

To Be or Not to Be

Compliments of Referee Magazine

BE APPROACHABLE

NOBODY LIKES TO BE IGNORED. One of the things that turns off coaches and players is an official who seems unapproachable, standoffish, even cold. You can be great with rules and mechanics, but if you aren't tempered with human-relations skills your career will be fraught with problems.

BE PREPARED

NO ONE SHOULD TRY TO WORK A GAME WITHOUT FIRST DISCUSSING THE GAME. No matter how long you've refereed or how many times you've worked with the same official, it's crucial to have a pregame conference before every game. Even if you've worked 20 games with your partner already this season, you've got to refresh your memory; you've got to make sure everybody on the crew feels at ease.

BE READY

AT TIMES, IT'S ROUTINE THINGS THAT CAN TRIP OFFICIALS. Concentrate at all times, because there will be times when routine duties are poorly executed. Have you doubts? Consider whether you've ever seen a football official mark off an 18-yard penalty, watched a basketball referee hand the ball to the wrong team or seen a batter go to first on ball three.

BE FOCUSED

IN ORDER TO DO A SOLID JOB, YOU MUST MAINTAIN CONCENTRATION THROUGH THICK AND THIN. To do that, you cannot allow anything to get under your skin. Some rookie officials are convinced nothing is worse than three dozen little league parents screaming at them. In fact, some pro officials agree, even after facing more than 50,000 spectators in an afternoon. Why? Because the pros learned quickly to "tune out" what the spectators have to say.

BE YOURSELF

DEVELOP YOUR SIGNALS AND MECHANICS UNTIL THAT ARE INSTINCTIVE, BUT KEEP YOUR PERSONALITY INTACT. Control the game first and foremost, and administer it within the framework of the rules. Then, go out and work the game and have some fun. Keep control of the game; use preventative officiating. But, at the same time, let the players know what is going on, what you're trying to do. Talk to them. Don't just stand there during timeouts like a toy soldier.

BE SURE

DEVELOP THE SELF-DISCIPLINE THAT PREVENTS "PHANTOM" CALLS. Often, the best call is a good no-call. Many top officials agree their greatest fear is a phantom call at the end of a game. Every call is important, but to call something that's not there at a crucial time is devastating.

BE REALISTIC

LOOK BOTH WAYS AS YOU CLIMB THE LADDER OF SUCCESS. Remember, if you move up too soon, you may forever eliminate the chance of another try. Your officiating friends might think you're crazy for turning down a promotion, but that's what you should do if you're really not ready to move to the next-higher level.

BE BALANCED

GAIN EXPERIENCE BY WORKING "EVERY GAME YOU CAN," BUT RECOGNIZE WHAT QUALITY OF GAMES YOU CAN WORK. It's counterproductive to work too many games or to work games at levels which don't offer challenges. When your officiating glass is full, whatever experience you pour into it will simply spill over the top.

BE SAVVY

"SPIRIT AND INTENT" IS MORE THAN A CATCH-PHRASE, IT'S A DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND A WAY OF LIFE. Knowing the rules is an initial step toward becoming a capable official. The next step: Truly understanding why each rule developed and how rules interrelate. Particularly at the collegiate level, top supervisors agree they're less interested in rules knowledge than in rules understanding. If you don't see the difference, you're probably not ready to advance.

BE BETTER

COMPLACENCY CAN BE AN OFFICIAL'S WORST ENEMY. No matter what you've done lately and no matter how lofty your reputation, you must firmly believe that you can become an even better official. Set your long-term goals early. Enter each season with clearly defined intermediate goals. Work each game with a careful number of objectives in mind, aimed at helping you meet an intermediate goal. Whether it's timing, positioning, positive communication or another objective, if you don't have one tonight you're wasting a game.

BE LOUD

IF YOU SOUND OR APPEAR TIMID, YOU'LL BE PERCEIVED AS WEAK. Cultivate your voice. It should be firm: loud enough to be heard, yet not challenging. Develop a brief list of planned statements that will convey your message without provoking anyone. Example: "Hey, I've heard enough," leaves no doubt that you do not want a conversation to continue, but it's not a threat.

BE QUIET

THE MORE YOU SAY, THE LESS IT MEANS. Rookies and veterans alike are often guilty of the "Yeah, but" syndrome. When another official or supervisor questions your mechanics or your judgement and your first utterance is, "Yeah, but," you're usually not listening. Grandma used to say, with rolling pin hand: "Be quiet and listen. That's why you've got two ears and only one mouth." Moral of the story: You'll learn more by listening than by talking.