



Post Play Express

Vol.5, No.6, February 2014

Gaining confidence, basketball officials mentoring program

By Monique Massiah

(This article was originally published in the Maple Creek Times, December 31st, 2013)

A one-of-a-kind mentoring program for basketball referees developed four years ago in Maple Creek is being practised throughout SWAC¹. If you attend one of the junior basketball games in Maple Creek it's likely you'll be watching high school students – participants of the junior basketball officials mentoring program – officiating the game.

"There's really nowhere else where particularly it's being done that is similar to what we are doing here," said program creator and long-time official Art Unsworth. The junior referee program is open to all students in SWAC. Participants are usually in grades 10-12 and have a basketball background. Students throughout the school division can sign up for the program and learn the basics of officiating firsthand at games and by participating in tournaments organized in Swift Current by South Saskatchewan officials Unsworth and Harv Martinez.

This year, Jordana Vos Jans, Graham Gordon and Kyler Barkman are taking part in the program. "It's really good, it's my first time this year and Art's a good teacher," said Barkman. "My dad is a ref so he talked me into it and I play on the basketball team. It's good to know how the game works." "I decided to do reffing because it was another way to get involved with basketball, and I really enjoy basketball, it's one of my favourite sports," said Vos Jans. She noted reffing is an activity she could complete while in post-secondary if she is unable to join a school team. "It's good experience and it gets you a little bit more pumped up. It keeps you in shape," she said.

1

¹ SWAC refers to the South West Athletic Conference. SWAC is a member of the Saskatchewan High Schools Athletic Association

In her second year of reffing, Vos Jans said at first being on the court and making calls was nerve wracking. "I didn't know exactly what I was doing. This year my first game was a lot calmer. I understood better what I was doing and Art's a really good teacher," she said. "I know what all of the rules are and what I can and can't do. It helps with my other game, for when I play," she added. Each of the three participants play on MCCS' senior basketball teams.

"I've worked with officials both junior and senior," said Unsworth. "They all have a basketball background, they've played somewhere along the line and that is a huge asset when you've played – you understand the game and that's half of the battle already." Unsworth approaches the program with a mechanics-of-the-game background compared to the usual rules-of-the-game teachings. "The mechanics are where you stand, where you look, what you are looking for as opposed to the rules, and the rules are black and white," said Unsworth. For example, where a basketball player will track the ball on the court during the game, an official will watch the space between players for illegal contact or be watching quadrants of the court for line violations. "It's a challenge to learn that. For example, the ball is passed between two players, you naturally as a player watch the ball go across," said Unsworth. "You can't do that as an official. You are aware of the ball movement, but you need to continue to follow the players."

Unsworth remarked that province-wide there is a decline in the number of officials. "All provinces, all associations are losing members and we as senior officials are guilty of not finding and training replacements," he said. "Replacements come in through volunteers, but it's a brutal learning curve without somebody hands-on mentoring you. I remember this well having come up myself the same way." Under the mentorship program, referees can move on to officiating games based on their performance on national officials testing, like former participant Raelene Boschee who is reffing at Lethbridge. "They are tested locally in the mentorship program. I've done it in all of the schools in SWAC from Shaunavon, Eastend, Gull Lake and Swift Current," said Unsworth. "The true test is so the coaches don't yell at you, the players don't yell at you and I don't yell at you is a passing grade and these kids they learn and you can see them blossom in confidence."

Junior officials have the option of being paid for games or gaining volunteer hours which are evaluated by their school. The program also helps referees to gain confidence in a position which is often intimidating and confrontational. "It's a challenging thing for a person to step into that field because the instant you blow that whistle the whole world looks at you," said Unsworth. "For a kid, that's hard on the ego, so often they are not confident within themselves. So it's a case of giving them confidence and I work hard at that – whether they make the right call or the wrong call – you tell them a good job, that they've blown the whistle, stepped up and done something."

Unsworth, who refs in Saskatchewan and Alberta, noted there is a decline in officials partly due to verbal abuse. "We just lost an official in Medicine Hat, he quit," he said. "The primary reasons are that you have fans, coaches and players and parents yelling at these people. These fans are sitting five feet away from you." In basketball, unlike hockey or soccer, the rules enable referees to have more control over spectators. "We can have them removed from the gymnasium," said Unsworth. Players or coaches may be removed from the game and a report filed with SWAC and the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association. The issue is rare in Saskatchewan, but fans can be removed from the facility by school supervisors if they interfere with the game.

REFEREEING A BLOW-OUT

Submitted by Gerard Brien, Interpreter for Newfoundland/Labrador

As officials, we are expected to give our best efforts in every game. As we progress as officials, we should aspire to referee at the highest levels of basketball in our country. The elite few achieve officiating prominence at national and world championships. However, the vast majority of CABO officials will never work at a national tournament. In fact, most of our officials derive their greatest satisfaction from working grass-roots basketball within their respective communities.

When officiating local league basketball, not all games will be decided by a last-second three-point heave from center-court in front of 10,000 screaming fans. Indeed, many games will be lopsided affairs in a near-empty gym. Even though these games may not be the most exciting ones to do, they quite often are the most challenging. In the course of observing and evaluating referees in such games, I often see officials who are only "going through the motions." They seem to referee as if they think that the game is not worthy of their best efforts. While I realize that everyone has their bad days, e.g. a tough day at work or a quarrel with a loved one, there is no excuse for a poor attitude towards the game. Blow-outs require every bit as much focused attention and respect from officials as barn-burners.

Officials will often encounter more game control issues in a one-sided game than in a nail-biter. The proper "feel" for the game is imperative in such situations, and officials must keep their focus and concentration for the entire forty minutes. Many games, even though lopsided, could be "rock-'em, sock-'em" affairs. These games require a strong game management presence. Officials must be vigilant and take care of any potential problems before they escalate into rough play and unsportsmanlike conduct. Good game awareness and control will be the difference in whether such games are healthy physical competitions or out-and-out war!!!

But not all blow-outs are nasty examples of poor sportsmanship. Many games will seem like scrimmages with lots of offence and very little defence. All the shots are falling and thus there is very little rebounding activity. In such games, the referees do not need to be over-officious, but they must stay engaged in the game in order to adjust to any change of intensity that could occur. In a nice peaceful game of basketball, it may be a good time for referees to concentrate more on specific aspects of their officiating, such as movement, crisp signals or off-ball coverage.

Most elite officials will tell you that refereeing a close competitive ballgame is ten times easier than handling a non-competitive grudge match. All officials must be prepared to adjudicate the game as it presents itself. Every game deserves our best effort, whether it is a buzzer-beater or a 30-point blow-out!!!

FOUL IN THE ACT OF SHOOTING?

By Paul Deshaies, CABO National Interpreter

The following topic was raised on many occasions in the recent past. It concerns a foul against a player who apparently has started the act of shooting, but after the whistle, (a) does not release the ball, (b) releases the ball which misses the basket, (c) ends up attempting a pass towards a teammate. In each case, has the foul been committed in the act of shooting? Before going into each of the situations, let's look at the definition of the act of shooting:

15.1.2 The act of shooting:

• *Begins when the player starts the continuous movement normally preceding the release of the ball and, in the judgement of an official, he has started an attempt to score by throwing, tapping or dunking the ball towards the opponents' basket.*

• *Ends when the ball has left the player's hand(s) and, in the case of an airborne shooter, both feet have returned to the floor.*

The player attempting to score might have his arm(s) held by an opponent, thus preventing him from scoring, even though he is considered to have made an attempt to score. In this case it is not essential that the ball leaves the player's hand(s).

Therefore, by rule, the act of shooting must include the release of the ball towards the opponent's basket, unless the player is prevented to do so because his arms are being held. So, here is the proper interpretation in each of the situations.

(a) Returns to the floor without releasing the ball ;

RULING : Unless the player was unable to release the ball because he was being held, this is not a foul in the act of shooting because the ball did not leave the hands of the player.

(b) Continues the act of shooting and then releases the ball which misses the basket;

RULING : This is a foul in the act of shooting since the ball was released towards the opponent's basket.

3) Does not continue the act of shooting (i.e. ends the act of shooting) and subsequently passes the ball off to a teammate.

RULING : This is a foul against a player attempting a pass and not in the act of shooting.

Even if a player seems to have started the act of shooting and then is fouled, we must wait to see the end of the action before deciding if the foul was committed in the act of shooting or not.

BUT WHERE SHOULD I STAND????

Submitted by Sébastien Gauthier, Interpreter for Québec

Over the past few months, I have received many questions regarding two and three-person mechanics, movement on the floor, rotations and switches. Many officials were puzzled following their evaluation and the demands and suggestions received from different supervisors.

We must remember that almost all movements and permutations are described in the two and three-person mechanics manuals published by FIBA as well as in the IAABO manual which incorporates the couple of variations used in Canada. In order to achieve as much uniformity as possible in our mechanics, we must normally follow what the books recommend (in my opinion about 80% of the time). I am always surprised to realize that a majority of officials I meet have not even read those books that are so basic to their development. On pages 23 and 29 of the two-person manual, there is a sentence in bold characters which says : « *Go where you need to go in order to see what you need to see* ». In my opinion, that phrase covers the 20% to complete the equation.

Your supervisors' comments usually fall in this 20% area. Based on their experience and preferences, they offer advice in order to better see, judge, and move during the game and in difficult situations. Advice also on the strength of the whistle, movements toward the table to report, etc. It may happen that such advice fall outside of the box defined in the books, but they are based on past experiences, different officiating philosophies, and sometimes on other rules. The strength of an official is to be open-minded to these types of suggestions, to experiment with them, and chose from among them those who will help making better decisions on the floor.

As officials or supervisors, since the various provincial and national championships are fast approaching, I incite you to again read the basic documents in order to standardize the message given to the officials in your province and across Canada and to get ready to offer peak performance.

Good luck to all!

REFEREEING VS JUDGING – A COMPARISON

Submitted by Jim Walsh, CABO Past-President

I have been a basketball official for over 35 years. I have officiated games at all levels of play from Under 12 boys and girls to the CIS Championships. I have been an instructor at officials' clinics and also serve as an evaluator. I have been in attendance at many clinics and been evaluated many times.

Throughout my career there have been some very consistent pieces of advice that helped me to become a better official. Many of you have heard the same things repeatedly such as: (1) control what you can control; (2) see the whole play; (3) anticipate the play – not the call; (4) be a good listener; (5) be friendly but firm in your approach; (6) do not prejudge; and (7) give clear and concise explanations.

When I was appointed a judge of the Provincial Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, I have had many people ask me whether refereeing was a good preparation for my new career. I found it difficult to give an answer at first. Now that I have been a sitting judge for more than a year, I can see that there are many similarities in the two roles and that yes, indeed, refereeing has been a valuable tool in preparing me for my new career. Let me explain.

What can I control? In officiating, I had to know my rules, interpretations and mechanics. I had to prepare for each assignment. Now, I must be current with respect to the law and procedures applicable to each case that comes before me.

See the whole play – We have been taught to let the play develop and, when it is completed, to make a decision. The same holds true in judging. I must keep an open mind until all evidence has been entered and the applicable law is applied to the specific facts. Then, and only then, can I make my decision.

Anticipation – We have been taught to get in the best position possible to judge the play. The same holds true in judging. As the case develops, I am often anticipating challenges that may be brought with respect to evidence or sentencing issues and must be ready when the challenges occur.

Be a good listener – Successful referees learn how to be good listeners in order to address concerns of players and coaches alike. We know that we need to talk less and listen more in order to really find out what the issue is. It usually allows us to solve problems more easily and without argument. The same holds true in judging. Listening attentively is crucial in identifying issues, determining facts, and receiving legal arguments on the matters in dispute. Then, judges are better equipped to render their decisions.

Be friendly but firm – I have stated at many clinics that it is crucial to give respect in order to get respect. The most respected officials are the ones who give respect to the participants. The same holds true in a courtroom. Justice must be seen to be done which includes a feeling of respect that the participants in the process must sense. Just as in a game of basketball, the courtroom is not the place for idle chit chat and being overly friendly with one side as it will ALWAYS give the impression of bias in favour of that side.

Everybody starts with a clean slate – Referees always have to guard against prejudging a player or coach based on their past behaviours. These people may actually have a game where they change their normal patterns and you have to allow them to do so and not penalize them for the past. The same holds true in judging. Past conduct is not always an indicator that someone is guilty. It certainly would make that person a suspect. Except in exceptional circumstances, past conduct is only relevant AFTER someone has been found guilty.

Give clear and concise explanations – Referees need to get right to the point when answering enquiries or dealing with questions. The same holds true for judges. The clearest judgements are those that explain clearly and concisely what decision has been made and the reasons why it was made. The person who agrees with you does not really care why but the person who disagrees definitely wants to know.

This last point raises the one real difference between refereeing and judging. At my swearing-in ceremony, I was speaking with the Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador who is a long-time basketball fan. He said to me “I have waited a long time to hear arguments about one of your decisions! Unlike refereeing, you can now be appealed!”