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Oregon Athletic Officials Association

# Sports Officiating 101

*OCEP Principles of Officiating Course*  
*A Basic Course of Officiating Information*

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# **OCEP Principles of Officiating Course Manual**

(Completion of this course satisfies the OCEP Principles requirement)

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the world of sports officiating. Whether you are a raw rookie or a veteran official seeking new skills and information, you are part of a large group of men and women who have decided to be a part of managing and facilitating athletic contests from lower level youth games all the way up to the pros.

Your officiating journey will take many twists and turns. You will be faced with many challenges. Besides learning the rules and mechanics of your sport, you will need good people and communication skills, for you will often deal with conflict, controversy, difficult situations and people.

To be a good official, you will have to define how you view your role as an official. One of the questions to ask yourself is, “why do I want to be a referee?” Another question might be, “what do I want to get from officiating?” We will suggest some possible answers to both questions and many others that you might be asking yourself.

We will also talk about how to develop your own style of officiating – your “officiating personality.” We will also spend time on some communication and decision-making skills. We will talk about building confidence and dealing with anxiety and stress. We will share tips on how to succeed in a local officials’ association. Hey, we may even tell a few war stories or show some video clips of officials in game situations to illustrate a particular point.

By the time this course is over, you will have some hands-on practical information that you can use to be a successful official. Your instructors have many years of experience under their belts. Don’t be afraid to ask questions.

Let’s get started!

## Lesson 1 – Your Local Association

The process of becoming a high school sports official includes joining a local association and being certified by the OSAA, the state association in Oregon.

Part of the certification fee goes towards membership dues in the Oregon Athletic Officials Association, or OAOA. All officials in Oregon belong to the OAOA. The OAOA represents the interests of all sports officials in Oregon. OAOA gets involved in the process of determining game fees and other compensation issues. Clinics and other training programs are sponsored by the OAOA and local associations. The OAOA also awards individual officials and association that have excelled in their particular sport. The OAOA website, [www.oreofficials.org](http://www.oreofficials.org) is a good source for officiating information.

As a new official, you are required to take this course during your first three years of officiating in Oregon. As you have seen, we have covered a lot of basic information for new officials. In order to be eligible to work postseason contests, from first round games to the final championship game, you must also have taken the ASEP methods course in your sport, OR have attended an approved regional clinic. Meeting these requirements makes you OCEP, Officials Certification and Education Program, certified.

By now, you are starting to learn the ins and outs of your local association. The Commissioner is the assignor. Most associations are governed by an executive board, a constitution and/or by-laws, and other local rules. Know what's required to advance. Also, get to know the process of how games are assigned. Don't lobby or beg for games. Don't solicit games from coaches or athletic directors. Don't trade games with other officials without permission. Don't undercut other officials or your association by offering to work games for less money.

Get to know folks in your association. You'll soon be able to pick out the veterans and the ones who are most active and respected – the leaders. You'll also recognize the politicians and the “good ‘ol boys.”

Find a mentor, some veteran who is willing to help and teach you. Way back when, that's how most of us got started – by hanging around officials and learning by going to games and watching them work. You're lucky now, there are lots of training opportunities, camps, clinics, Referee magazine, films, books and pamphlets, even courses like this one that weren't available 15-20 years ago. But that still doesn't take the place of the personal touch. There's a lot to learn about officiating that you'll never find in any rules book or mechanics manual. Some of the best teaching gets done after games at the local watering hole when games are rehashed and war stories are told.

Ask your mentor or another veteran official to observe your work. Ask questions. Get lots of feedback. You may get differing opinions on some things. Pick out what works best for you. This way you can develop your own style.

As a young official, develop a support network. Sometimes it's easier to relate to other officials who are at the same level as you are. Unfortunately, some older, veteran officials feel threatened by or are impatient with the “new kid on the block.”

Connect with national associations. Many links can be found on the OAOA and OSAA websites. Through these sites, you can get more information on training and educational opportunities, camps, clinics, equipment, insurance, rules and mechanics. Many of these sites have chat rooms or discussion boards where officials can exchange ideas and information through the Internet.

## Lesson 2 – Legal and Business Issues

Officiating may be a second job for you or something you do on the side. That brings us to a discussion of some business and legal issues that affect officials.

The issue of whether officials are independent contractors or employees has been debated for many years. Courts have generally found officials not to be employers, and as such, not eligible for benefits such as unemployment or worker's compensation.

As an independent contractor, officials are responsible for reporting and paying appropriate taxes on their officiating income. Remember, officiating expenses such as dues to local, state and national officiating organizations; uniform and equipment costs; non-reimbursed travel expenses; and costs associated with professional education and development like publications, camps, clinics and classes can be deductions against income. Consult a tax professional for further information.

Unfortunately, officials often become the target of legal action when injuries or other unusual circumstances occur.

When a player is injured, stop the game and allow medical personnel to attend to the injured player. Most sport rules require that an injured player be removed from the game for at least one play. Take the time to allow the player to be removed to a safe distance away from the field or court. In some sports, a player may not re-enter the game without authorization from a health care professional. Officials should not involve themselves in any re-entry decision.

Officials must make sure that the game is played according to the rules. Rough and illegal play must be properly penalized. Officials must also recognize and take steps to control baiting, taunting and other unsportsmanlike acts that may lead to fighting.

Officials must also know the requirements for player equipment and inspect casts, padding and braces that could cause injury. In some sports, the head coach must certify that his/her players are legally equipped.

The playing surface and game equipment must also be inspected for hazardous conditions. Protruding sprinkler heads, rocks, potholes, non-padded goal posts, non-covered vaulting pits, loose bases and faulty pitcher's rubber are all potential hazards in outdoor games. Bats and batting helmets have safety requirements. Inside, be alert for leaking roofs, non-padded net supports and water and debris on the floor. Be proactive.

Correct faulty conditions before the contest.

Inclement weather conditions can give rise to liability claims against officials, especially if lightning starts. Don't be hesitant to delay or suspend the game if you think conditions are hazardous to the participants. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

One of the risks of being an official is getting injured on the job. As such, officials should have good medical insurance. As we have seen, good personal liability insurance isn't a bad idea, either. In many cases, good overall coverage is available through an "umbrella" policy. Secondary insurance coverage for sports officials is available through the National Federation and NASO.

Two other legal issues are worth mentioning –

First, the OSAA and the National Federation do not recognize protests of a possible misapplication of a game rule or a possible error in judgment by a contest official.

Likewise, courts have uniformly determined that sports officials' game calls cannot be challenged by disgruntled teams, players, or fans where a sports official has made an error in judgment or misapplied a game rule. Disagreement over a call is part of the game, part of human nature. There is no legal claim for judicial review of a

sports official's honest judgmental error or misapplication of a rule during a game unless there is demonstrable bad faith or corruption (bribery).

Second, Oregon is one of several states that have enacted legislation making it a criminal offense to assault a sports official. While assaults on officials are rare, officials need to have a game plan in place in case they are assaulted or attacked. Here are some things to think about.

### **IF YOU'RE ATTACKED –**

Do not look for trouble, but if you or your partner(s) are assaulted, get the police involved. You do a disservice to the officiating avocation by failing to hold people responsible for their conduct/behavior.

### **RECOMMENDED PROPER PROCEDURES –**

- **Don't strike back physically at the person who assaulted you.** By fighting back physically, you may place yourself in a no-win situation and compromise any case against your attacker.
- **As soon as possible, obtain the names, addresses and phone numbers of witnesses and write down a complete version of what occurred and how you were injured.** This information may be critical to you and your attorney.
- **Get appropriate medical attention if necessary.** Medical records are also good documentation of any injury.
- **Determine if a videotape of the game and incident has been made.** Visual evidence can be of great value to you and your attorney.
- **Discuss the incident only with those who "need to know".** Often what we say is misunderstood or misinterpreted, which could return to haunt you.
- **Contact your assigning authority.** Your commissioner will help with future contacts with schools, coaches, athletic directors, etc.
- **Consult legal counsel.** Discuss whether you have any civil or criminal action against your attacker(s).

**REVIEW THE INCIDENT** – Following any contest in which you had an ejection or an ugly situation, take a look at yourself to see if there's anything you could have done better or different. Ask yourself if you did anything to create the incident including losing your self-control. Some bad situations can't be prevented or avoided, but many can.

**THE NEXT CONTEST** – Learn from the incident, but also clear your head and be ready to officiate the next game. The biggest challenge may be seeing the offender again. **Deal with this and any new challenge professionally and be prepared to implement your personal plan of conflict management again if necessary.**

In the next lesson, we will talk about local officiating associations and how to get the most out of being a member. However, there are some business and legal issues regarding associations that are worth mentioning now.

Many local associations, especially the large ones, are incorporated as a non-profit corporation established for educational purposes. The most important reason for incorporation is to protect the individual member officials from potential liability. In other words, in case of a suit for contractual or injury claims, only the corporation could be held liable. Most likely, this would be the Commissioner and officers. In Oregon, part of your OAOA dues are used to provide Director's and Officer's insurance for all associations.

Local associations should also have operating rules set out in a Constitution and/or By-Laws. Behavioral expectations of members should be clearly defined so that members are aware of required and prohibited activities. In addition to listing the do's and don'ts, the by-laws should also include a procedure for handling violations. Possible sanctions should be outlined. Members are entitled to due-process provisions, including notice of the alleged violation, an opportunity to be heard, and a process to appeal an adverse decision.

## Lesson 3 – Roles, Responsibilities and Ethics

The role of an official is determined by many things. In fact, officials will often differ in how they view their role. Some may see themselves as the “police officer” or enforcer of the contest. Others may become officials just to help people play games and not want to interfere very much. Some officials look at themselves as game managers and contest facilitators. Whatever role you see yourself in as a sports official is up to you. There is no “correct” role.

Why do so many people become officials? Let’s take a look at some possible reasons.

- Prolong their athletic involvement. Continue an association with a sport.
- Personal reasons. Give back to sports. Help athletes perform and aid in their development. Meet new people. Be positive role models for student athletes
- Provide an enjoyable physical activity.
- Extra money – part-time career.

Officials have a responsibility to make sure the contest is played fairly. Other responsibilities include insuring the safety of players and promoting good sportsmanship.

Let’s look at some of the ways officials can meet these responsibilities.

### 1. **Insuring Player Safety**

- a. Inspecting Protective Equipment
- b. Officials must inspect player equipment to be sure it complies with the rules.
- c. The coach must verbally certify that his/her players are properly equipped.

### 2. **Inspecting Facilities** – When officials discover potentially hazardous facilities, they should alert game management.

### 3. **Regulating Game Conduct**

- a. It is up to the official to know the rules and enforce penalties when a player’s behavior violates the rules.
- b. Officials must learn when to use warnings and when to penalize immediately.
- c. Always call things that deal with player safety and unsportsmanlike issues.

### 4. **Response to an Injury** – When in doubt about an injured player, make decisions on the side of caution.

### 5. **Response to Crowd Situations** – Alert game management. Do not deal with spectators.

### 6. **Encourage Fair Play**

- a. The fundamental role of an official is to see that the contest is played in a fair manner. Officials must call the game in a consistent manner. This means calling the game the same way at the beginning as near the end. The rules have to be enforced the same way every time. Coaches also have a responsibility towards fair play. Coaches must teach skills that are legal and within the rules.
- b. Officials should manage the game with the lightest touch necessary to provide equitable competition. Sometimes, overly technical officials prevent the game from flowing smoothly. We will talk more about this when we talk about officiating styles.

7. **Promote Good Sportsmanship** – Officials can influence player behavior by acknowledging acts of good sportsmanship. Use positive words and phrases, not negative ones.

The behavior of a sports official must also be ethical. The NFHS has created an Officials Code of Ethics which is published in every rules book. Let's take a brief look at some of these standards, which I've paraphrased and simplified. We will go into more detail with some of them later in this program.

1. Officials shall master both the rules of the game and the mechanics necessary to enforce the rules and should exercise authority in an impartial, firm and controlled manner.
2. Officials need to know what they are doing when they step onto the field, court or floor. We need to know the rules and where to stand to make the best calls. Officials must be decisive and not inconsistent. Officials must be in control of their emotions.
3. Officials shall work with each other and their state associations in a constructive and cooperative manner.
4. Officials need to get along with and respect the people in their local association, their officiating partners and the folks at the state office. Everybody needs to work together to make things better. There is no justification to "bad mouth" anybody. Getting along makes your officiating experience more rewarding and enjoyable.
5. Officials shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession.
6. Officiating is no longer a casual hobby. It's a profession. Officials have a vast amount of "final" power. Officials need to behave in a professional manner at all times.
7. Officials shall prepare themselves physically and mentally, shall dress neatly and carry themselves in a manner consistent with the high standards of the profession.
8. Officiating is a physical activity. Officials need to be in good shape. Officials need to focus on the job at hand and leave other problems behind for a few hours. Officials need to look good. Your uniform and how you wear it says a lot about your commitment to officiating. Remember...."you never get a second chance to make a first impression."
9. Officials shall be professional in the fulfillment of all contractual obligations.
10. It's a cardinal sin to be late to a game. Leave plenty of time for heavy traffic, etc. If you accept a game assignment, be there. Contact your assigner or one of your partners if problems arise. Don't turn back one assignment for a better offer – this will be discussed again later!
11. Officials shall remember that their conduct influences the respect that others have for the profession
12. Do not do anything that diminishes the respect people have for officials. Don't say or do anything stupid. Do not draw attention to yourself. Be professional. The game is not about you. Sometimes that's hard for an official to accept, because it's human nature to want to be recognized for the job you do, but in officiating, it's best not to be noticed.

## 8. **Conflict of Interest**

Sports officials must also be alert to potential conflicts of interest. In the perfect world, officials would be strangers to coaches and schools, but in the real world, that's not going to happen as officials often come from a town or city or the surrounding area of a given school.

Officials truly believe that they can administer any game or contest and make objective decisions without any hint of bias or favoritism. It's the perception of bias and favoritism that makes things difficult when officials do not recognize potential conflicts of interest.

Officials should not work games for a school he/she has attended. Also, a conflict arises where a child or spouse attends or works at a particular school. Another conflict occurs when a coach is a personal friend or a fellow official in another sport. Or your daughter is dating the star quarterback at a neighboring school.....or your business provides goods or services to a school.....the possibilities are endless!

Officials are ethically bound to report any conflict of interest, no matter how remote, to their assignor. Assignors appreciate knowing this in advance of making out schedules, but should a conflict of interest develop as the season progresses, officials must request a change in assignment.



## Lesson 4 – Goal Setting

As you decide if you want to be a sports official, ask yourself a few questions, such as –

- Do I have the personality to become a good official?
- What skills do I have?
- Am I willing to commit the time, energy and money that are necessary?
- Am I willing to learn?
- What do I want to accomplish as an official?
- We will talk more about some of these issues as we go through this course.

In order to be successful at anything, you must have some goals. Setting goals helps to motivate and improve performance. If you set an important goal for yourself, you will generally work hard to achieve that goal. Without goals, many people just drift through life, some bump into success along the way, others don't.

Goals help focus on what is important. Setting goals is setting standards for what you'd like to do. Sometimes, people set goals that are hard or impossible to achieve, by –

- Not having goal(s) that are measurable.
- Setting goals that conflict with one another, or your style or personality.
- Not taking ownership of your goal.
- Setting too many goals.
- Being afraid to try something new, fear of failure.
- Setting goals that YOU aren't willing to work at – goals that are set to please someone else.
- Setting unrealistic goals.

Start with small steps.

You cannot achieve goals that are inconsistent with your self-image.

You need to see yourself as someone who can achieve your goals.

When it comes to setting goals, you should consider YOUR needs as high priority.

Identifying your needs and wants also means clarifying your personal values. If your goals are not in line with your values, you will be less likely to achieve them.

In order to establish goals, you must first determine what you want to achieve. Ask yourself some questions about your attitudes towards officiating, such as –

- What are my strengths as an official?
- What are my weaknesses as an official?
- What parts of officiating are most enjoyable to me?

- Am I able to communicate well with players, coaches and other officials?

The answers to these and other questions will help clarify what you want to accomplish and start you on the path to setting goals.

1. Establish Goals – short-range, intermediate, and long-range goals. Short term goals give an indication of progress towards long term goals. Short term goals give immediate feedback.
2. Make your Goals Specific – Be specific when you write down your goals. Writing down your goals will increase your commitment to them. Keep track of your progress in your officiating notebook.
3. State your Goals in Positive Terms – Goals usually are challenging and difficult, and that’s why they need to be stated in positive terms. Identify the things you would like to do, not what you don’t want to do. Don’t call attention to behaviors you are trying to reduce or eliminate.
4. Make your Goals Obtainable – Sometimes people sabotage themselves by setting goals that they cannot achieve. Sometimes circumstances surrounding you change, and that affects your ability to achieve your goal. The more difficult the goal, the better the motivation and performance, as long as the person is capable of achieving the goal. Don’t try to be a perfectionist and set unrealistic goals.
5. Make your Goals Measurable – You make a goal measurable by setting objectives. Objectives are strategies to help you reach your goals.
6. Have a Feedback Mechanism in Place – Do self-assessment periodically. Keep an officiating diary – successes as well as areas in need of improvement. We will talk more about feedback and self-evaluation later on.
7. Know What You Need to Achieve Your Goal – Determine the resources you need to achieve your goal. Some goals, camps, clinics, require time and money.
8. Be Flexible – If you do not achieve your intended goal within a reasonable time, you should consider modifying or changing your goal.
9. Enjoy Meeting Your Goals – By taking time to pat yourself on the back as you work toward your goal, you make attaining your goal not only more enjoyable, but also more likely. Reward yourself for a job well done.
10. The Sweet Taste of Success – The harder you work toward a goal, the sweeter the taste of success. Remember that the road to success always has some pain or disappointments along the way.

One other thing – you will find other young officials in the same boat as yourself. Develop a network to share frustrations and experiences. Gain good pointers from each other.

## Lesson 5 – Officiating Styles

As we have learned, officials may view their role differently. Likewise, there are different styles of officiating. We will look at several styles, keeping in mind that there is no “right” style and that successful officials are flexible in adapting their style to specific game situations.

### 1. The Law and Order Approach

These officials know the rules book inside and out. They can quote chapter and verse. They score in the high 90’s on tests. Everything is either black or white – there are no grey areas. They can always find a rule reference to apply to any situation.

Unfortunately, with this style, there is not much room for common sense. The rules cannot cover all situations. There has to be some flexibility to allow for human nature. Overly technical officials prevent the contest from flowing smoothly. Overly technical officials cause conflict and controversy. A strict interpretation of the rules may not be the fairest way to judge the action.

### 2. The “Less Involved the Better” Official

Some officials just like to let the players play the game and not interfere very much. That’s OK if both teams are playing well, neither is gaining an unfair advantage, and no one is complaining.

The problem lies when the game heats up and critical judgment is necessary. This official may not be able to make crucial, game-deciding calls. This official may not have a thorough knowledge of the rules. This official may lack the hustle and the mechanics knowledge to get in a good position to make a critical call.

Some officials don’t get involved because they just don’t want to be bothered.

### 3. Common Sense Officiating

The successful officials are the ones that use good judgment and apply common sense to their knowledge of the rules and mechanics. These officials –

- Know the meaning of preventive officiating.
- Go beyond the printed rules to learn the spirit and intent of the rules.
- Know what to call and when to call it.
- Know that sometimes the best call is a “no-call.”

The context of the contest determines what style is best. For example –

- Is the game a big rivalry? Perhaps two cross-town schools.
- Is there bad blood between the teams? Were there incidents in last year’s game? Or in last night’s JV game? Not knowing some of these dynamics can set the officials up for a long night. In these situations, officials may have to adopt more of the “law and order” approach and call the game by the book to establish game control.
- The skill level of the players is not very good. When play is sloppy, officials have to officiate according to the skill level of the players. Officials may have to overlook technical violations and make allowances for the lack of ability. Officials have to officiate a game the way the game is being played.

An official’s style is also enhanced by his/her mannerisms – signals, body language, how you wear the uniform, how you communicate, etc. All of these help determine your style at any particular point in the game. Let’s look at some of these areas.

1. Signals – Use only signals approved for the level of the game you are working. Don't use college or pro signals in a high school game. Know when to "sell" a call. Don't "showboat" while signaling. Avoid being stiff, mechanical or overly demonstrative. Practice signals in front of a mirror.
2. Body Language – Body language can also be the way you wear the uniform. If you look professional, that sends a positive message about your commitment to that contest. A professional appearance can also reduce controversy. So maintain an upright posture, head erect. Shine your shoes, buy new uniform parts (shirt, pants, etc) if necessary, get a haircut. Look confident.
3. Communication – We will talk later about communication skills, but suffice to say, a good official – has many verbal and non-verbal skills at his disposal – different skills for different styles!!!

So far, we've talked about some officiating roles, responsibilities and styles. Before we get real specific and learn about how to communicate and make good decisions, let's summarize what it takes to become a good official.

1. Know The Rules – There is no excuse for not knowing the rules. Rules knowledge comes from study and experience. With experience, some calls and decisions will become second nature. Being able to apply the rules during the game is another necessary skill. By seeing situations over and over, you will recognize when they occur during a game and will have the confidence to make the correct call. Remember, if you don't make your calls with confidence, coaches and players will assume you don't know the rules and you will lose their respect.
2. Know The Vocabulary – Each sport has its' own words, its' own slang or lingo. Knowing the vocabulary of your sport makes it easier to communicate with other officials, players and coaches.
3. Know The Mechanics – Mechanics are knowing where to position yourself to make the best calls. If you are in the right position to make the call, the less likely coaches are to question your judgment. Look at film and continuously work to get in the right position.
4. Make Your Calls With Confidence – Be decisive. That doesn't mean making fast calls. Position yourself so you can see the action, watch the whole play, decide if there is a foul or violation, and then make the call. Try not to make a call while you're in motion.

Indecision is often the result of a lack of confidence. Being assertive, or "selling" your call helps get your call accepted. One of your greatest assets is your voice. We will talk more about that later!!

Know, realize and accept that you are going to make mistakes. That's part of the learning process. When you do make a mistake, shake it off, keep your head in the game and continue to officiate.

5. Focus On The Game – Tune out the fans. Unfortunately, your officiating uniform comes with a bulls-eye. You become the target of heckling and insults. Don't take it personal. When emotions get hot and heavy, you must stay calm and in control. Leave crowd control issue to game management personnel.
6. Remain Invisible – Easier said than done! Remember the bulls-eye on your uniform! Don't draw attention to yourself by excessive gestures or "showboating." The game is about the players, not the officials. Remember, you are there to manage and facilitate the contest.
7. Keep In Control – We will talk more about this one later, but good officials stay in control of themselves when the going gets tough. Be alert and recognize potential trouble. Use preventative officiating when possible. If that doesn't work, maintain control by making good, decisive calls in a professional manner. Don't get caught up in the emotions of the game.
8. Stay In Shape and Hustle – To keep up with the players, you have to be in top physical shape. You must have the energy to get into the proper place to make good call...at the beginning of the game, and at the end. Maintain your conditioning throughout the season.

There is no excuse for not hustling. We've already talked about the advantage of being in the right position to make the best calls. Move briskly. Watch your body language; more on this one later.

9. Be A Good Partner – Remember, you are part of a team, a crew. Support your fellow officials and don't badmouth them behind their backs. Accept responsibility and don't shift blame to another crew member when things go wrong. A good pre-game conference will make sure everyone knows their positions and duties. Communicate with each other and stick together throughout the contest.
10. Have Passion – You must have a passion for officiating. Without one, why put up with all the abuse, the low pay, the time it takes away from family, etc? You are more likely to succeed when you bring energy and enthusiasm to your officiating. Remember, the more you give, the more you're likely to get back in return.

Developing your officiating style also means taking a look at some characteristics that are common to all good officials.

11. Consistency – Players and coaches expect officials to be consistent. Decisions should be the same for both teams. Being consistent is more important than being good. When officials are not consistent, players are always guessing what is allowed, what will be called, and what will not. Coaches will become frustrated with inconsistent officiating. Inconsistent officiating creates a perception that officials will try to “even up” calls – in effect punishing a team or a player for previous bad calls. To achieve consistency, officials must apply the same rule interpretation across the board.
12. Rapport – Successful officials develop a good rapport with players, coaches and their officiating partners. A big key in establishing a good rapport is effective communication. We will talk more about communication skills later. Officials should be approachable and willing to listen, but not be overly friendly. Maintain your image of neutrality.
13. Decisiveness – Being decisive gives the impression of being absolutely certain of your call. Hesitation will bring on question and controversy and give an impression of uncertainty. Do take the time to process what you have seen; don't make a call without evaluating all of the available information.
14. Poise – An official must remain calm and poised, regardless of the action of the contest. You may not be able to control the emotions of others, but you must be in control of your own emotions. Officials need to be relaxed, yet focused on the task at hand. Don't try to please everyone. Don't put undue pressure on yourself to make all the “right” calls. Accept that you are human and will make mistakes.
15. Integrity – Officials must call the game in an unbiased, honest manner. Officials must also maintain their integrity off the field. Don't air personal feelings about teams, players, coaches, schools and your officiating partners.
16. Judgment – In order to exercise good judgment, officials must know the rules of their sport. Judgment is gained through experience. Good judgment comes from being totally focused on the contest and being able to block out distractions around you....crowd noise, etc. Don't go in the tank if you think you've missed a call. Keep on officiating, otherwise, you'll lose focus and may have a hard time getting your head back in the game.
17. Confidence – Good officials have confidence in themselves and their abilities. Confidence comes from experience. All officials have bad games...for lots of reasons. Bad games can shake one's confidence, but you have to get back in the saddle and keep on riding!
18. Enjoy – In order to be a successful official, you must enjoy what you are doing. Sometimes it's tough to enjoy officiating when all you hear is abuse and feel your efforts aren't appreciated. When you stop enjoying calling games, you'll stop working hard. That's when complacency sets in and pretty soon, you're burnt out.

## Lesson 6 – Communication Skills

Good officials are also effective communicators. The two most important steps in the process of effective communication are sending a message and receiving a message.

It is important that an official send the right message to coaches, players, and other officials. Your message can convey confidence, calmness and control – or a lack of any or all of these. Your message can be verbal or non-verbal. Body language – posture, gestures and the tone of your voice will combine to transmit either the right or wrong message.

Being able to effectively receive messages is also critical for officials. Officials need to be good listeners. Be prepared to focus on what people are telling you. Sometimes, coaches just want to vent. Appear to be receptive. It's easy to stop listening and begin preparing your response, but you need to hear the whole problem or concern. Empathize with the other point of view. Listen to learn.

Many of us believe that most communication is verbal – speaking and listening. However, most communication between people is non-verbal. Think about that! Let's look at some types of non-verbal communication.

Body Language - Body language is your physical appearance, posture, gestures and facial expressions.

- Physical Appearance - How you wear the uniform, weight, grooming. A good physical appearance will project an image of control, credibility and authority and will reflect your commitment to the contest. One thing about putting on your uniform, expect to take a little criticism. It's part of the game. Accept that fans delight in getting on the officials. Don't take it personally. Withhold the temptation to respond with a smart-ass remark, non-verbal gesture or facial expression. Sometimes the best communication is no communication. Ignore the fans unless they interrupt the game or prevent you from doing your job.
- Posture - Good posture signifies confidence, enthusiasm and self-assurance. A slumped or slouched posture shows a lack of concern. Good posture reflects your personality and your professionalism.
- Gestures - Your officiating signals are a form of communication. Practice making good, approved signals. Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself by "showboating." Pointing your finger at someone conveys a message of aggression. Hands on the hips shows that you are bored.
- Facial Expressions – "If looks could kill" says a lot. Keep your expressions neutral, business-like, and professional.
- Personal Space - Respect personal space. Don't invite confrontation through unnecessary proximity or prolonged eye contact.
- Tone, Pitch and Inflection - How you say it! The tone and pitch of your voice sends a message. A loud voice conveys confidence and enthusiasm, whereas a soft voice indicates compassion and understanding. Lowering your voice and speaking slower will help lessen conflict. Don't shout. You can be firm with a normal relaxed voice. Shouting indicates a loss of control. Don't threaten a player or coach. This will only put them on the defensive. If a situation is serious enough to warrant a threat, then penalize according to the rules. There can be subtle threats, but you have to use the right words. You might want to record and listen to your voice and think about how to become a better communicator.

Let's talk about communicating with your officiating partner or crew members.

In order to work together as a cohesive unit, members of an officiating crew must effectively communicate with each other. If you are to respect, trust, accept and encourage each other, you must function effectively as a unit while tending to your individual officiating responsibilities.

Time spent together doesn't always guarantee good communication. Get to know your other officials. Make an effort to get along. Take responsibility for your own actions; don't blame your partners for your mistakes. Encourage each other; be honest when giving feedback. Share your strengths and experiences. Ask for help or advice.

As we've learned, consistency is one of the keys to effective officiating. It takes teamwork to achieve consistency. Building teamwork starts with a good pre-game conference. Sometimes officials have specific responsibilities to cover and make calls in a particular area. In these cases, they may have to confine themselves to these duties. In other sports, once your job is done, you may be able to assist other officials as necessary. In baseball and softball, for example, the plate umpire will often ask for assistance from a base umpire.

Other issues involving the need to effectively communicate may center around working with a partner of another gender, a veteran official working with a less experienced official.

Remember, personalities must mesh, officiating styles must be complementary and partners must be sensitive to each other's needs.

Effective communication should continue after the game. Don't be in a hurry to shower and leave the game site. A good post-game conference with your partner or fellow crew members will consist of compliments and constructive criticism. Sometimes a game observer or an evaluator will participate in or lead the post-game conference. Ask for feedback. Examine your own performance. You may want to use the following self-evaluation checklists.

### **SELF-EVALUATION – PART ONE**

1. Did I blow any calls?
2. Did I make the right calls for the wrong reasons?
3. Were there any times when it was fortunate that I didn't have to make a call?
4. Did I do everything I could to ensure a fair outcome to the game?
5. Did I make any calls that didn't reflect the way I experienced the play?
6. Did I fail to maintain proper game control at any time?
7. Did I ever feel vulnerable to outside influences?
8. Did I fail to seriously consider the nature of any criticism directed at my work?
9. Were there any situations where I avoided or usurped responsibility for a ruling at the expense of a partner?
10. Was there anything about my signals, gestures or style that evoked an unexpected or unwanted response?
11. Did I uphold, defend or rationalize any improper rulings?
12. Was there a particular aspect of my performance that could have an effect on my next game?

### **SELF-EVALUATION – PART TWO**

Did I ??????

1. Arrive at the game site on time?
2. Dress smartly and look like an official?
3. Conduct or participate in a beneficial pre- game conference?
4. Look confident without appearing over-confident?
5. Give the proper signals in an appropriate manner?
6. Develop and maintain genuine teamwork with my partner(s)?
7. Maintain proper positioning?

8. React appropriately to insults or profanity directed at me or others?
9. Place my hands on a player's person for any reason?
10. Treat all participants with the appropriate amount of respect?
11. Make every effort to defuse potentially volatile situations?
12. Leave the field immediately after the contest in the company of my partner(s)?
13. Have a meaningful post-game conference?

Bottom line – if you don't communicate effectively, you'll miss out on an opportunity to improve your officiating performance with the help of other officials.



## Lesson 7 – Building Confidence

Being confident is one of the most important attributes of a successful official. Having confidence is second only to knowing the rules and mechanics of your sport. Top performers display a strong belief in themselves and their abilities to meet any challenge of an athletic contest. Officials who lack confidence doubt whether they are good enough or have what it takes to make the tough calls. This self-doubt creates barriers to good officiating performance and success.

If we define self-confidence as the belief that you can successfully do what you want to do, then self-doubt is the belief in expected failure which leads to actual failure which leads to expectations of future failure.

Confidence is a skill that can be learned. You have to think that you are able to successfully do what you want to do. You have to believe that you will make the correct call. You have to get rid of negative thoughts. Talk to yourself in a positive manner. Don't let your confidence be shaken by criticism dished out by coaches and fans. That's a tough one!!!

Besides thinking confidently, you must act with confidence. Decisively selling a call that you're unsure of shows confidence and a sense of control. Your voice is also a measure of your confidence. We've already talked about good verbal communication skills.

There are several steps you can take to build confidence.

- Practice your skills and techniques. Example: football referee microphone announcements.
- Work lower level games to build confidence for varsity games.
- Attend camps and clinics. Another opportunity to hone your skills and get feedback. Usually led by veteran officials.
- Get as much experience as you can. Scrimmages, games – the more plays you officiate, the more you'll learn what to see and call.

We've talked a little about what self-doubt and a lack of confidence can do. The other side of the coin is an official who is overconfident.

Officials who are overconfident think they are better than they really are. These officials believe that they do not have to prepare as much or put forth the same effort as others to get the job done. Quite often they can skate by without causing problems, especially if their partner is a take-charge official, or if they are absorbed and insulated by their fellow crew members. Unfortunately, this often causes the other officials to over-officiate to compensate for the weaker crewmate.

To summarize, confidence involves the way you feel, think and act. Sometimes you will doubt yourself, especially after a tough game. However, you must always believe in your mental and physical abilities and in yourself to be a good official.

## Lesson 8 – Developing Concentration

Concentration is being able to focus on specific areas of an athletic contest and maintain that focus over a period of time. Some people believe that you can turn your concentration on and off like a faucet. While it may seem easy to focus on the main parts of the game, external factors like a whining player, a coach or a hostile crowd may help to distract the official's concentration. Officials have to learn to avoid distractions and mental and physical fatigue. Officials have to stay sharp throughout the entire contest.

In a well-played game, distractions are minimal and it's easier to maintain concentration and focus. The same holds true the more intense or important the game is. It's easier to concentrate in a playoff or championship game because the stakes are higher.

On the other hand, in a one-sided, or blowout game, officials must work extra hard to maintain their concentration. Most of the time, you just want the game to be over. Lull yourself into complacency and you're asking for trouble.

Different sports require different levels of concentration. In football, baseball and softball, there are intervals between plays and pitches where officials can regroup their thoughts and refocus their concentration. In basketball and soccer, the action is continuous until the whistle blows for a foul or violation.

Concentration is a learnable skill, just like learning confidence, which we've just talked about. Let's look at some ways to improve your concentration.

You must be able to –

- Cope effectively with pressure and anxiety. We will talk more about dealing with anxiety, but as anxiety increases, the focus of your concentration narrows. Excess anxiety causes a person to think “too much” and limits the ability to shift from a broad to a narrow focus of attention. Some sports require a broad focus, such as soccer where officials have to scan a large area. Other sports, such as football, allow for a more narrow focus due to the increased number of officials, each with specific areas of responsibility.
- Focus on the action that is relevant and tune out external factors that we've earlier identified – the whining player, the complaining coach, the lop-sided score, fatigue, boredom.
- Refocus your attention when distracted.

Maintaining concentration throughout a game is tough, as we've seen. Let's look at some other factors that can break an official's concentration.

- Sometimes, officials are unable to forget past calls, especially the bad ones, or at least the ones they believe to be incorrect. They stop officiating and brood on the effect of their error on the game. “Have I cost a team the game?” “Have I blown my chances for a playoff game?” You cannot keep up with the present action if you dwell on the past. Acknowledge the mistake, forget it and refocus on the action at hand. Regardless of the consequences, it's over and done with.
- Worrying about future plays can also cause an official to lose concentration. Wondering what might happen if you miss a critical call will only distract from your present concentration. “What if I don't know a rule?” “What if I'm unsure about a call?” “What if I'm out of position?” are types of questions asked by future-thinking officials.
- Thinking about too many things can also be distracting. Especially things over which you have no control...the crowd, the weather, where the crew is going after the game...the unfinished job you left at the office.

As we've seen, concentration plays an important part in the success of an official. In the next chapter, we will look at things that cause anxiety in officials and some techniques to help officials relax.

## Lesson 8 – Anxiety and Relaxation

Because officiating is emotional and stressful, in order to become a successful official, you must learn to recognize and deal with anxiety. Being able to officiate high-pressure situations in an effective manner is a lot better than becoming anxious and tentative and risk losing control of the game. Or as one football official put it –

**“You can bring your whistle and you can bring your flag, but if you don’t bring your guts you might as well stay home.”**

Anxiety plays an important role in an official’s performance. We’ve mentioned that successful officials are able to remain calm and in control despite adverse circumstances. Good officials take control and make the proper calls under pressure. In order to manage the pressures of a game, let’s look at some sources of stress and anxiety.

1. Fear of Failure - Fear of failure includes worrying about blowing a call, being out of position and getting a bad evaluation. Being rated by coaches and observers is a major source of stress and anxiety for officials. Many officials see the rating and evaluation process as a challenge to their self-esteem and ego. At some point, an official may decide that he or she doesn’t “have what it takes” and drop out of officiating.

Self-esteem and ego also play a part in an official’s performance. Officials are also not immune from self-doubt. “I’ll never be able to face my association if I let this game get out of control.” “I will be well-liked if I work a good game.” These are thoughts some officials say to themselves.

If officials do a good job, they will probably go unnoticed. Screw up and you’re in the spotlight. Thus, your successes go unappreciated and your failures become highly scrutinized. Fear of failure causes officials to dodge making important or crucial calls at critical times during a game.

2. Fear of Inadequacy - Officials may feel uneasy because of a real or perceived lack of ability or failure to prepare for an upcoming game. Feeling inadequate may also result from not being in good physical condition, not knowing the rules or mechanics, or lacking in concentration or self-confidence, which we’ve discussed earlier.

There is no substitute for good preparation. Officials must bring their “A” game to every contest they officiate.

3. Perceived Loss of Control - Officials feel anxious about not being in control of the game. When you think you are in control, you probably aren’t. Working with incompetent partners, being “worked” by coaches and other things beyond your immediate control cause stress and anxiety. Remember, you can’t worry about things beyond your control. And that’s easier said than done!!

Now that we’ve identified some causes of anxiety, let’s look at how anxiety negatively affects the official.

From a physical standpoint, anxiety causes the heart rate to increase. Breathing intensifies; muscles begin to tighten. Think about the tightness in your neck and shoulders after a long day at the office. That’s nothing but anxiety and stress. Fatigue is also a concern; that’s why officials must be in good shape.

From a psychological perspective, anxiety and stress may affect an official in the form of reduced concentration and impaired decision making. Anxious officials are more likely to worry about making the right calls or being in the proper position. If a younger official is paired with a “big-name” veteran, the rookie is often more concerned about making a “rookie mistake” than focusing and concentrating on his duties and responsibilities.

Some calls that officials make are based on specific rules while other calls involve judgment. That puts a lot of pressure on officials. If the official is anxious and feeling stressed, then his judgment and decision making abilities will be affected.

Now that we’ve identified some sources of anxiety and stress, let’s look at some strategies that officials can use to cope with stressful situations. Again, we will look at both physical and psychological techniques.

One of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety and stress is through breath control. When you are anxious, your breathing is short and forced. When you are calm, your breathing is smooth and rhythmical. Practice inhaling deeply through your nose. Do this in an easy, relaxed manner. Likewise, exhale slowly through your mouth.

Deep breathing will help relax your muscles. You can do deep breathing exercises during a time out or whenever there is a break in the action. This is kind of a short mental break which will allow you to refocus and re-energize.

Talking to oneself can help an official remain calm, stay focused and forget past mistakes. Self-talk must be positive, not negative. Words like “relax,” “stay calm” can help you stay relaxed and keep your emotions under control.

Smile when you feel yourself getting uptight and tense. A smile can take the edge off an upsetting situation. Smiling reminds you to stay in control.

Prepare for stressful situations. If you know that you are working for a coach with a reputation for being tough on officials, prepare yourself to handle his reaction to your calls. Think about possible actions the coach may take, and then devise a strategy to diffuse his behavior.

Stay focused on the action at hand. Don't become distracted by what just happened or what might happen. There is nothing you can do about either situation.

Slow down...and then slow down some more!! Officials under pressure tend to rush their actions. It's easy to get carried away and make a rash statement or a decision that you will regret later. Slowing down does not imply any loss of decisiveness. Sometimes it's better to pause before making a decision.

## Lesson 9 – Developing Decision-Making Skills

We've just talked about concentration, confidence, dealing with stress and anxiety, and some relaxation techniques. Let's now take some of that information and see how it can apply to officials making good calls and decisions.

Good officials don't spend a lot of time thinking about the calls they make. They react to what they observe and because of their experience; know what to look for, and then, what to call. As we know, not every foul or rule infraction needs to be called. Remember, we talked about overly technical officials who call everything by the book, and then those officials who just don't want to step up and get involved. The successful official is somewhere in the middle.

Another way of saying the same thing –

**“Manage the game with the lightest touch necessary to provide equitable competition.”**

Let's now talk about some essential elements that go into making good decisions.

### 1. Know the Rules

You have to be sure exactly what is permitted by the rules.

- Terms and Definitions – definitions are at the heart of the game
- Player's Rights and Restrictions – descriptions of appropriate player behavior are extensions of the game's basic definitions. Unfortunately, the rules book is written in the negative....what you can't do.
- Violations and Penalties – when a player does something that the rules forbid, including acting in an unsportsmanlike way, consequences are spelled out.
- Peripheral Regulations – uniforms, player and team equipment, jewelry, field and court dimensions and markings.

Let's stop and take a few minutes and talk about how to study the rules. Rules books are written in a language and style all their own. Here are some suggestions on how to read the rules book.

### **9 WAYS TO MASTER ANY SPORT'S RULES BOOK**

The rules book is an official's bible. It provides the “nuts and bolts” basics that each official must master before he or she steps onto the playing surface. Rules knowledge and understanding are essential ingredients to become a well-rounded official.

The problem is that most rules books are written more like legal texts, making them tough to read and difficult to understand. Plus, related sections are often separated, forcing officials to hopscotch through various parts of the book to amass several references needed to find just one answer.

While other aspects of officiating are critical, solid rules knowledge and understanding form the root system from which an official will branch out, grow and prosper. Regardless of the sport or level you officiate, here are nine tips that will help you move closer to mastering the rules book.

- Speed-read the entire book. Read through the book as if you're cruising through a novel. You will not remember everything you read, but don't worry about that now. Familiarize yourself with different sections so you don't need to rely on the index.
- Categorize the rules. Some rules have more game-to-game impact than others. For example, the “equipment and court specifications” rule, often near the front of the book, is not necessarily the one you should read first. While important, it is not the most important rule to learn for someone trying to learn the rules. What's more important, a basketball player's legal guarding position or the radius of the jump-ball circle?

- Read the “good” book in the following order:
  - Definitions. Mastering the definitions helps you study the rest of the book.
  - Live ball, dead ball.
  - Game-specific chapters, out-of-bounds, pitching, kicks, etc.
  - Fouls and penalties.
  - Violations and penalties.
  - Scoring and timing regulations.
  - Players and substitutions.
  - Officials and their duties
  - Playing surface and equipment.
  - Rule changes and points of emphasis
- Chapter breakdown. For each sentence, visualize several plays that relate to what’s discussed. That takes what you’ve read and applies it to real game situations. Create a quiz. Read a sentence in the rules book, and then write it down without looking at the book. If you’ve correctly written the core of the sentence, write two related true-false questions, with correct answers and rule references. Quiz writing aids memory retention and is an effective rules review.
- Have several copies of the same rules book. For convenience, it’s a good idea to have more than one copy of each rules book. Keep them wherever you spend a great deal of time. That way, one copy is always accessible when time permits.
- Read in short increments of time. After the initial reading of the entire rules book, study in increments of 15-20 minutes per sitting. Digest the material in bite-sized pieces.
- Review the book each day. Read some part of the rules book each day. Make it as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth.
- Study just before falling asleep. USA Today reported that a study proved memory retention is enhanced by studying right before sleeping. Instead of watching TV as you begin to fall asleep, read the rules book.
- Check related casebook plays. Once you’ve grasped a rule, read related casebook plays before moving to the next rule. Casebooks take rules and place them into game situations.
- Talk with rules experts. Attend local association meetings, ask questions and listen to the rules “experts.” These meetings often entail vigorous rules discussions that can be helpful. Don’t always take the local guru’s word as gospel. On occasion, the local veterans apply incorrect rulings, which are then passed on to the next generation of officials. Don’t get caught in the loop.

Finally, remember the old saying, “Just when I thought I knew it all....” there is always more to learn.

Back to more elements of good decision making.

2. Know the Language of the Sport – As we have seen, every sport has its own vocabulary, both formal and informal. Formal language is the language of the rules book and case book...the definitions of the sport which as we’ve seen, are the backbone of learning the rules. Informal language is the “street language” of the sport, words and phrases that aren’t found in the books, but are used by players, coaches and officials to describe play actions. Example: you won’t find the term “point of attack” in any football rules book, yet it’s real important to know the meaning of those words.
3. Master the Mechanics of Communicating Decisions – In a nutshell, that means good signals. Some officials accompany their signals with a verbal explanation. Officials need to learn when to explain decisions and when to let decisions speak for themselves. We’ve already talked about how an official’s

voice and mannerisms can help or hinder the communication process. Officials must also learn when to ask for help from other officials during a game and when to offer help.

4. Adapt to the Nature of the Game – Know the dynamics of the game you are working. We've talked about cross-town rivalry games, "revenge" games that are carried over from the previous season or a lower level game and blowout games. A team that is behind in the score may do certain things to try and overcome a deficit, just as the team in front may do things to keep its lead.
5. Be in Proper Position – If you learn just one thing in today's class, it's this. **If you are in the proper position to make a call, the less likely your judgment will be questioned.**

Now, just being in the right position doesn't always mean you'll make the correct call, but it's a big step in the right direction. If an official is out of position to make a call, he or she has two choices. One is to make the best "long-distance" call possible. The other choice is to rely on your partner or crewmates. We've just talked about seeking and giving help.

To be in the proper spot to make good calls, you have to read what teams are trying to do. Good officials can anticipate where the next call is likely to take place and what kind of action to expect. That anticipation allows the official to move into the best position and make the call while standing still and not on the run.

6. Focus – We've just finished talking about the art of concentration, which is another way of saying "focus." Just remember, there are dead spots in every game when the temptation to let the mind wander is strong. Between downs in football, between innings in baseball and softball, during time outs in any sport.....stay focused during these periods of relative inactivity, use the down time to regroup and refocus if necessary.
7. Be Calm – Again, something we've just talked about. The need to slow down and process what you've observed before making the call, especially when the action heats up. The more furious the play, the more an official needs to adopt a cool, deliberate approach.

Use positive self-talk. Talk yourself into being cool, calm and collected. Use those breathing techniques that we've talked about.

8. Work with Fellow Officials – Learn when to get and give help. Learn catchy phrases that only officials know. Example: "Did you see the ball?" If you give help, you better be 125% sure.

In some sports, areas of responsibility are pretty clearly defined. Some officials may get real upset if another official makes a call in their area. But, officials can get blocked out, screened out or straight-lined. That's when you'll see an official with the "deer-in-the-headlights" look – the big eyes! That's when his partner has to and should come to the rescue.

We are seeing officials get together and conference more. Never used to happen much – officials lived and died with their calls – right or wrong. Nowadays, there's more emphasis on getting the play right and let's face it; some plays can get downright complicated. Conferences are OK, as long as they don't last too long. Too long a conference and people begin to wonder if the officials know what they're doing.

## Lesson 10 – Managing Conflict

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR OFFICIALS

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Controversy is inevitable whenever there is competition.
  - People are emotionally involved as they compete for a scarce reward-not everybody can win the contest-there can only be one winner.
  - Rules exist that limit the behavioral options of the participants.
  - Officials enforce the rules and people do not like to have their behavior restricted, limited, or penalized.
  - We live in a society that insists on placing blame. Officials are often unfairly blamed. Making the officials the scapegoats is a convenient alternative to accepting responsibility for one's behavior.
2. Basic definitions:
  - Controversy: different viewpoints or opinions.
  - Conflict: confrontational behavior (words or actions) that develops out of controversial situations.
3. Officials are game managers and contest facilitators. Therefore, they must find effective ways to deal with conflict and controversy in the games they officiate.
4. Officials are also role models who can teach student athletes important lessons about dealing with conflict and controversy.

#### MINIMIZING CONFLICT

1. Conflict and controversy are inevitable, but there are ways to lessen their occurrence and/or their severity.
2. Internal issues:
  - The psychological makeup of an official can affect the likelihood of conflicts developing.
  - Officials need to know their pressure points, their hot buttons and how they respond to stressful situations.
  - Be confident about your preparation (physical and mental) - be prepared to handle the unexpected.
  - Do not take controversy personally-do not allow criticism to become personal. Know when a remark is aimed at you and when it is aimed at motivating a team. When coach's comments are repetitive, it is usually a sign of frustration or an attempt to manipulate the officials.
  - Self-control precedes game control – do not add “fuel to the fire” of conflict.
  - In order to enjoy the authority you have as an official, you must have credibility.

#### **Experience = Reputation = Credibility**

3. Situational issues:
  - A professional appearance (uniform and mechanics) can reduce controversy.



Body language can also be the way you wear the uniform.

If you look professional, that sends a positive message about your commitment to the contest. Looking as if you know what you're doing and being confident in your handling of situations goes a long way toward managing conflict. Coaches can sense a lack of confidence. Coaches tend to test rookies because they believe that rookies are more easily influenced than veterans.

Coaches are less likely to question your judgment if you are in the right position to make the call.

- The way problems are handled in a contest often determines whether controversy becomes conflict.

Overly technical officials prevent the contest from flowing smoothly.

Some officials are so good at "putting out fires" that they go start some just to have something to do.

The more picky we are, the harder it is to be consistent. Therefore, the less picky we are, the more we can agree on.

- Officials may have to use both passive and assertive modes of game management.

Always call things that deal with player safety and unsportsmanlike issues.

Manage the game with the lightest touch necessary to provide equitable competition.

## **RESOLVING CONFLICT**

### 1. Think through your options:

- What we see, hear, sense and feel triggers certain emotional responses.

Some officials immediately jump into action based on these emotions without any thought about the consequences, i.e. They allow themselves to be "baited."

Others think, and then they choose their responsive behavior.

- Recognize that coaches and officials have preconceptions about the role of the other.

People tend to hold on to their preconceptions when handling conflicting ideas.

These mindsets affect how we communicate (words, tone, body language, etc.)

- Do not say anything you'll regret later. Sometimes it is better to say nothing – silence can't be misquoted.
- Humor – sometimes a funny word or phrase can diffuse a tense situation. But be careful with humor. Some people are good with humor, most are not. If you are not, then you'll look stupid making a wisecrack. Avoid any humor that deals with race, gender, etc.

### 2. Practical solutions:

- Appear to be receptive – have the courtesy to listen before saying anything – empathize with the other point of view.
- Don't invite confrontation through unnecessary proximity or prolonged eye contact. Respect personal space.

Finger wagging conveys a message of aggression; possibly demeaning, combative or disrespectful.

A stare can be perceived as threatening. Eye contact in general means, "I am interested in what you have to say."

Standing up straight says you are confident and interested. A slouch shows lack of concern. Hands on hips shows that you are bored.

Move away if possible. If a coach tries to "get in your face," turn sideways so you are shoulder-to-shoulder. – harder to speak in an aggressive, confrontational way when both parties are side by side.

Lower your voice and speak slower.

- Keep all communication professional.

Use "coach," rather than the person's first name.

Focus on game-related issues – deal only with things that intrude on this contest which disrupt your management of this contest.

Emphasize what is right, not who is right. Give the opportunity to save face and maintain self-esteem. Don't back anyone into a corner. Be a good listener. Let the coach vent. Permit the coach to disengage.

Recognize when it is time to cease talking. Do not insist on having the last word.

Project serenity amidst a storm of controversy. Be determined not to escalate the problem.

Impose penalties professionally when efforts to minimize or resolve conflict don't work. Walk away to report the penalty. Don't bait anyone into a second penalty.

## Lesson 11 – Fitness for Officials

We've talked earlier about the need to hustle and get in the right position to make good calls. In order to do that, officials need to be fit and in shape. Officials are subjected to physical demands for extended periods of time. Different sports require different degrees of physical conditioning. In basketball, soccer and football, the official must be as physically conditioned as the players.

Although not required at the high school level, an annual preseason physical examination is strongly recommended.

Officials need these physical fitness components to perform well:

- Aerobic endurance
- Strength
- Flexibility
- Speed
- Coordination

Diet and nutrition also play an important role in your physical preparation. Be careful how much you eat before any contest. Be sure you stay hydrated, especially in warm or hot weather. Water is the fluid-replacement drink of choice. Don't be reluctant to accept water when offered from team attendants.

Rest and sleep are also important to an official. You cannot do your best job if you are tired.

A pre-game warm-up helps limber up your muscles and joints and get them ready for the physical demands of the upcoming contest. Stretching and some calisthenics can be done in your dressing room. When you get on the field or court, a few, brief sprints up and down the sidelines can get you ready to go.

Perform specific exercises that mirror the particular officiating moves found in your sport. If you are not fit, it is unreasonable to expect your body to perform at the level needed to officiate and still stay injury free. Poor fitness can lead to acute or chronic injuries.

Pay specific attention to your eyes and feet. More and more officials are wearing glasses. The negative image once associated with officials who wear glasses is going away. Make sure your glasses are unbreakable and are held in place with elastic straps.

The importance of a good pair of shoes cannot be overstated. Shoes provide traction, support and cushioning to your feet. Wear the type of shoe appropriate to specific field conditions....flat bottomed shoes on hard fields, molded cleats in rain and mud. Some kinds of shoes work better on artificial surfaces and some work better on grass.

Good officials listen to their body. Pay attention to aches and pains, tightness and swelling for they may indicate sprains and strains and other athletic injuries. Don't try to be a hero and officiate when you're not able to go at full strength. Your partner or crewmates will over-officiate your areas of responsibility resulting in less attention to their own duties, opening the door to all sorts of possible trouble.

## Lesson 12 – Looking Ahead

Many officials work more than one sport. For them, there is no real “off-season,” or perhaps a brief one at best. These officials stay in shape throughout the year and don’t have to cram running and physical training into a few weeks before the season. For those officials who only work one sport, off-season conditioning is essential.

Ongoing study of the rules and mechanics is one way to continue growing. Most rules books have 9 or 10 general categories. Take one rule a month, or every three weeks, and really look at it in depth. Look at the case plays that relate to the rule. Another good idea is to meet with other officials informally during the off-season. Each person is responsible for “presenting” a given rule or topic on any given night. Believe me, the best way to learn something is having to teach or explain it to someone else!

During the off-season, work as many pre-season scrimmages and spring practice games as you can. The more plays you see and officiate, the more your mechanics will improve. Getting in the right place to make the call will become automatic. Haven’t we said that before! Review game films to see yourself in action. You’ll be surprised at what you see!!

Whatever level officials wish to aim for, they can enjoy the experience for a long time if they continue to improve. When officials cease trying to get better, from lack of motivation or limitations in ability, they stagnate and may just go through the motions when working games. Officials have a tendency to be self-satisfied once they reach a certain level of expertise. They often don’t take constructive criticism well, not do they seek evaluation from experts. Faulty habits sometimes keep an official at one level and prevent them from advancing.

Camps and clinics are opportunities for advancement to higher levels. Learn what the advancement procedure is for your sport in your area. Some officials try to advance too quickly and find their desires do not match their experience or ability. Sometimes, advancement depends more on who you know than what you know. Every official who has moved up the ladder is thankful to someone who supplied help at a critical time.

As you can see, sports officiating can be a lifetime career, what you make of it depends on what you put into it. You can never learn everything.

I often tell my crew two things before a ball game “Work hard and have fun.” You must be able to have fun and enjoy what you are doing. If officiating ever becomes a chore or an unpleasant duty, then it’s time to walk away. Officials should be able to feel the excitement that is part of the game. Whether folks will admit it or not, officials are essential to athletic competition. Remember this, “Without Officials, It’s Just Recess.”