



MENTORSHIP AND RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

Submitted by Morgan Munroe, Interpreter for Alberta

A recently released study entitled "Understanding Factors Contributing to the Retention of Canadian Sports Officials" analyzes some of the reasons given by respondents for their continued involvement in officiating. The study was published by professors Susan Forbes and Lori Livingston of Lakehead University. Over 1000 active officials responded to a questionnaire and the information provided became the basis for the study. Some 10.6% of the respondents were from our sport - the 3rd largest group - so the findings are likely very relevant to our situations. The study makes 15 key observations based on the answers and subsequent analysis by the authors. It is not my intent to review the entire document, but rather to focus on a few of the conclusions made by the authors.

A lot of the observations focus on the positive affects mentoring programs and mentorship in general has had on younger officials. Conversely, the study also points to the frustrations many long serving officials experience with what they perceive to be the lack of both mentorship and general organizational support for those with significant years of service.

Let me start with my thoughts on the mentorship of younger and less experienced officials. Almost every long serving official can think back to at least one but probably a small number of veteran officials who positively influenced them early in their careers. When I started nearly 25 years ago, there were no formal mentorship programs, only the benevolence and foresight of the assignor to send a veteran official out to work with a younger official. I was lucky, amongst the many men who helped get me started on the right track, was Keith Jorgensen a long time CIAU (now CIS) official here in southern Alberta. The one long term mentoring lesson I learned from him was the importance in finding a balance between allowing the younger official to "fend" for themselves on the floor and needing to keep the game under control so it was safe and fair for the players. Keith was a master at it as he just

seemed to intuitively know when to give the young official a chance to “go at it alone” and when to step up and do what was needed in a particular game. In my first year, he and I were working a league tournament final. Not as big as it seems because all teams in the league would still go on to play in their respective zone competitions prior to provincials, but to me a pretty plum assignment. We were in a small town with students keeping score. Early in the game, the visiting coach questioned the accuracy of the score and I, as the closer official, felt it was my responsibility to approach the table. As you might expect, it didn’t take the veteran coach very long to confuse me and add to the stress of the young students at the table. Somehow we arrived at a score that both coaches accepted and the game continued. My partner Keith stayed close but did not intervene. On the way home, I gathered up the courage to ask him why he didn’t step in when it was obvious that I wasn’t improving the situation. He calmly replied that, if I wanted to advance in officiating, there would be times when I would be the experienced official and would need to be able to sort these things out on my own. How would I learn if I didn’t experience the situations first hand? That was a valuable mentoring experience for me. From that point forward, I worked on developing my skills in dealing with scoring or timing errors and the responses that often accompany them from the coaches involved. Have I got everyone of them right? Probably not, but I suppose it depends on whom you ask. However, if this now happens in a game, when it is over, I always think back to my first table experience and the lesson my mentor taught me. I might have not completely satisfied a coach, but I know the value of remaining calm and making the best and most rational decision possible with the information I have available. Would I have learned this eventually? Of course, but it would likely have been through a series of trials and errors with a heavy emphasis on the errors. This is of course something that doesn’t sit well with players, coaches, fellow officials and evaluators. We all know that there is very little latitude to allow officials of any experience level to make serious errors that dramatically affect the outcome of game. This is even more pronounced with younger less experienced officials and yet, in many cases, this is the essence of learning and the goal of mentorship. How can we make the lessons palatable for the newer official so they remain in the game? It’s a tricky balancing act, but a very critical and important one in the retention of new officials. As experienced officials, we know with experience that we learned the most and grew as individuals from our most trying moments and not our greatest achievements. This is the essence of mentorship - allowing younger officials to stand on their own, but still providing them the structure to grow and develop. The old adage rings true. Experience is the hardest teacher; it gives the test first and the lesson later. Good mentors know just how much of the “test” a young official can handle and when enough is enough.

Today, most larger boards have some formal mentorship program in place. Here in Alberta, one large urban board experimented with assigning a group of their members to work all the games in a local high school tournament under the tutelage of a group of mentor/assignors who would work with them exclusively during the two days. The officials were only given their day-one assignments and asked to watch and observe their fellow members. Instead of leaving after their assignment and heading home, they received not only individual feedback after the game, but group feedback and assignments at the end of day one. The goal was to allow the officials to get consistent feedback from a small number of observers and to be assigned to day-two games based on performance. It was a big commitment from all involved, but the results were positive for all who participated. It’s worth noting that the officials involved were all younger officials who were willing to devote extra time as it can be assumed that they perceived there were mentoring opportunities readily available. This mirrors the professors’ conclusion in their study.

We know that mentorship can take the form of observation by mentors with informal feedback, formal observations by trained observers and, as I described in my early experience, on-floor partners who have the confidence in themselves to allow the younger official space to make the occasional mistake, but not the predisposition to over-call the game to “protect” their less experienced partner. By far, this is the most challenging aspect to being a mentor and yet it can be the most vital and critical part of the development of newer officials. As I mentioned earlier, one of the other observations in the study involves long serving officials who perceive a lack of organizational support as their careers advanced.

What about mentoring of the long serving official? It obviously can't be exactly the same as the programs in place for younger officials and yet, as the study indicates, it can be an important factor in keeping officials involved in the game. Quite simply, we can't afford to lose our veteran officials. How do we keep them feeling appreciated and support them as the years go by? Obviously, this is more easily said than done, but, as the study indicates, it is often a determining factor in keeping people involved.

The first step has to be creating a culture of mentoring amongst the members of an association. As a member of the Canada West panel, I've had the opportunity to experience this first hand. Our supervisor, Bill Crowley, has been progressive in bringing new officials on to the panel. Sometimes, this is the result of the addition of new schools and sometimes because he's identified new talent from camps and national tournaments. There are two messages that are emphasized to the new panel members. The first is, once the pregame starts, everyone is to be involved; and then, on the floor everyone has a voice during timeouts, intervals, at halftime and in the post-game. This has created a culture of inclusion which breeds confidence in all members and keeps the long serving members involved as mentors. Although never directly asked, the veterans know that they are rightfully expected to mentor the newer members in a positive and forthright manner. This same attitude and approach is now spreading amongst the college officials who work ACAC games here in Alberta. It has to spread through our high school ranks if we are to remain successful in subsequent years at the post-secondary levels. I know the same commitment and pride exists throughout the country. We must not only continue the fine mentoring programs we have for our younger officials, but remain open and vigilant to the concerns of our long serving officials. Ironically this leads me to the end of my article, but to the first observation in Forbes and Livingston's paper.

Observation 1: Sports officials have a voice and they want to be heard

Officials, for the most part, have previous experience in basketball and moved into officiating due to their passion for the sport or because they felt a need to continue to contribute to the game. Officiating meets this need and, as a result, the respondents feel very strongly that they need to have their voice(s) heard.

Clearly, there is passion amongst our members. In the study, nearly 78% of the respondents have previous experience in the game. In my opinion, the number may be higher in basketball so we clearly have people dedicated to the game. At all levels, local, provincial, or national, we must find ways to hear the voices of all our members and provide them the forum for expression as well as the mentoring to remain part of this great game.

Each provincial officiating association has a copy of the study and I encourage people at levels of officiating to read it and use the observations to improve the retention of basketball officials throughout the country.

CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE ME SOME HELP?

Submitted by Jamey Jennings, Supervisor for Newfoundland/Labrador

When I was a kid growing up in the City of Corner Brook on the west coast of Newfoundland, I spent my summers on the baseball diamond. Our city's representative in the provincial baseball play downs was named the Barons – and we loved beating the St. John's Capitals – who had a fine utility player with a great bat named Jim Walsh. And Jim will tell you – the Caps LOVED coming into Jubilee Field and beating us on our home turf.

Our coach was named "Mike". After practice, I would ask Mike if "he could give me some help" with my bunting, or other hitting skills. The answer I got more often than not was : "Sorry kid, I don't have the time tonight." I was only looking for some advice or a few more swings – 10 minutes tops. But he didn't give me the time of day

What then, does this personal vignette have to do with basketball officiating? Everything, as far as I am concerned. In each province of our country, we have officials who are looked up to and held in high esteem by those at the grassroots level, by those waiting to break into the next level of their officiating careers. It is those individuals who will approach the ones in high esteem – looking for some positive feedback at a tournament or camp, some hint on how they should handle a coach or player who has a reputation with officials, some help with floor mechanics, and how to prepare for games or other aspects of officiating.

It is important for those of us who have participated in National Championships, camps hosted by CABO, regional camps or those who've attended FIBA Certification opportunities to reach out when called upon by members of our provincial associations. Not to provide "the time of day", so to speak, is a disservice to those who seek our advice, our mentorship, and our experience so they may become better officials.

CABO exists because those who had the vision to bring together the officiating fraternity in the country wanted to ensure that education was paramount and that rules and mechanics were uniform from sea to sea to sea. To that end, CABO gets better with each passing year. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the nuances that happen regionally, but these are becoming few and far between. Uniform rule interpretations and accepted two-person and three-person mechanics are provided by our organization through clinics under the NOCP. This will only make our organization better as we progress as we finally have a standard evaluation program for the nation.

So, when you get into a position that you become like my former coach "Mike" and a fellow official asks : "Can you please give me some help?", do the right thing. Take a few minutes to offer your perspective on aspects of officiating on which you are questioned, or to offer help and/or advice on the situation given. If further help is needed from an executive member of a local branch, provincial association or the CABO executive, point the official to the appropriate person. Our National Association does not need us telling our own that "we don't have the time." Time was provided to us by those gone by. It's up to us to continue to see that, as the game grows, so do CABO officials. This will only help our local, provincial and national associations, and more importantly, the game itself.

CHARGE/BLOCK: TRY TO MAKE IT SIMPLE

Submitted by Rob Anderson, Interpreter for Prince Edward Island

Do not make the block/charge call complicated. Everyone may have you convinced that this is the toughest call in basketball and it doesn't have to be. Simply follow a few guidelines to help you with the correct call.

When a block/charge situation presents itself, four options are possible: (1) maybe the offensive player travelled before the contact, then the violation should be called and the contact ignored unless unsportsmanlike or disqualifying; (2) call a foul on the defensive player for blocking; (3) call a foul on the offensive player for charging; (4) make a no-call. Too often, officials do not know which decision to make; they are unsure of what to call, and therefore, because of indecision, there is NO Call ! When a crash occurs, this latter option should not be considered. A call must be made.

First of all, never penalize the defender if he/she has done nothing wrong! The key to calling this play is to "Referee the defense". When officials observe a one on one situation to decide on a block or charge, they must focus on the defender to see if he /she causes the contact. The defender has the same rights as the offensive player in basketball, but we often choose to favour the offensive player with the ball. Having the ball does not warrant any more rights.

Initially, the defender must have established "a legal guarding position", with both feet on the floor, in an acceptable defensive stance and facing the offensive player with the ball being guarded. The key is "initially", but by no means does the defender have to have both feet on the floor or be standing still when contact occurs. The defender may move backward or laterally to maintain the legal guarding position in front of the offensive player. The defender may even leave his/her feet to jump straight up in the air. If the defensive player remains within these parameters, he/she has done nothing wrong and should not be judged responsible for contact. However, if the offensive player on the dribble gets his/her head and shoulders by the defender, the defender loses his/her legal guarding position and he/she must re-establish such legal guarding position. Otherwise, he/she will be responsible for the eventual contact.

Once the offensive player with the ball is in the air, the defensive player may not move into the spot where the offensive player is determined to land. If this happens, it is a blocking foul. However, if the defender established a legal position on the floor before the offensive player jumped and contact occurs on landing, this would be a charging foul

If you follow these guidelines and see the whole play, you will be confident and have success in making the correct call.

RELATIONSHIP WITH COACHES

Submitted by Sébastien Gauthier, Interpreter for Quebec

Everyone who knows me well realizes that the relation between officials and coaches is, in my opinion, an aspect of officiating that needs improvement across Canada. Being accessible to coaches while making firm decisions constitutes a paradox and requires a high level of skill. We still behave in ways that are remnants of our years of officiating NCAA rules. For too many officials, pleasing coaches carries greater importance than applying the rule and being fair and equitable for the teams in presence. It seems that, still today, some colleagues tolerate inadequate behaviours in order to be on the coaches' list at the end of the season and selected for various championships.

I know that, in all the regions of the country, we are dealing with a few coaches who utilize verbal aggression during games in order to influence the outcome, at all levels from mini-basket to national university championships. In the past two years, CABO and Canada Basketball have issued points of emphasis to be enforced across Canada. One of these points deals with the relationship with coaches. As a group, we must enforce these new directives, discuss them at our clinics and follow up with our supervisors, if things are going to improve. Changes have to be applied at all levels of play. I encourage you again this year to insist with your provincial interpreter so he reminds everyone of the point of emphasis related to the relationship with the coaches. The application of the instructions outlined in the Canada Basketball document will contribute in building respect, a more positive relation, and a more harmonious communication with coaches.

These few lines are far short of a 2-hour clinic, but I wish to at least share my passion for the behavioural changes that need to be achieved. Some will say : « But why????!!! » « Is it really necessary? » They say that the coaches' shouting does not bother them and that they don't hear them anyway since they concentrate on the game. « He was not yelling at me, he was yelling at my partner. » « It did not change the game. » « Me, it doesn't bother me. » These are some of the comments heard in the recent past.

Now, do the following mental exercise : think of a game in which you were the target of verbal abuse from a coach and neither you nor one of your colleagues penalized this inappropriate behaviour. Now, put yourself in the shoes of the opposing coach, players, or fans, a parent, a scorer, a younger official in the stands, etc. Ask yourself how these people felt and may have reacted to your performance and their perception of impartiality with your decisions in regard to the abuse they observed. You may not have been bothered by the abuse, but appearances were against you on each occasion.

Officiating is not easy and one does not need to increase the level of difficulty by tolerating behaviours detrimental to our sport. Do not kid yourself, an abusive behaviour is almost always meant to influence you and ultimately favour the style of play of one team to the disadvantage of the other. Coaches who adopt this kind of tactics do not want you to make fair decisions, but decisions that favour their team. When a coach is becoming a distraction to you or disturbing the smooth running of the game, it is time to act. He /She will go as far as you will let him/her. If you ignore him/her, the problem will only amplify.

Preparation is everybody's business, from rookie officials to national evaluators. Keep the points of emphasis in mind and talk about them in your pre-game. Discuss them in your pre-season clinics. Insist with your more experienced officials to work as a team and not tolerate situations where a colleague is a target of a coach's abuse. Retaining newer officials depends on that. Ask the supervisors to be clear in their instructions to officials at the beginning of the season and before national championships. Meet with, train, follow up, and ultimately sanction officials who tolerate abusive behaviour.

The majority of coaches do not condone such behaviour in their gym, but feel that they have to become abusive when they observe their opponent acting in that way without being penalized by the officials, because they fear that their team may be disadvantaged.

Enforce the points of emphasis related to coaches' behaviour and I guarantee that you will have the best season of your life. You will have more fun on the court and make better decisions.

SUMMER BREAK

This is the last issue of Post Play Express for the 2012-2013 season. I wish to sincerely thank all the contributors to our newsletter over the past ten months. I hope that the membership enjoyed reading the different pieces published this year. I receive practically no feedback from the readership, so it is difficult to know if Post Play Express fulfill needs and expectations of the members.

Post Play Express will be back in September. In the meantime, please feel free to express comments or suggestions to improve our monthly publication. Send your comments to paul.deshaies@videotron.ca

Paul Deshaies, Editor

Post Play Express

ENJOY A GREAT SUMMER!

