

SOLVING CONFLICTS



by Carl Jungebrand

International referee since 1986, he officiated at three Olympic Games, two World Men's Championships, three European Men's Championship finals, six European Final Fours, and in more than 800 international games.

Basketball is a game played with both the heart and the mind and emotions flare up from time to time. In addition to making it an interesting game to watch, it can also elevate the emotional feelings of spectators and players alike. Because there are these high emotions, it often creates situations where conflicts are likely to occur, or at least have a great potential to occur. These conflicts happen not only among team members but also between players, coaches, and referees. In many close games or in games between highly rated opponents, spectators are often involved in the conflict situations as well.

UNDERSTANDING IS KEY TO CONTROL

When we talk about controlling something within us or our surroundings, we need to understand first what we're dealing with. That's why we need to spend some time thinking what conflicts actually are. Even if we try to analyze the particular conflicts that arise during the game right now, we should not forget that the same rules we use to govern the game are also working in our so-called 'normal life' off the court. Many of the rules of society that are working for you successfully in every day life are also very effective during a heated basketball game. It doesn't matter if you are player, coach, referee, or table official in the game. By following some basic principles, you will be able to help solve a variety of complicated situations that all too often lead to conflict.

I truly believe that during the game every person will experience the same number of situations that may lead to conflict. So, we first need to recognize that we must try to solve the disagreements, not avoid



them. There will be always some crucial moments in every game where we have to react the 'right' way. Sometimes we tend to think that if there is a conflict during the game we have failed in some way. The same thing applies to fear. Both conflict and fear are very natural. Disagreements arise because we all are different, with our own values and habits. Generally speaking, conflicts can be triggered by various sources, including anger, frustration, pressure, and provocation. They're all natural human feelings and surprise, surprise, they are also present on the basketball court. The bottom line: It is perfectly natural to have disagreements and conflicts during a basketball game.

KEY FACTOR

Disagreements/Conflicts are natural - they happen to everybody!

PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS INVOLVED

We used to say that people never fight, but it's the subjects they are talking about that cause the fight. It is true that conflicts could be based on disagreements, but we cannot forget that people are still involved. In other words, so-called human laws are in effect too, because behind every conflict a human heart is always beating. It doesn't matter if you are a player, coach or referee. Sometimes we think that

everything changes when you put on your uniform. It doesn't. Solving conflicts entails nothing more than dealing with people in the right way.

HOW - NOT WHAT! BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

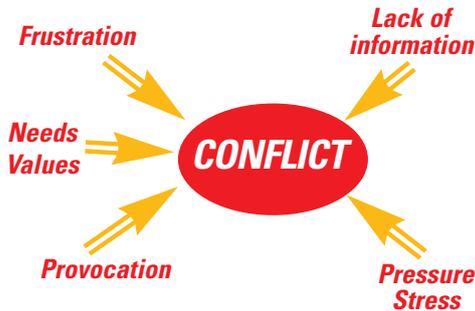
It's been said that 90 percent of divorces are caused by one's tone of voice, not by the things that are done or said. There is some truth to this. By carefully analyzing the various situations during the game you quickly learn that the tone with which you deliver your message-not the message itself-can often be the major cause of problems. Hopefully, this will cause you to rethink your methods during heated moments of the game, and see if they're really appropriate or not!

When we are in the middle of a conflict between animated people who all think that they are right, we oftentimes lose the ability to make the right decision. We sometimes even lose our temper. From the referee's point of view, there can be many disagreements, which, according to my study, could be caused equally by both parties. A misinterpretation of a player's response for his statements or situation by a referee, is in many cases the main cause of conflict. I have completed a study of basketball conflicts and based on my own

experiences, I'd say the players are honest 99 percent of the time with their reactions or statements made during the game. So, the key factor for a referee is then to be able to analyze what has caused the initial disagreement. Oftentimes it turns out to be a lack of information or a misunderstanding. Therefore, in order to solve the case, you need to identify the reasons why there is a disagreement.

KEY FACTOR

Identify the reason why you have the disagreement!



UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT, UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN ACTIONS

It is generally thought that by understanding others, they will come to understand you even more. It's imperative, therefore, that everyone spend some time studying his or herself. Of course, this is not easy and sometimes it can even be a little bit painful when you notice that you are not perfect in every manner-not at all!

KEY FACTOR

When you know your strengths and weak-

nesses, you are able to control them! We have a saying, "Treat others as you wish them to treat you!" Basically, this is true, but the outcome is not always what we expect or want. Because we are all different, what you happen to like may not always be what I happen to like. That is why this statement should be slightly re-worded as follows: "Treat others as they wish to be treated!" This means that people with good psychological insight will be very successful in dealing with difficult situations. This is especially true with salesmen. These people have to be extremely careful with their customers in order to survive their demanding jobs. I have found that an inherent lack of respect for the people around you can quickly lead to conflict. You can be very upset with somebody, but still respect him/her. More often, the respect you show to someone will be paid back with dividends. Like a smile, showing respect is free of charge.

In emotional situations people often speak when silence would be better. By listening (or at least giving that impression), you have a better chance to be the ultimate negotiator.

THINK AND PRACTICE DO NOT WIN - SOLVE!

Difficult moments occur so quickly during basketball games that referees often don't have the luxury of too much time to think and react. Oftentimes, we may say something we regret and it is almost impossible to correct it afterwards. Generally speaking, the start of a disa-

greement is the crucial moment in order to solve it. This is why we need to pay particular attention to how and when we start our reply.

As a referee, I have been involved with hundreds of difficult moments during games. Over the years, I have spent hours analyzing how I was able to create happy endings, even when emotional players/coaches were not so happy with my decisions. I first had to look at myself honestly and try to understand why and for what reasons my action or reaction led to an unsuccessful conflict. Then, when I really understood the various factors, I was able to make positive changes. Eventually, I found that the following factors are most important:

1. Voice: Keep your tone always calm and cool - try to avoid using an aggressive tone.
2. Body language: Avoid any unpleasant gestures and try to be approachable.
3. Words: Start with something other than negative words. Be professional and polite- but you can still be demanding!
4. Protect the ego: Everybody in the game has a strong ego, otherwise they would not be on the court. Do not threaten the other person's ego. He or she will surely fight back-it's human nature. Show everyone respect and you will get the same chance too.

KEY FACTOR

Most powerful words: Thank you... Please... Excuse me... Would you... Could I... May I...

Whenever you try to solve a disagreement, remember that you have to focus on the actual problem. Do not let the subject expand-it can happen easily-or else the first conflict will rarely be solved. Make sure that you know what you are talking about and do not start to explain too much.

If you need to have more conversation, choose a better time and place for the additional discussion.

Always try to analyze the group and its structure because it may help you when you need help or some contact person. Who among the group is very useful to know? If you pick the right person to solve the problem, his/her influence could help swing the rest of the group.

KEY FACTOR

1. Understand the reason
2. Respect all people
3. Solve the conflict

