



Post Play Express

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STEPPING UP

Submitted by Gerard MacDonald, Supervisor of Prince Edward Island

As officials, we continually strive to make ourselves better. There comes a point in our officiating career when we must step up and make the “ Big Call “.

We all remember the first game that we officiated probably a mini or bantam game. Yes, we were nervous; nevertheless, when we blew that whistle for the first time and made that travel call, it was the start of a learning process. I remember my first foul call in a game. When I reported the foul, I reported it to my partner and he proceeded to tell me: “Now go report the foul to the scorer!” It was humorous in the moment, but it was all a progression to becoming a better official.

The next step in the progression was the block/charge call. At the time, everything was a block call, until you learned how to referee the defence. We then learned about Game Management and how important it is to the game of basketball. You have to manage the game, whether it be resetting the game clock or shot clock, or knowing that a team is in penalty, even though the game clock indicates that there are only 4 team fouls. This skill enables you to make the game a lot easier to officiate.

These steps of progression do not come easily or automatically; they come with a lot of help and work. It’s like going to watch a game at a level higher than the level you are now officiating and seeing the scenario that may unfold for you as you progress as an official. It may also consist in listening to a senior official in a post-game about how you should handle a situation on the court or seeing your partner come out of his primary to make a must call in your area. If your partner bails you out in time of need, don’t be upset because he/she made the call in your area; thank him/her at the next opportunity.

These are just some of the examples of steps of progression in order to prepare you as a better official. The more knowledge you can obtain through these avenues, the better you will be able to step up and make the big call.

The Big Call might be in a situation, where, in the final minutes of a championship game, you call a foul and the Coach does not agree with the call and goes nuts. Are you going to allow the coach to abuse you and not penalize his team anymore than what you already called? Or will you assess a technical foul for what he/she deserves by being out of line. Of course, we don't want to decide the outcome of the game, but we cannot accept the Coach disrespecting the integrity of the game.

There are times when we just want to go into the gym and not have any disputes, keep everyone happy, and go home unnoticed. In the end, we cannot be the nice guy all the time. We must step up and make the big call when it's needed.

FINISH A CLOSE GAME WITH YOUR BEST PERFORMANCE

Submitted by Morgan Munroe, Interpreter of Alberta

Anyone who has spent some time around basketball officiating can recall games where a crew did a solid 38-39 minutes of decision making, only to have a call in the last seconds erase all their good work. The only thing people remember and want to talk about is how the game ended. This year, the NBA has started publicly commenting on the accuracy of the calls made by their officials in the last two minutes of all games. In one game, the league determined that the officials made seven mistakes in the last two minutes! Of course, the media had a field day with this announcement. FIBA now allows officials to review specific plays using court side equipment in the last two minutes as well. This should indicate that at the highest levels rule makers are particularly concerned about the quality of the calls near the end of a game. The expectations at those levels quickly work their way down to the lower levels where most of us officiate. Unfortunately, very few of us have the benefit of court side replay equipment, so we have to do things the "old fashioned way" using our eyes, ears and mouths to bring a successful ending to any game, but especially those where the score is particularly close.

In a FIBA game, certain rule modifications occur once the clock shows 2:00 or less in the 4th quarter or in an overtime period. Let's review those:

- **Time-outs:** a team is only entitled to call a maximum of two time-outs during the last 2 minutes of the 4th quarter. A team with 3 time-outs loses one, once the clock hits the 2:00 mark. If the clock in the gym shows the number of time-outs remaining, it is a good idea to ask the operator to change the number from 3 to 2 in this situation.
- **Resuming play after a time-out:** if a team entitled to possession of the ball in their backcourt requests a time-out, the resulting throw-in will occur in the frontcourt at the inbound spot, 6,75m from the endline, opposite the team benches and the scorer's table. It is worth mentioning that the play, prior to the time-out, may affect the shot clock. Reviewing the various scenarios, such as paragraph 17-13 in the current FIBA interpretations manual, would be advisable in a pregame.

- **Substitutions:** a team that is scored upon can have substitutes enter the game provided they are at the scorer's table and make the request prior to the ball becoming "live". The scoring team can then have substitutes enter the game as well.
- **Defensive fouls during a throw in:** if a Defensive foul occurs during a throw in and the ball has not left the inbounder's hands, the foul automatically becomes an unsportsmanlike foul, regardless of the amount of contact or the intent of the defender.

Now, let's examine areas the officials can't control, but of which they must be aware, especially in the last 2 minutes:

- **Location of game and 24 second clocks:** in a perfect gym setup, the clocks would be at both ends of the facility as well as immediately above both baskets. If this is not the case, then the officials must make adjustments accordingly. The priority is to observe the players, but as the clock must stop after a successful field goal when the game clock displays 2:00 minutes or less, it is advisable that one of the officials be aware if that, in fact, happens. As well, insuring that the shot clock starts or is reset properly on a missed attempt can be equally important. Discussion in the pregame and a quick review during a late time-out is a good course of action.
- **Horns:** are the game and 24-second horns going to be audible at the end of the game, if the crowd is particularly loud? Again, a pregame discussion and reminder during a near-end-of-game time-out is advisable.
- **LED backboard lights:** if the backboards have these lights, they can be used to assist the officials in determining if a shot was released prior to the end of a period. Yet, another item for pregame discussions.

End of game scenarios

Tommy Nunez Sr., a distinguished NBA official who retired from the league a few years back, had probably the simplest, yet most accurate statement, regarding the crux of officiating. "We can teach you everything except judgment". Nothing could be more applicable for a discussion of what often happens near the end of a close game. The consistent judgment of the on-floor officials will either "make or break" how the game ends. Is the team trailing going to commit fouls to try and stop the clock? Are the plays in question simply personal fouls or are they "intentional" and therefore unsportsmanlike by definition? These are strictly up to the judgment of the official making the call and can be the decision, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, that erases all the good work done earlier in the game. Conversely, sound judgment can validate the crew's efforts and provide a smooth and efficient end to a close and exciting game.

Fouls to stop the clock: touch fouls present a consistency dilemma. For the first 39 minutes, the officials may have been letting the players play through minor contact when no advantage was gained. However, ignoring light contact by the losing team when they want a foul, often leads to rough, second attempts at getting a foul, and perhaps retaliation. Once the team is determined to foul, it is probably wise to call the first contact.

Unsportsmanlike fouls can be a problem. Knowing the spirit and the intent of the rule regarding such fouls is a good place to start. When a play occurs that might be unsportsmanlike, a simple guideline is to quickly ask oneself. "Do I want to see that again?" If the answer is no, then an unsportsmanlike foul is quite likely warranted. Less

experienced officials often tend to worry too much about how this call will be received by the coach of the team committing the foul, but this is simply one of the areas that stepping up and making the call is generally appreciated by fellow officials and evaluators. An official's level of tolerance for judging late-game contact cannot be affected by what the coach yells or signals when the time comes to decide if a player made a legitimate attempt to play the ball without excessive contact. The worst thing that can happen is for one official to call a “common” foul on contact that is clearly intentional and then have a partner call an unsportsmanlike foul on the next one. Remember Tommy’s statement about what we can’t teach.

I’ve witnessed some officials actually ask the players if they are going to foul to stop the clock. While I understand the intent of the inquiry, I am not completely comfortable with this method, as I’ve seen some coaches respond unfavourably. They feel the officials are too quick to call fouls when the defender might have actually made a legitimate steal. A less problematic approach might be to speak to the players prior to the resumption of the play and limit it to a general statement such as “If you are going to foul, make a play on the ball”. However, I would recommend using this sparingly and only in situations where the coach in question has a good track record for calm responses. My personal preference is that nothing be said and that the officials simply call what’s in front of them and see what the results are.

Throw-in situations pose risks for everyone; officials must stay alert for many things. The Defence is likely to be aggressive and the Offence varied. Some teams are content to get the ball inbounds and wait for the presumed foul while other teams will try a surprise attack at the basket to try and “end” the game. Officials must make sure the Defence stays behind the boundary line and that the whole world knows whether the thrower can run the endline or not. Watch for holds on cutting players and the possibility that the Defence may try anticipating the path of a cutter and legally defend the play by taking a charging foul.

On the Offensive side, watch out for a big player pushing out from the endline with the Defence on his or her back to make space for a layup or the in-bounder coming from the out of bounds area back onto the court behind a screen to attempt a shot. Count steadily and visibly and be alert for any occurrence, especially a shot as just described. A foot near the 3-point line on a shot attempt must be observed by the officials to determine the point value of a last second shot. Even the trail official who has inbounding responsibilities can’t lose focus once the throw-in is released as he/she might be the only person with an open look on a long attempt.

What if ...

Sometimes even the best prepared and well anticipated procedures can go awry when the pressure is on. I’ve witnessed some strange endings as a result of officiating decisions or, in some cases non-decisions, that once the crew is assembled for the post-game, the play in question is quickly and correctly decided in a manner that, if the officials had been that calm and focused on the floor during the game, it would have ended smoothly with little or no “excitement”.

Case in point - on the last possession of a tie game, an official calls a foul on a tip during a rebound attempt. The horn sounds immediately after the whistle. The clock shows zeroes. The opposing coach, of course, feels that the call was both marginal and after the expiration of time, therefore feeling that the game should go into overtime. The

crew makes a quick discussion and put the shooter on the line with no time on the clock. After the first free throw misses, the second is made, ending the game, but of course not the controversy. In the post-game, I asked the crew for their opinions on the play. The non calling officials both deferred to the calling official who was adamant that the foul had occurred before the horn sounded. At this point, I asked any of the three officials if they had considered putting some time back on the clock. I opined that .5 seconds seemed fair and reasonable given the calling official's earlier response. Unfortunately, none of the three had considered this. Given that the coach whose team had been assessed the foul had a time-out left, he could have chosen to take it before the attempts or wait to see if the last free throw was successful, and then advance the ball. Had they chosen this option, in my opinion, the coach would have left a little less frustrated and less likely to tell the media that the officials had "decided" the game. But that is another story for another time.

End-of-game situations can be summarized in a single sentence:

Prevent the preventable, prepare for what might happen and never stop thinking out there.

ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL
DAYS OF SUMMER

