



Post Play Express

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Paddling Through Rough Waters!

Submitted by Mike Homsy, Supervisor for Quebec

Anyone can pick up a whistle and referee, but not everyone can do it smoothly. Even the top officials have trouble sometimes but, not often. We call that Game Management.

Game management consists of dealing with issues that arise during a game and responding to them in an efficient and logical fashion. It does not mean that everyone will be happy with the solution but, whatever the course of action, it is taken in the best interest of the game.

Usually, the reason we find ourselves in a tough situation is a misapplication of one or more of the following principles:

- ✓ Rule knowledge
- ✓ Mechanics
- ✓ Preparation – Allows you to anticipate situations that may occur.
- ✓ Experience – Part of maturing and takes time. Make mistakes or learn from others'.

It is obvious that rule knowledge is fundamental to officiating. Trying to referee without knowing the rules is akin to doing surgery without knowing the anatomy of the body.

Mechanics help to put you in the best position to referee the game and allow you to communicate effectively.

We can all agree that if we get every call correct on the court, we should have less management issues.

In order to referee a play correctly, think of the following: PLAD

POSITION – LOOK – ANTICIPATION - DECISION

You must first get into position, to have the look, to anticipate the play, to make the proper decision. If you lack one of the first 3, your accuracy will suffer! Let's look at two of the tougher situations we face in a game and see how our preparation and experience can help us through.

If I were to ask players and coaches for the toughest call, most would say Block/Charge. A recent poll survey in Referee Magazine found that 60% of readers chose the Block/ Charge as the #1 toughest call to make in basketball. Why? Because in that split second, emotion clashes with fact! Players & coaches react with a biased emotion while referees react on the facts of the play. If we know the rules of contact and we apply proper mechanics, this call is not really that difficult. However, during a game, there can be many factors that can complicate things. A moving defender, a secondary defender, traffic in the lane, etc. It's not going to be an exact science with only the benefit of the human eye. But, if we apply proper officiating principles, it can become much easier to call.

Arguably, the Technical Foul is the most emotional call in the game of basketball for everyone involved. The T, however, is like any other call. A rule is violated, the whistle blows and an infraction is called but, with more serious implications. Aside from identifying bad behavior and punishing it, the 2 points and possession can seriously hurt a team.

So, how does an official determine when a technical foul should be called? Here are a few guidelines.

Eventually, each official, with experience, will establish his/her own level of tolerance and work within the expectations of his/her supervisor.

- 1. Don't tolerate bad behavior. Taunting, language, threats, accusations and excessive gestures are automatic.**
- 2. Differentiate between two types of emotions : players upset at themselves versus upset at the referee. On the court, players are wrapped up in the emotion & physical frenzy of the game. We have to be aware of that and take it into consideration.**
- 3. Differentiate between genuine and non-genuine reactions : legitimate questions versus constant complaining. Complainers must be dealt with immediately.**
- 4. Right or wrong : if I feel I may have ruled incorrectly and the coach has an emotional outburst, I will give him an opportunity to vent. But, he must remain professional and in control. If I am 100% correct, my tolerance level will be shorter.**

One of the most challenging skills for any official is dealing with those stressful moments and then regaining his/her composure after making the call. Here are two Ps that can help : Preparation and Prevention.

Preparation is critical and starts in the pre-game. If you have knowledge of the teams, key match-ups, tendencies and history, then you are in a much better position to anticipate what may occur. You will be aware of game flow and

style of play. You will watch and recognize players' emotions and may see signs of frustration or anger. Preparation allows you to be pro-active.

Prevention can take place on the court during the game. Either making a call, or finding the appropriate time to defuse or discuss a problem with a player, coach or partner, can help prevent or control a situation.

Basketball is unique in that there are constant opportunities for coaches and referees to interact during the course of a game, especially in a 3-man crew. Being able to efficiently communicate with coaches, without a doubt, is a very important part of the game. Strong officials master this skill and maneuver through the rough waters more effectively. Communication can be beneficial, however, the degree of interaction will depend on the referee's level of experience, familiarity with the coach and individual personality.

For the young official, it is not recommended to engage in too much conversation with a coach because it takes away his/her focus. With more experience, an official can sort, filter and appropriately handle the situation.

Below are a few tips to keep in mind.

- Communication is not only about talking. We must listen first, before we respond.
- Don't ignore a coach. Respond with a nod, quick answer to a question or a hand signal when necessary.
- Be approachable & responsive but don't be a punching bag. Know when to draw the line to conversations.
- Don't assume the coach wants an explanation. Don't initiate dialogue unless you are sending a message.
- Don't try to win an argument. Just don't argue!
- Don't be afraid to admit an error.
- Treat coaches with respect and expect the same.
- Treat coaches fairly but not necessarily the same.

Our body language can be our own worst enemy. When we are arrogant or look disinterested, we become targets for coaches and players. Be professional, stay in the game and work hard to make the tough situations easier to handle.

If you apply the four principles to your officiating, you will have fewer surprises and fewer issues to deal with. Refereeing will become more enjoyable and less stressful as you gain control of the game.

OFFICIATING UNDER PRESSURE

Submitted by Gerard Brien, Interpreter for Newfoundland/Labrador

As officials on the basketball court, we have all experienced pressure at some point in our careers. How we handle our anxieties in these pressure situations will help determine our level of success as officials.

A certain degree of stress can actually be helpful. We have all felt “butterflies in our stomachs” before a big game. This is a normal sensation, and indicates that we are conscious of the challenge that lies ahead. A major part of our job as officials is to recognize pressure as it builds, and to control our nerves so that we may perform at our maximum level of effectiveness.

As pressure builds, it can manifest itself both physically and mentally. Physical symptoms may include increased perspiration, rapid breathing, a weakness in the knees, a loss of saliva, or all of the above. Mentally, an increase in stress may result in a loss of focus and a decrease in confidence. We may find ourselves dwelling on earlier calls, we may start to shrink from making further calls, we may find ourselves wishing for the game to end, or all of the above.

Many factors can lead to increased anxiety. Lack of physical conditioning, lack of pregame preparation, feeling that we are “in over our heads”, fear of confrontation, distrust of our partner, fear of working in front of large crowds, or dread of being evaluated can all add to the pressure we may feel. Many of these factors can be summarized in three words : fear of failure.

There are steps we can take to help us perform at peak level during stressful times. Obviously, a thorough knowledge of the rules and mechanics is the basis for an optimum level of confidence. My oft-times officiating partner, Jim Walsh (our current CABO President), is fond of saying that officials “shouldn’t referee to get into shape, they should get into shape to referee.” Proper physical conditioning, as well as a good regimen of pregame stretching, will help us, during the game, to get to where we need to be in order to see what we need to see. Being in a good position to make the call will also lead to increased confidence. Mental preparation is also essential. A thorough pregame meeting with our officiating partner(s) may help calm the nerves. Visualization techniques during pregame preparation may help. Controlling our breathing during tense situations may also be helpful.

Managing pressure is important if we actually wish to enjoy officiating. How we handle the tough times will often determine whether we are a good official or a great official.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BASKETBALL

Submitted by Brent Stocker, Nova Scotia Official

Growing up in Fredericton, New Brunswick I played basketball all through school. In my grade 12 year, I didn't make the team but was asked if I wanted to referee. I jumped at the opportunity to stay involved in the game and have a part-time job. Timing was in my favour as the Fredericton zone had a shortage of officials and some senior officials were stepping away from the game. I was supported by the zone representative and assignor to advance to a higher level than my skills and ability supported.

It was sink or swim and fortunately there were other new officials in the same situation. The Fredericton group was really a *family*. As a group, we took the time both on and off the court to talk, learn from each other and grow as officials. I often used humour to lighten the discussion of my challenges and seek feedback. I took any opportunity I could to talk basketball and watch both my mentors and peers for ways to improve. The relationships I started then have continued to other parts of my life.

As I look back on my career, I see how I have grown as an official and a person. I am humble, hard working and always looking to grow in this role. I am never completely satisfied with my performance and look for ways to improve and work on my game. I can say this was not the case the first few years into my career.

In 1995, after only 6 years in officiating, I had my first opportunity to represent New Brunswick at a national tournament. I must admit that this opportunity inflated my ego especially when I was assigned to referee the gold medal game. This over-confidence negatively impacted my performance as I began to over call games and distrust my partners. Luckily, this phase passed quickly as peers I respected called me on this conduct and pointed out that other officials were imitating my behaviour. When did I become someone to be watched and copied? It didn't seem real to me. My basketball persona was different than in other areas of my life and these comments struck home. Their opinion of me was important and I chose to change. Basketball has helped me learn who I am as a person on and off the court.

Some of the best advice I ever received prior to a national tournament was that "your game is only a couple of hours in the day". The rest of the time is where you make or break your experience. Spend time with your fellow officials, get to know them and always be positive. Positive people gravitate to each other and first impressions are hard to get past. I take this to heart as we all have off days, games or times we are distracted. That is the time we need to focus more and have respect for the game regardless of the level. We are not just here for ourselves but for the players, coaches and fellow officials as well.

In 2008, I relocated to Nova Scotia for both personal and professional opportunities outside of basketball. I had just received a second positive CIS men's evaluation and my FIBA card (level 5). I felt a sense of accomplishment and was looking forward to expanding on these successes. However, I was also anxious, scared and concerned about

how the move might impact what I had achieved in New Brunswick and my future growth as an official. I respected the Nova Scotia officials and their systems. Would I have to prove my worth?

Fortunately, from day one I didn't feel like an outsider. I was welcomed by some familiar faces from previous regional tournaments and new ones. I was glad I had taken the time in the past to get to know them and gain mutual respect. I appreciated the opportunities presented to me and worked hard on both the games and relationships to succeed.

My transition to Nova Scotia has made me a much better official, although I still have room to improve. I am constantly growing from the healthy internal referee competition and mentoring from both peers and evaluators. The feedback and open communication offered is intended to help me grow and the NS officials group advance as a whole. We have a great group of hard working officials and the opportunity of lots of challenging games to prove ourselves.

Basketball-life balance is unique to every official- it's a matter of learning what truly nourishes you and what causes stress and chaos in your life. Not everyone is able to chose or achieve the top level of officiating for various reasons.

For example, the commitment to make it in officiating is beyond the time on the court. It includes travel, attending meetings, clinics, studying rules, connecting with peers and staying fit. To be successful you need a support system- a *family*, in addition to the traditional family, also including your employer and other officials. Supportive people of a like mind sharing the same experiences are very important. Be honest with yourself and others. Regardless of the level of ball you are working, it is important to be committed and enjoy the experience.

This past year has been the best of my life and none of it had to do with basketball. In August, my wife Morgane and I welcomed our first child Blake. This has called me to re-evaluate my basketball-life balance. With the support of my *family*, I have been able to cherish moments with my son and still enjoy the game. I'd like take the opportunity to thank all of those people who I've had the privilege to know and who have encouraged me to become the official I am today.

Note: “ I am extremely proud of Brent Stocker’s personal development. When provinces commit to working together for the betterment of officials, we can achieve great things. Our new Certification Program will definitely assist us when officials transition from province to province.”

Reg Caulfield, Supervisor for Nove Scotia