



Post Play Express

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SOME MUSINGS ABOUT CONSISTENCY

Submitted by Bill Carr, Supervisor for Alberta

A little while ago, I received from our Interpreter the latest (April) issue of Post Play Express and was reminded about a commitment I made to prepare an article for the May issue. Over the May 4th - 6th weekend, we had both an Executive meeting and a Cabinet meeting in Edmonton, with our AGM wrapping things up on Sunday afternoon. In preparation for these meetings, I'd been thinking back on various successes and challenges we've had over the last year and I thought some of these might fit in nicely with a Post Play article. Hopefully, you'll agree.

Recruitment and Development of Officials continues to be on our agenda and, as I recall, our President, Jim Walsh, referred to this in a Post Play Express article last fall. In Alberta, and possibly in other provinces, it seems to be a bigger challenge in the more rural areas. But why? And how is this linked to consistency? Consider this possibility.

The relationships between Provincial and Territorial Sports Organizations (PTSOs) and their respective Officials Associations vary considerably across Canada and I believe are far from consistent. In some provinces, the PTSOs provide both financial and staff support to the Officials' Associations to assist with recruitment, training and development. It is viewed as a core component of the PTSO's responsibility. As a result, clinics may be held in some of the more remote rural areas of a province with little or no cost for the attendees. In our province, no such PTSO support is provided, and the cost to attend a clinic is borne by the attendees, with our Super Weekend

provincial clinic costing upwards of \$100.00 per person, not including travel, accommodation and meals. We recognize that this may be a deterrent for some rural officials who often work fewer than 20 or so high school games per year. Which begs the question - might the cost to become an accredited official be a contributing factor in the recruitment and development cycle?

Retention of officials is closely tied to recruitment and development but I believe it to be much more complicated. I believe people give up on officiating for a number of reasons, some of which are documented below:

The belief that there is no further career upside or the frustration with their current schedule of assignments probably top the list. Officials' associations often identify referees with excellent potential and attempt to provide the encouragement and mentoring necessary for growth. In Alberta, we have set minimum standards for eligibility for selection to provincial championships. For example, a candidate must have attended a provincial clinic during the last two years, and must obtain a minimum score of 80% on the CABO exam to be eligible for a College level provincial appointment. How consistently should this principle be applied? Take the case of the President or Leader of a small rural board of 8 officials several hours north of Edmonton. His or her upside is being selected to a provincial high school tournament; this is the reward or goal so-to-speak. But the official scored only 76% on the CABO exam. How consistently should this established minimum standard be applied, knowing the risk of possibly losing first the official, secondly the Leader in a local board and third, perhaps even the local board?

Burnout is another significant reason for which we lose officials. Basketball is now a 12-month sport and there are very few breaks in the year. Morgan Munroe addressed this in a Post Play Express article earlier this year. Perhaps our local and provincial associations have to reduce their commitment to service various leagues and give their officials some down time. And similarly, perhaps officials need to accept fewer assignments to give themselves some down time and an improved family/work/life balance.

I must confess that Cam Moskal's Post Play Express article earlier this year really resonated with me and I'm convinced that how officials are compensated for their work is a variable regarding retention. I'm not going to dwell on this, but I believe that somewhere, the principle of equal or consistent compensation for a consistent level of work has been lost.

Complicating the challenge that officials' associations have regarding these matters are the expectations of our local and provincial stakeholders, often the associations to which we provide services. In Alberta, there are two main associations that fall into this category, namely the Alberta Schools Athletic Association (ASAA) and the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference (ACAC).

With respect to the ASAA, where they hold their provincial championships is strictly their decision. Often, in order to promote sports in some of the more rural areas, thus making their championships truly provincial in nature, small communities are chosen as hosts. These communities often have few if any local officials and are sometimes located a considerable distance from the major urban centres where officials would like nothing more than an opportunity to work in a provincial championship. But, cost is a factor (primarily travel and

accommodation) and it becomes necessary to balance the associated cost with both the availability of officials (some cannot take time away from work to travel on a Wednesday and officiate Thursday, Friday and Saturday) along with the level of officials required. This can create inconsistency in the overall balance of a crew of officials assigned to a tournament. And unfortunately, this inconsistency creates concern. We sometimes receive complaints such as “we had better officiating at the zone playoffs than we had at the provincials”. Or, “there was an official in the stands watching the games that should have been assigned to the tournament”. Or, “how did this official get a provincial assignment - he/she was brutal in one of our games earlier this season”. But thankfully, our relationship with the ASAA is excellent. They understand the challenges of arranging for eight separate provincial high school championships each year over the same weekend, many of which have 12 and as many as 16 teams participating. And they’ve come to appreciate that there are many variables in play when we continue to strive for the characteristics of competency and consistency in officiating. This past season, we had one high school provincial tournament played in a small rural community 700 km north of Edmonton.

Last, I’m going to touch briefly on the ACAC. This, I believe is probably the fastest growing conference of post secondary schools in Canada. It seems that each year, a new school joins the ACAC with teams participating in various sports, and in particular, basketball. Here again, recruiting, developing and retaining officials in some of these smaller communities present problems. Included is the need to have officials with a higher NOCP level and be competent with 3-person mechanics. When an insufficient number of local officials is available, it becomes necessary to have officials travel and unfortunately, this means an added cost. So once again, economics becomes a variable when we attempt to address the need for consistency. Case in point below.

This year, the ACAC Men’s championships were held at Keyano College in Fort McMurray, while the Women’s championships were held at Augustana College in Camrose. As a point of reference, in these two communities there is a combined total of 4 approved college level officials. In Fort McMurray, all nine officials who were assigned to work the tournament and two A/Es were flown in, while in Camrose, the assigned 12 officials and two A/Es travelled upwards of 5 hours to referee the championships.

As part of our initiative for NOCP certification, we were delighted to have CABO’s support in having Warren Poncsak and Nancy Éthier participate in these tournaments as A/Es along with Jake Steinbrenner and Grant Stewart from the ABOA. Both Jake and Grant are also National Evaluators. These two tournaments were truly provincial in nature with only one local official from Camrose participating. One of our objectives was to have accredited non Alberta NOCP Evaluators assist us in the accreditation process and by all accounts this was a truly successful initiative. From a consistency standpoint, I believe this was one of this year’s true highlights and success stories.

I hope that some of my musings about consistency will foster some thought and discussion both locally, provincially and nationally. I don’t believe there are easy solutions, but I do believe that by trying to identify some of the shortcomings, we will have a better chance of making improvements.

THE ROAD TO BARCELONA

Submitted by Dick Steeves, from New Brunswick

A few weeks ago I received a call from my good friend Don Grant, i.e. Chico, aka the Godfather, asking me to write an article about my basketball officiating experiences and outline how one gets from Bessborough Middle school to Barcelona as he put it. So I'm thinking, what can I write about? And more specifically, what is it that he wants to hear? I really have no idea where to start, except that perhaps the beginning might be a pretty good place. A number of years ago a physician friend of mine, Dr. Tom Barry from Fredericton, asked me if I had kept a diary of my basketball experiences and trips over the years, and I said "no" I hadn't. I wish I had kept a diary. So the following really is to the best of my recollection.

Who would have ever thought that a technical foul, on a cold Friday night in February in Sussex, New Brunswick, a long time ago, would one day lead to a game with the greatest basketball team of all time on the Olympic stage? Sounds pretty farfetched, but that's pretty much the way it all started. We, Moncton High that is, were playing a game on that Friday night in Sussex and during the game I said something to one of the officials and he called a technical foul on me. I don't recall what was said or even who the official was, but anyway the coach immediately sends in a sub for me and for the rest of the game I'm sitting on the bench. The next day we are playing Sackville High at home and when I arrived at the gym for the game the coach informed me that I was not dressing for the game because I had gotten a technical foul the night before. Needless to say I was pretty disappointed, because this was the last conference game of the season, and it was a pretty big game. Ed Skiffington, the Athletic Director at Moncton High at that time, happened to be in the room when I was informed that I wasn't going to be allowed to play. He sensed that I was a little pissed and he said to me : "Get your sneakers....you're coming with me". I asked where we were going, and he said to referee a basketball game across town. It was a high school game between Harrison Trimble and Simmonds. I had no idea what I was doing but Skiff did a great job of carrying me that afternoon and we got through the game with no problems. I was hooked. And this is where it all started. So, in reality that technical foul that was called on me on that Friday night was the catalyst. Everything happens for a reason they say.

Now that I was hooked on officiating basketball, Skiff had me do a lot of refereeing in the intramural league at the high school. This is where I really cut my teeth so to speak learning how to manage the game and learn the basic techniques. Skiff was a big help in this regard and was the one responsible for launching my career. Over the course of the next few years I refereed a lot of games in the Moncton area at the junior level and a few games at the high school level. In 1968, I moved on to the University of New Brunswick where I continued to referee while a student. It was a good way to stay in touch with the game and make a few bucks on the side as a student. Actually we did a lot of refereeing while in University as Fredericton had a lot of pretty good basketball teams in those years so there was no shortage of games to be done.

This is where I met Bill Ritchie. Bill was responsible for assigning officials to games in the Fredericton area and we became pretty good friends over the years. Bill was a giant in Canadian basketball, as he was an excellent official himself in his day, and later for his administrative efforts. He was in on the formation of the 1st association of approved basketball officials in N.B. Later on, he was a member of the executive for both the national and

international associations for basketball officials. He also assigned officials for national as well as international tournaments. More on this later, as this would be instrumental in my career later on.

In the meantime, during these formative years, I met a guy by the name of Don Grant. Now Don is a legend in officiating circles in New Brunswick as well as nationally in a number of sports. He's also a member of a number of Halls of Fame, and rightfully so. He was the whole package. Don sort of took me under his wing. He's the guy who really taught me how to officiate, to manage a game, to handle the players and coaches, to talk your way out of sticky situations, and at the same time seem to keep everybody happy. He shared with me the moxie that you need to have to be a top official. We refereed a ton of games together, high school & college, over the years and the lessons that he passed on to me stood me in pretty good stead over the years.

Now it's 1982, and this is where things really start to happen. Bill Ritchie called me one day, and asked me to apply for an international referee licence, a FIBA licence. The reason was that the World University Games (FISU Games) were going to be held in Edmonton, Alberta in 1983 and they were going to need a number of officials from Canada. So I applied for the licence, got it, and now I'm ready to be set loose on the world. Later that year (1982) Bill sends me off to my 1st international experience to Havana, Cuba with the Canadian National Team. Other than getting pretty sick down there, it was a pretty positive experience. Now I got to see what the international game was all about. It was a lot quicker and a lot more physical than university basketball in Canada. It was a good education for me.

Now it's 1983 and we are at the World University Games in Alberta. The assigners were from Yugoslavia & Spain and they had no idea who Dick Steeves was from Adam. I was assigned to some pretty good games and as far as I know I thought I did a pretty decent job. No major problems to speak of, as things went well. All the games that I was assigned to were men's games. Now the playoff games are starting and Canada had qualified on the men's side, so we figured that we (the Canadian officials) were done because of neutrality. The next day, to my surprise, I get an assignment on the women's side, a playoff game between Romania & China. The game goes pretty well and Romania wins quite easily. Two days later, I get assigned to referee the women's Gold Medal game between U.S.A. and Romania. Talk about surprised....wow!! The U.S. wins easy. Of all the officials there from around the world why do they choose a rookie from Canada for the Gold Medal game? I have no idea, except that the assigners must have liked my style of officiating. Sometimes you just get lucky and things go well.

The next year, 1984, I get invited to a tournament in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It was a club tournament with most of the teams from South America. There were a few other teams, one from the U.S. and one from Italy, there as well. This was another good learning experience about how tough men's international basketball can be. This was the first time I was involved in a game with a major brawl in it. One thing I learned is that when these guys don't like each other and they start swinging, it's a good idea not to get in the middle of it. These are big guys. It was interesting that the guy assigning the games was from Yugoslavia. You guessed it.....the same guy that was assigning the games in Alberta the year before. As luck would have it.....you guessed it.....I got the final again. I think he liked me. Turns out he was a pretty influential guy, the President of the International Technical Commission. He told me that the only way to keep getting better was to just to do as many games as possible. Experience is a great teacher he said.

In 1985, I was invited to do a tournament in Taipei, Taiwan. This tournament was a bit different in that it was a women's tournament and it was also my first trip to Asia. Of all the games I've worked over the years, women's games have not been my strong suit, but one of the games we did over there was most memorable. I did the game

with a female official from the U.S., Patty Broderick, a real good official whom I would meet again later at the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. The game was between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China (ROK vs. ROC). What a great game.....12,000 screaming fans. There was no post play whatsoever. It was like a track meet....run & gun, up and down the court with great shooting. Those gals could really play.

In 1986, it was off to South America again and a tournament in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was an invitational championship for club teams. The fans in Argentina are something else. What an atmosphere they bring to the game. They show up about an hour prior to tip-off and start their singing along with the drums and they don't stop until the game is over. The better the home team plays, the louder they get. They really create an unbelievable atmosphere. This tournament is where I first met Arvidas Sabonis, just possibly the best center I ever saw play this game.....bar none. Sabonis was playing for the club team from Lithuania, Jalgiris Kaunas. How good was this club team? Well, four of the starters for Jalgiris were also starters on the powerful Soviet national team. That's a pretty good club team. Keep in mind now this is before the breakup of the Soviet Union. Jalgiris played a team from Argentina in the final with the great guard Cortejo. Sabonis was just too much of a force and the Lithuanians won easily. Got lucky again and was assigned to the final. I would run across these Lithuanians again the following year in Greece at the European Championship and in Seoul at the '88 Olympics when they were playing for the Soviet Union. If this is what European basketball looked like.....I figured it must be pretty good.

1987 was the start of a 5 year span that I guess you could call the "Big Time". It seemed that the first few years of my international career were prepping me for what was to come next. In 1987, I was invited to referee the European Championship in Athens, Greece. The Europeans invited two officials from North America to this tournament as neutral officials, Paul Housman (an official in the ACC) from the U.S. and me. This tournament was unbelievable. This was my first experience in Europe and my first opportunity to meet some of Europe's top officials, guys like Costas Rigas (Greece), Yvon Mainini (France), and Wieslaw Zych (Poland) to name a few. These guys were really good officials. The tournament was played at the "Peace & Friendship" stadium, but there wasn't a whole lot of peace and friendship going on once the tournament started. This was for the Championship of Europe, a take no prisoners mentality. There were more than five hundred media representatives and 45 radio and TV networks covering this event. Now this was the Big Time. The tournament had 12 teams; two pools of 6 play round robin and the top 4 in each pool cross over in the medal round, 1 plays 4, etc. The intensity in this tournament was like nothing I had ever experienced before, and as a neutral official I was getting some pretty good games, pretty tough games. The preliminary round went as expected with the top teams finishing 1 through 4 in each pool.

In the medal round Yvon Mainini and I were assigned a quarter final game between Italy and Greece. I remember Mainini telling me that this was not a gift, as he called it. Mainini is a great official and we took this game by the throat from the get-go and had no problems whatsoever. Both teams were great and Greece pulled off the major upset; 4 beat the 1 seed (90-78). In the semi-final round I was assigned the game between Spain and the Soviet Union. One element missing for the Soviets was Sabonis. He had torn his Achilles and was in rehab. They brought Vladimir Tkachenko in place of Sabonis. His was a monster at 2.20 meters. He was so big you could hardly see around this guy on the court. Spain had one of the great shooters from Europe, Epi. The Soviets just proved to be too much for the Spaniards and won going away 113-96. At the same time, Greece was on a roll and had pulled off another upset, this time the powerful Yugoslavia 81-77, setting up the final between the Soviets and the Greeks. And what a final it was to be. Some people have said that it was one of the greatest games ever played in Europe. As luck would have it, I was assigned the final game with Sanchis from Spain. Needless to say, this was the toughest ticket

in the country. The basketball Gods couldn't have written a better script for the host Greeks, a chance to play for it all.....against all odds.

The atmosphere for this game was nearly overwhelming. As we approached the court, I knew I was going to experience something special. You could just feel it. At one end stood the mighty Soviet Union national team preparing to meet the host Greeks with more than 16,000 passionate home fans dancing, singing, shouting and roaring to the rock anthem "Eye of the Tiger" as it blared in the background. Just as we reached the court, the atmosphere intensified. I thought to myself, "Holy smokes are you kidding me? Christ and the 12 apostles couldn't referee this game." As it turned out, the Greeks, with the heavy artillery of Greek basketball Nik Gallis, upset the Soviets in overtime 103-101. The Greek center, Kambouris made 2 free-throws with 4 seconds left in the game to win it all. The Soviets missed the final shot and the Greeks were the champions of Europe. Hollywood couldn't have scripted this one any better. The country went nuts for the next three days in celebration.

I had never refereed a game before where I felt as much pressure as I did in this one. At one point, I remember looking up at the clock and there was exactly 8 minutes to go and Tkachenko had just thrown down a monster dunk, and for about 10 seconds I couldn't even breathe. It was a bit scary. The next year, one of the commissioners from this tournament told me that he had never seen an atmosphere as intense as it was that night. It was nice to know that I wasn't the only guy feeling the heat. This tournament was an unbelievable experience. (Check out YouTube Eurobasket 87)

So, how do you top that tournament in Greece? Well, I guess by getting an invitation to referee at the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea the next year (1988). The selection people must have liked what they saw of my officiating so far in order to get invited to the Olympics in Seoul. When I got the letter I was on cloud 9, because the Olympics is the ultimate.....the Mt. Everest of basketball officiating. One really nice thing about this tournament was that my good friend, John Weiland was invited to officiate as well. I had worked many games in Canada with John and he's a great official, and a guy that I had learned a lot from over the years. Another Canadian, Al Rae was in Seoul as well. Al was the Vice President of the technical commission for FIBA and as such attended most of the big tournaments as a commissioner. It was always nice to have Al around, as a friend, of whom to bounce things off. Al had been a great official in his own right having worked at four Olympic Games in his career.

For some reason, this was not one of my better tournaments. I can't really remember why, but somehow I didn't get off to a good start. I didn't feel comfortable and apparently it was reflected in my officiating. I only did three or four games, and in the end was assigned the game for 7th & 8th place. So, at the end of it all, I was disappointed in my performance and wondered what the future now held. Not a good time to mess up.

The significant thing about the 1988 Olympics is that it was a turning point for international basketball. It was where the whole idea of the pros playing for the U.S. was spawned. The Soviet Union beat the U.S. in the semi-finals and went on to win the gold medal. Now the U.S. had been using college kids in these international competitions and had been pretty successful up until now. But it had become evident that these college kids couldn't compete with the European teams any longer and win. The Europeans were just too strong for the college kids now. When the Soviets beat the U.S. in the semi-final one Basketball USA official was heard saying, "We need the pros". So in fact, this is where the transition started that would later pave the way for the NBA stars to play in the Olympics. More on that later.

I wasn't sure what was going to happen next as far as my international officiating career was concerned. Here I had gotten to the Olympics, and didn't really have a great tournament, so I wondered if it was all over. To my surprise, the next year, 1989, I was invited by the Australian Basketball Federation to referee at the Oceania Championship in Sydney, Australia. This was the final round of the Oceania qualifying tournament for the World Championships that were to be held in Argentina the following year (1990). They invited two neutrals to officiate the best 2 out of 3 games between Australia and New Zealand, Stavros Douvis from Greece and me. Australia killed them. It wasn't even close and I wondered why they had brought two officials from half a world away to referee this. They said they had problems when they used locals in the past and wanted to bring in neutrals for a change. It cost them a ton of money to bring us in, but I told them if they ever needed neutral again, to give me a shout, because Australia is a beautiful country to visit.

Apparently my international career wasn't over, because the next year, in 1990, I was invited to work the World Championships in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Now this was quite a tournament and I felt like I was back on track. This was my 3rd trip to South America to referee and I was getting pretty comfortable with the place. This tournament was the last time that the U.S. would use the college kids at the big tournaments (Worlds & Olympics). The Americans were being coached by Mike Krzyzewski from Duke University. I was assigned to referee, in the preliminary round, in the pool that they played in and wound up doing 3 of their games. So I got to know them a little bit. They had a team of All-Americans and they were pretty good. They had Mark Randal from Kansas, Christian Laettner from Duke, Alonzo Mourning from Georgetown, Smith from UConn, Billy Owens from Syracuse and Kenny Smith from Georgia Tech to name a few. First game out of the tournament, I get these guys vs. Greece. They beat Greece in a great game in overtime. I later had them vs. Spain in preliminary play. They beat Spain easily. Now the championship round was about to start and it was played in a stadium called Luna Park. We had a different name for it. We called it Lunatic Park because the fans were unbelievable, but what an atmosphere. I was assigned to some great games: Brazil vs. Yugoslavia, Greece vs. Argentina, and Puerto Rico vs. Argentina.

In the medal round semi-finals, the Americans were beaten quite handily by Yugoslavia. The Soviet Union beat Puerto Rico in the other semi-final, so that set up the Soviets vs. the Yugo's for the gold and the Americans vs. Puerto Rico for the bronze. My good friend Costas Rigas from Greece and I were assigned to referee the bronze medal game. We were the two best officials at the tournament and wondered why we hadn't been chosen to do the gold medal game. We were pissed and almost didn't do the game, but Al Rae talked us out of doing anything stupid, and we did the game. He told us that there are sometimes when you can't fight city hall, and this was one of them. As it turned out the Yugo's beat the Soviets quite easily, and the bronze medal game between the U.S. and Puerto Rico was a classic. We had lucked out. It was one of the toughest games that I had ever officiated. Physical like you would not believe. Costas and I called 64 fouls that night and barely kept the lid on it. The game was won by the Americans on a goal tending call in overtime. That was the night that Krzyzewski suggested that I should join the priesthood, but that's a story for another day. All in this entire tournament was right up there with the best.

The next year, 1991 a pre-Olympic year, I got invited back to Europe as a neutral along with Jim Burr from the States, to referee the European Championship again in Rome, Italy this time. This was my second European Championship and again it turned out to be a year of transition for international basketball. This was the last time that Yugoslavia would play as a unified team. The war in Yugoslavia started when this tournament was being played and eventually it led to the Serbs & Croats going their separate ways when the country split. It was too bad, because a unified Yugoslavia was a great team made up of lots of pros that played in the NBA. As a matter of fact P.J. Carlesimo, a

U.S.A. assistant coach on their olympic team, was over to scout the Yugo's in this tournament because he told us they were concerned about the Yugo's for the upcoming Olympics. That's how good the unified Yugo's were. As it turned out, unfortunately the war changed everything. Yugoslavia, the following year in Barcelona, would be represented by the Croatians only.....no Serbs on the team. What a shame.

Let's get back to Rome. Italy had a pretty good team and they played in the final against Yugoslavia. Costas Rigas, my Greek friend, and I were assigned to do this final game and the Yugo's were just too much for the Italians. As I said before, the Yugo's had a lot of NBA players on the team; Vlade Divac, Drazen Petrovic, Dino Raga, Toni Kukoc, to name a few, and they were very strong.

At this tournament, on the first, night an incident happened in one of the games and as a result they sat the two officials who did this game down for the rest of the tournament. They didn't referee again. Now as a neutral you know that you are going to get some tough games. When the assignments came out the next day I was assigned to the Greece game. When the assignments came out for the following day, I again was assigned to the Greece game. Now I'm thinking that this is just bad luck, but no big deal. When the assignments came out for the following day I was assigned to the Greeks again for the 3rd day in a row. Now I'm telling you these guys (the Greek players) can wear you out as they can be a handfull, so I asked the assigner what the story was. He told me that because they had to sit two officials down that they had no choice but to put one of the neutrals on their games. Besides, he said that I handled the Greeks quite well. Believe me when I say that they were getting tired of me and I was getting tired of them. But it all worked out in the end. You know you've done a team a lot when their fans call you by your name. One thing I will say about the Greeks though.....they come to play.....and they have great fans.

Now I've had a pretty good international career up until this time, with some great tournaments all around the world, but unbelievable as it may seem, the highlight was yet to come. It came in 1992 when I was fortunate enough to be invited back to the Olympics for the second time, this time in Barcelona, Spain, and it was all different.

So, what was different about these Olympics from the ones in Seoul? I remember when walking into the stadium for the opening ceremonies in Barcelona and looking around at the architecture of the stadium, I said to myself : "Now this is what it is supposed to look like". The stadium was an old structure and this gave the impression of something that had an ancient flavour to it. The city itself was a testament to this sense I had. Seoul was just too new. All the facilities were brand new and it didn't have the same feel for me as Barcelona did. It's strange, but I just felt a lot more comfortable with the atmosphere in Barcelona.

These Olympics were unique in that it was the first time that the pros were officially allowed to compete in basketball and the U.S.A. introduced the "Dream Team" to the world. The Dream Team was one of a kind, a once in a lifetime squad at a once in a lifetime moment. They were a phenomenon and, as Jack McCallum called them in his book, "Dream Team", a marketing juggernaut. They were the story of the '92 Olympics. "The Dream Team was the single biggest impact of any team in any sport in history", said Lithuania's Sarunas Marciulionis. "We took a lot of research details from our international players", says the NBA's Kim Bohuny, "and I can't begin to tell you how many of them said they started watching basketball at the '92 Olympics." As such they were a group of icons that conquered the world and changed the game of basketball forever. As Jack McCallum says in his book, the best barometer of what this team meant to history is limned by the words of one of its prominent members, a man who won five NBA championships, three MVP awards, one NCAA title, and an untold number of popularity contests. "For me, the

Dream Team is number one of anything I've done in basketball," says Magic Johnson, "because there will never be another team like it. There can't be."

The Olympic tournament had 12 teams; two pools of 6 play round robin and the top 4 in each pool cross over in the medal round, 1 plays 4, etc. I was invited again as a neutral, so that meant I should be getting some of the better, more closely contested games, and that proved to be the case. As a matter of fact, I never saw any of the teams that didn't make the medal round. When the medal round started, I was assigned a quarter-final game between Germany & the Soviet Union. The game went well with the Soviets coming out on top in a close game. Lithuania, Croatia and the U.S. Dream Team all won their quarter-final games as well. When the assignments came out for the semi-final round I wasn't on the list, and that was a good thing. For if you get assigned a semi-final game, very seldom do you get assigned to the final. I must admit the final was on my mind from day one, and now it seemed at least that I had a shot at getting it. Two days later the assignments came out and Wieslaw Zych, we called him "Ziggy" for short, and I were assigned the final gold medal game between Croatia and the U.S.A. Wow! I had made it to the Mount Everest of basketball officiating, the Olympic final, and to be on the game with the greatest basketball team of all time, made it all the more special.

As the ball was thrown up to start the game there were so many camera flashes going off that it looked like a sea of lights throughout the arena. The outcome of the game itself was never in doubt even though Croatia did have the lead for the first few minutes of the game at 25-23. Once the Dream Teamers kicked it into gear, it was all over and the U.S.A. eventually won 117-85. The game went off without a hitch from our perspective, the officials perspective that is, as it was a nice easy game to officiate. The thing that stood out in my mind from this game was just how quick these guys were. When guys like Michael Jordan or Scottie Pippen decided they were going to shut you down defensively, you were in for a long night. These guys are big men and to be that quick was unusual. And when they got it out on a fast break it was like watching poetry in motion. I remember one break in particular when Jordan got out alone for a dunk, it was awesome to watch. Watching guys like Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Magic Johnson, Charles Barkley, Larry Bird, Patrick Ewing, Karl Malone, David Robinson, Chris Mullen, Clyde Drexler, and Laettner (the college guy) play this game can be pretty exciting. During the last few seconds of the game, I was standing next to John Stockton, who was dribbling the ball, and I said to him: "Give me the ball at the horn", and he said, "I can't." I later found out that the game ball was going to be given to the basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

During the tournament we spent a lot of time at the basketball venue and saw most of the games that the Dream Team played. It was like a rock concert when these guys were on stage and everyone wanted to see them play. We could not believe the prices people were willing to pay to get tickets to their games. We were offered \$600 for a ticket, if we could get one for people, to see the U.S.A. play Angola. Are you kidding me? What person in his right mind would pay that kind of money to see that blow-out? Anyway, that's how popular these guys were. It was something else. The stands were loaded with celebrities when these guys played as well, people like Spike Lee, Evander Holyfield, Kirk Douglas, to name a few. There is no question that the Dream Team was the toughest ticket in town.

My good Greek friend Costas Rigas, who would retire from officiating after this tournament, was assigned to referee the women's gold medal game in Barcelona. Costas is the only official I know that has done both a men's and a women's olympic gold medal game. He refereed the men's gold medal game at the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984. He and I became very good friends over the years and it was a privilege to have known and refereed with him. I think of him often.

The day following the game, I was in the airport in Barcelona, waiting for a flight to Frankfurt, when I was approached by a sport writer from Germany. He asked me if I had any idea of what the estimated television audience was for last night's game. I said that I had no idea. He told me that the global estimated audience that watched part of or all of that game was around one and a half billion people. Wow! Anyway, glad we didn't screw it up. And just to set the record straight, many people have asked me over the years about the technical foul that I called on Charles Barkley in this game. For the record, I did not call a technical on Charles. We had words about a call that he wanted, but that was the end of it, no technical.

So, in a nutshell, that's what the Road to Barcelona looked like. Lots of twists and turns, lots of lessons learned, a few disappointments along the way, but certainly a gratifying journey. As an official, I was very fortunate over the years. Along the way, I met a lot of great people and made a lot of great friends. One thing I always did was watch the better officials and tried to learn from them, such as how to handle certain situations, how to handle the coaches, how to handle the players, and how to be as professional as possible. I had the opportunity to learn from some of the very best officials around. Guys like Ron Foxcroft (probably the best), John McDonough, John Weiland, Don Cline, Roger Caulfield, Fran McHugh and Don Grant to name a few. When these guys told me something, I had a tendency to listen, because I knew I was going to learn something. These guys were not only great officials, but great people as well. I always respected the players and coaches with whom I was involved, and respected the game itself by giving it my best shot every night, and hopefully it was good enough.

But I guess, as in any successful endeavour, you need three things to be successful. One, is that you obviously need to have a little bit of talent; two, you need to have a lot of help along the way from mentors, evaluators, etc.; and three, you need to have a bunch of luck. I was fortunate enough in my career to have had some great mentors and advisors and without their help and guidance none of the success I enjoyed would have been possible. To them I owe a debt of gratitude.

This is the first time that I've tried to document any of these events, and I've forgotten a lot of stuff I'm sure. Now I wouldn't have had this problem if I had kept a diary, right! Too soon old, too late smart.