



# THE LITTLE-KNOWN WORLD OF FIBA REFEREES: INTERVIEW WITH LUBOMIR KOTLEBA



**Former player, coach, executive, and referee, Lubomir Kotleba has officiated the finals of the Olympic Games, the World, European and other continental Championships, as well as European Club competitions. He presently serves as the FIBA Sport Director and is in charge of overseeing the training, selection, and conduct of FIBA referees.**

Officiating any sport can often be a thankless task and referees seem to receive far more criticism than they do credit. Referees rarely seek or receive attention, but what is not in doubt is the high standard that all FIBA referees must adhere to. We spoke with Lubomir Kotleba, FIBA Sports Director and asked him to take us behind the scenes in the world of the referee.

***How does someone become a FIBA referee?***

FIBA referee candidates are nominated by their national federations. Only the best national referees make it to this selection process. The candidates then must participate in international referee clinics where they eventually must pass special examinations created by the Technical Commission. Those who pass the exams receive an international referee licence, issued by the FIBA Secretary General. These new FIBA referees are now eligible to officiate all FIBA-sanctioned competitions, cups, and tournaments.

***What is the role of the World Technical Commission in regards to referees?***

The main duties of the World Technical Commission include drafting, continuously updating and amending the Basketball Rules to make them compatible with a dynamically developing basketball game. It is our job to ensure that referees take training courses based on common principles and that rules are uniformly interpreted throughout the world.

***The Commission reviewed the basketball rules in 2000 and made proposals for possible changes for the basketball rules in 2003. Can you tell us more about the proposals?***

Typically when you adopt new rules the changes are very well received. However, there are some rule changes that needed to be looked at again. After three years, the FIBA Technical Commission reviewed various changes and reexamined the rules in order to cope with the needs of the ever-changing game. The key issue was the 24-second shot clock rule, which says that when the ball is in the air and the 24-second shot has expired, the game clock is stopped, as is the game. This is unnecessary stoppage and we wanted to amend the rule. I perso-

nally think that this change will be accepted. Some other changes include the number of jump balls during the game, the number of time-outs, and additional small issues. These changes proposed by the FIBA Technical Commission, if approved by the FIBA Central Board, might be adopted for 2003- 2004 season.

***What are the ultimate goals when the basketball rules are changed?***

The ultimate goal is to keep up with the progress of the game. When we decided to changed the shot clock rule from 30 to 24-seconds, it was done so because we discovered the game was getting too slow and less spectacular for the spectators. Whatever the change, it is either a reaction to or possibly an anticipation of what is going on in the current game. The game has become much more athletic, the players are faster, the game itself is changing-therefore, the rules must adapt to these changes.

***You mentioned the word "spectacular." When you make rule changes, does the basketball fan play a role in your thinking?***

Of course. The game needs to be easily understandable and especially attractive to the players, coaches, and all the fans of the game. One change, which was implemented a couple of years ago, was the allowance of the "alley oop," which is one of the most spectacular plays of the present game. Any spectacular aspects that can be implemented in basketball, without changing the inherent game philosophy itself, are always welcome.



***FIBA has tried to unify the basketball rules around the world because there are different organizations that play with different rules, which is not good for spectators or the game. It seems that FIBA was not totally successful and it looks like there are now even more organizations that play with different rules. What can FIBA do to change this situation?***

It is certainly FIBA's role to set the standards globally. I think that each governing body, which runs a national or international competition, is trying to find what is the best for their own game. One disadvantage of the FIBA Rule Book is that it is valid for almost all ages and for all 212 participating countries worldwide. It is extremely difficult to have one rulebook that is valid for all ages and all types of basketball. This is the main reason why some organizations are adjusting the rules to their needs. We were always trying to unify the rules. Recently, we were partly successful in diminishing the many differences between FIBA, NBA, and NCAA rules. Due to local playing conditions in various countries, it will be extremely difficult, if almost impossible, to have one set of rules in place worldwide in the near future.

***Three-man officiating system was recently accepted by FIBA. Will three referees be used in a FIBA world competition soon?***

The FIBA Rule Book foresees the possibility of using both the two-man system of officiating and the 3-man system. The governing body of the local competition can decide on using one system or the other. Personally, before anybody moves to a 3-man officiating system, "yes" should be answered to the following three basic questions:

- Does the level of competition merit the use of three referees?
- Are there three quality referees available?
- Do I have the financial resources to pay for the three-man officiating team?

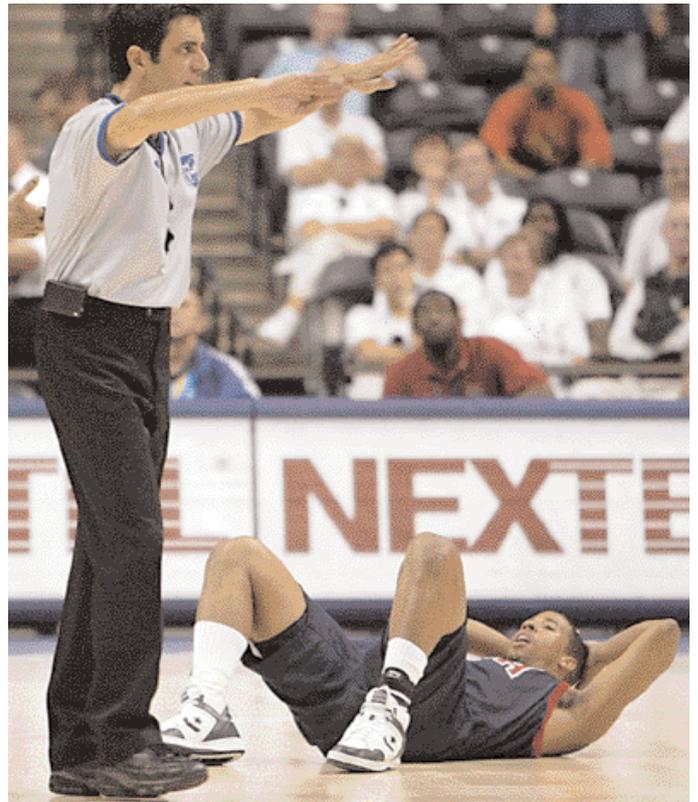
If the answer were "yes" to all three questions, I would say a three-man officiating crew would be beneficial to the game. When the first FIBA World Championship uses three referees ultimately depends on the decision of the FIBA Central Board.

***You have been a referee at the top level for many years, and have had experience with many great players and coaches. Do players and coaches really care about the various FIBA rule changes? How much influence should coaches and players have in possible rule-change decisions?***

There are many rules changes that do not actually involve game play rather are administrative issues or very minor changes. I don't think that the players or coaches really care about these changes. But they do care very much about the big changes, such as the introduction of the 3-point shot, the 24-second clock, and the throw-in from the baseline. All these are changes which were dictated by the game itself, which the players and coaches are an integral part. Therefore, they express their opinions and the Technical Commission is extremely receptive to their comments. Coaches always were and will be members of the Technical Commission. Currently, we have two coaches on the technical commission: Lindsay Gaze from Australia and Dusan Ivkovic from Serbia-Montenegro, who is also President of the World Basketball Coaches Association. Active players are currently not on the Technical Commission, but probably in the future, some kind of advisory body may exist, which could consist of active referees, players, and coaches as an ad hoc working commission or as an advisor to the Technical Commission.

***Can you tell us more about what happens at the referee clinics?***

FIBA clinics are conducted for two groups of referees, those



applying to be FIBA international referees and those who are already FIBA referees. The main focus of the clinics was the Basketball Rules and their interpretation. In addition, the clinics cover referee mechanics and officiating techniques, philosophy of the game, and the psychological aspects of officiating.

***What does a typical program consist of during these clinics?***

The program is very well established and there are several standard features that must be included in every international clinic. All candidates have to undergo three tests: a written exam, a physical fitness test, and a practical officiating test. However, as the game progressed, FIBA developed an improved program utilizing tests, which are under review. In the past, we concentrated much more on the rules, their explanation and interpretation. Now the clinics concentrate more on what a referee cannot learn by himself. One can come to understand the basketball rules, get in good physical condition, and develop good mechanics of officiating by yourself. What you can't learn by yourself are the psychological and mental aspects of the game: how to handle the game, how to be mentally prepared for the game, how to deal with all the conflicts, and how to become and remain mentally strong during a game.

***Will FIBA be producing instructional videos for referees?***

We know that some national federations are producing good instructional videos for referees. I think we have to do it on the FIBA level as well and I think the FIBA Technical Commission will come up with a good proposal for producing a high-quality instructional video that can be used worldwide.

***FIBA established a system of FIBA "referee instructors." Please detail how this works.***

Some years ago FIBA developed a system called "FIBA International Referee Instructors" and "FIBA National Referee Instructors." International Referee Instructors are the instructors used at FIBA clinics and they also assist the FIBA staff in running these events. Fifteen people currently work worldwide in the FIBA clinics. The FIBA National Referee Instructors is

now considered the much more important project. FIBA adopted the philosophy that each country should have one person who is the so-called "extended arm of FIBA."

This person teaches or follows the same educational process within the country as FIBA does on a worldwide level. This project is currently working very well in Europe and in the Americas and in the future, it will be extended to the other continents. The project is currently eight years old, so the FIBA Technical Commission will look at it and revitalize it to meet our present needs.

***Coaches and players sometimes complain that they face different refereeing conditions when they play in their respective national leagues compared to international competitions. Will this project help avoid different philosophies and interpretations?***

The program of the national and international instructors was created for exactly this reason: to have the same philosophy and interpretations in FIBA, as well as in the national federation competitions. We must work together, but we must also accept that each individual is different and every coach and player has his or her own personality, as every referee has his own personality, too. Achieving the same way of thinking is extremely difficult. But even though there are many differences even within national leagues, we still have to get as close as possible to the same philosophy of officiating on a global basis.

***What would you recommend to a young referee if he wants to become a top FIBA international referee?***

First of all, he has to be ready to devote himself totally to basketball. As basketball officiating is getting more and more semi-professional, he must make up his mind as to which direction he would like to go. Being an international referee is demanding work.

As a FIBA referee, it is now almost impossible to reach the top level in your off-court work and also become a top basketball official. When a referee passes his first exam, he must be available to call the games almost anytime and anywhere. He must

talk to his experienced colleagues, be very open to criticism, and have the following goal as a driving force in his life: "I want to be a top referee."

***Does it help a referee to have played the game or isn't this necessary?***

It is not a requirement to have been a former player, but it is certainly a big plus. In our referee clinics, we are trying to get the referees to develop a better understanding of the game, as well as an understanding of the players and the coaches. Having been a player is not a precondition, but if a referee had been a player before, this learning process is certainly much easier because he has a good insight into the game as well as the mentality of the players and coaches.

***In the past, you rarely saw referees talking with players during the game. Now, it's very common. Why has this changed?***

Each referee has to find his own way how to handle the game and to bring it to a "happy ending," without any conflicts, if possible. We recommend a "preventive officiating" philosophy, which may include verbal communication with the players and coaches.

If certain referees feel by communicating verbally with players and coaches that they will have better control of the game or allow the game to run more smoothly, we feel this is fine. But, of course, you have to place some restrictions on this interaction, otherwise the game has the possibility of becoming a roundtable discussion, which would undermine the referee's authority and delay the game.

***Are you happy with quality of FIBA referees?***

Extremely so. There are a number of very good referees in each of the FIBA zones. However, there is always room for improvement and this is the task of the World Technical Commission. Referees have often been blamed by players, coaches, and fans for the poor play of their team. This is inevitable, no matter how good or bad a referee performs.

## THE WORLD TECHNICAL COMMISSION MEETING IN GENEVA

Recommendations to change the 24-second rule, and size of the ball for women were among the topics on the agenda when the FIBA Technical Commission met in Geneva on February 21-22, 2003 at FIBA Headquarters. The goal of the meeting was to review the changes implemented in the Official Basketball Rules 2000; address immediate and necessary changes; prepare the general revision of the Official Basketball Rules to be implemented after the Olympic Games in 2004, and to discuss matters related to the training of FIBA officials.

### Review of Official Basketball Rules 2000

In general, the Official Basketball Rules 2000 have been extremely well received during the 2001 continental competitions and the 2002 World Championships in the United States and China. In particular, the change from the 30-second rule to the 24-second rule has been beneficial to the attractiveness of the game.

### Recommendations for changes as of 2003-2004 season

The Technical Commission proposed the following changes:

- **The 24-second rule:** Whenever a shot is taken and the ball is still in the air while the 24-second signal sounds, the game will no longer be stopped if the ball touches the rim.

- **Timeouts:** Five (5) charged time-outs may be granted to each team during normal playing time, two (2) charged time-outs anytime during the first half (1st and 2nd periods), and three (3) charged time outs any time during the second half (3rd and 4th periods). The time-out rules for overtime are unchanged.
- **Jump balls:** Except for the beginning of the 1st and 2nd half and any overtime, all jump balls are eliminated and managed according to the alternating possession rule.

The proposals will be submitted to the FIBA Central Board for approval in May 2003. If approved they will be implemented as of the start of the 2003-2004 season in September this year.

### Recommendations for changes as of the 2004-2005 season

The Technical Commission proposed the following changes:

- The three-men officiating at main FIBA official competitions after the Olympic Games in Athens, Greece.
- The use of the smaller basketball (size 6) for women's basketball.

If approved by the Central Board, these changes will be included in the new Rule Book to be issued in 2004 and valid as of September 2004.