your crew on these court diagrams and moving them around can really help the less experienced officials understand positioning and line coverage.
- **Make it an Open Dialogue:** While the Referee should lead this discussion it's not just all about him / her and in a dictator mode. It's about a collaborative and stimulating conversation between crew members. If you decide (for some special reason) to deviate from the standard mechanics then you must communicate that during the pregame discussion. Allow your partner(s) to contribute to this discussion by asking questions and their viewpoint on various topics.

The key takeaway here is ... the crew should ALWAYS have some type of pregame discussion based on the situation and time allowed. And as the Referee ... it's your job to initiate that discussion.