

Important Things About Officiating

1. For All But A Few Of Us, Officiating Is An Avocation, Not Our Profession

It takes time, hard work, and study to become a successful official. But an official must not put officiating ahead of what's really important: family and work. Devote more time and energy to your family and job than you do to officiating.

2. Ninety Percent of Officiating Is Being A People Person

Know how to handle people. Remember that listening is an important skill. If you're asked a question, answer it. Treat everyone at the game with the same respect you want from him or her.

3. Officiating Is Not Always Fair

Regardless of how much talent you possess and how hard you work, you won't always work the big events or move up the officiating ladder. It is sometimes less a matter of what you know than whom you know. There is no use obsessing about things you can't control. No matter what level you work, you will often be criticized even though you are 100 percent correct. It isn't fair, but you must learn to accept it.

4. Keep Safety Number One

The rules not only empower but also require officials to penalize rough play. Even if a potentially dangerous situation is not specifically covered in the rules, an official is obligated to make whatever correction is necessary to ensure player safety. In this overly litigious age, erring on the side of safety is not only the morally correct course but the one that will help keep the official out of court as well.

5. Don't Make Excuses

Even if you have the best possible excuse for making a mistake, the error won't be corrected because you have an alibi. Instead of wasting time and mental energy coming up with an excuse, your first course should be doing whatever the rules allow you to do to rectify the situation. Next you should learn from the mistakes so you won't make it - or have to come up with another excuse - again.

6. You Have An Obligation To Hold Yourself To A Higher-Than- Normal Ethical Standard

How you comport yourself away from the court is as important as how you act on the court. Poor decisions or bad behavior in everyday life can eradicate all of the good will and good impressions you earn when you're officiating. Integrity is defined by how you act when you think nobody is watching.

7. Expect Criticism and Learn How To Handle It

Most comments from spectators, players and coaches should go in one ear and out the other. Granted, that's easier said than done. But turning a deaf ear to such criticism is crucial to maintaining focus and keeping a positive attitude. Constructive criticism from chief officials, assignors and veteran officials should be sought. If you solicit comments after working with a respected veteran, be prepared for what you might get. It's possible you'll find out you're not as good as you think you are.

8. Officiating Builds Skills for A Lifetime

The qualities that make a great official are also the qualities that make a person a good employee, spouse, parent and friend. Teamwork, loyalty, sacrifice, study, decision-making, fair mindedness, accountability and honesty are just a few of the positive skills and qualities that can be learned, developed and implemented through officiating.

9. Never Let Your Signals Convey Your Emotions

Too many officials view fouls or rules infractions as personal affronts. Instead of acting dispassionately, they allow their body language or voice to convey that displeasure. Your facial expression and voice should not suggest you're happy or unhappy to be enforcing a penalty.

10. Understand the Intent Of The Rules - Not Just The Rule

Knowing why a rule is needed will help you enforce it. In some cases, the intent is obvious (e.g. safety). In other instances, a rule is intended to ensure that neither team nor athlete is placed at an unfair disadvantage.

11. If You're Going To Blow The Whistle, Blow It Hard

In almost every situation in virtually every sport, the rules dictate that an official's whistle causes play to cease. Since that is the case, you might as well blow it hard. A strong blast of the whistle conveys the message that you're sure play should be stopped. A weak toot casts doubt about your confidence and judgment.

12. Understand That You Will Make Mistakes

Sometimes they are dreadful mistakes, but we must accept them as an environmental hazard in an avocation that calls for us to make a multitude of split-second decisions under very stressful conditions. To expect perfection is too heavy a burden for any person to carry and ultimately will take the joy out of officiating for even the best official.

13. Don't Criticize Other Officials

Under no circumstances should an official point out a peer's inadequacies or offer a negative opinion about another official to a coach or player. Let your work and the work of others speak for itself. If an official you've worked with or observed asks for a critique, be honest but supportive. If your opinion is not sought, don't offer it.

14. Be Professional

No matter the level, dress the part; act the part. In officiating, a book is judged by its cover. Soiled, aged, discolored, ill-fitting and wrinkled uniforms cast a negative impression before a game even starts. Your appearance before and after the event is important. No, you don't have to wear a tuxedo en route to a venue, but it is a good idea to dress a bit better than most people expect.

15. Know Your Role

You are part of a bigger picture - don't showboat. When you need to sell a call, it's OK to give an emphatic signal. But actions designed to draw attention away from participants and onto officials are unprofessional and unacceptable. Use the standard mechanics and signals for the level you are working.

16. Be Prepared

Plan for the unexpected. Don't anticipate the call; anticipate the play. That sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. If you can "feel" what's coming and adjust your position or your visual focus to the right area, you'll see what's happening better and you'll have improved your opportunity to make the correct call if needed. Good umpires know when to expect a squeeze play. Football officials know when to expect a deep pass or a quarterback sneak. Top basketball referees recognize the times teams are going to apply full-court pressure or change defense.

17. Continuing Study Is A Requirement

How many times have you had to correct a partner who applies an outdated rule? Or been corrected yourself? Good officials read the rulebook often. The more often you read it, the more ingrained the rules will be in your mind. Attending clinics allows you to keep up with changes in philosophies and mechanics.

18. Body Language Will Do You In Quicker Than A Lack Of Knowledge

Sometimes it's less a matter of what you say than how you say it. In officiating, body language often speaks louder than words. Even a correct call will cast doubt in the minds of participants if you don't appear decisive. Don't stand with your arms folded or shoulder slumped, which gives the impression you're bored or would rather be anywhere else.

19. Pour No Gasoline

Coaches, players and fans will say plenty during most games. Much is designed to do no more than vent frustration. Understanding which comments or questions merit a response is a key to success in officiating. Yelling in kind can turn a small brush fire into a four-alarm conflagration. More often than not, the "right" response will not be verbal. You might nod your head slightly, smile momentarily, glance at whoever said something, hold eye contact for a moment or two, shake your head, or hold up a stop sign. Each alternative communication has a particular meaning; learn to use them wisely.

20. You Don't Care Who Wins

One of the many sports myths accepted as fact; is that the officials are predisposed to favor the locals. But an official should never use calls to favor any player or team for any reason. Impartiality is the foundation on which the officiating house is built. Officials must be blind to factors that have nothing to do with the game, including who wins or loses.

21. Have A Reverence For The Rules

Before you can understand the spirit behind the rules you must have an appreciation for them. That doesn't necessarily mean knowing them verbatim. More important, is understanding how vital it is to properly apply the rules. The avocation suffers when officials ignore or misapply the rules.

22. Always Have A Pre Game

Just as athletes must warm up before competing, officials must prepare themselves for the job ahead. Even if you work with the same partner or crew day after day, a pre game provides valuable reminders about how certain situations will be handled.

23. Don't Carry Over Feelings To The Next Game

It is crucial to treat each game as a new experience. If you work a game involving a player or coach you've had to penalize or eject, your demeanor and actions must convey the feeling that you've forgotten about it - even if they haven't.

24. Remember Where You Came From

If you've achieved your goal, it's easy to forget what helped you reach that pinnacle. Few officials make it on their own; more than likely there was a mentor, an assignor or a local association that gave you the boost you needed. You can repay that by helping another budding official.

25. Be Who You Are When You Referee

Your officiating personality is driven by your everyday personality. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But remember that extremes are often detrimental in officiating. For example, if your job involves supervising people, remember that you can't treat fellow officials, players and coaches the same as you do your employees.