


FIBA

We Are Basketball



by Paul "Jacky" Loube

TOWER PHILOSOPHY: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

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I remember the very first time I was asked to make a presentation at an IAABO Interpreters Seminar.

My topic that morning was the "Tower Philosophy" and its impact on different levels of basketball. I really didn't know where to begin so I attempted to research the impact that the "Tower Philosophy" had on the game by interviewing coaches and officials.

I was amazed by the many different interpretations of the philosophy and the cavalier approach veterans had when explaining the philosophy to me.

I found that officials working youth basketball while exercising the Tower Philosophy gave a great deal of latitude to players at that level, while those at progressively higher levels gave less leeway.

My concern was that this implementation should have been reversed. Should not younger players first have an understanding of what actions are within the limits of the rules? Is not a travel a travel? In today's basketball, however, young officials begin early to make their own determination as to what is within the "spirit and intent" of the rules.

SOUND RULES FOUNDATION

The more I observe the training of applicants who want to become officials, the

more convinced I become that the concept of advantage-disadvantage should remain a "foreign language" until a sound rules foundation has been realized and processed by the official. Officials should be absolutely certain and well versed on the description and explanation of each foul and violation. A strictly literal approach should be taken.

Only then, armed with an initial literal knowledge of all the elements of the rules, will they be able to make rulings on the realistic philosophy of advantage-disadvantage.

It is true that all the great officials have put the Tower Philosophy into practice but that skill doesn't develop overnight.

A well-officiated game is one wherein the official has adhered to the spirit and intent of the rules as established, in FIBA competition, by the World Technical Commission.

The basic and fundamental responsibility of each official is to ensure the game proceeds with as little interference as possible by the officiating team. This is not to say that an official should not blow the whistle when a rule has been breached. The intention should rather be to avoid calling infractions that do not contravene the spirit and intent of the rules.

DR. JOHN BUNN

Over 50 years ago, Dr. John Bunn, IAABO Interpreter and editor of the NCAA Rules, introduced what was

called the "Oswald Tower Philosophy," named for his friend and fellow IAABO Interpreter, Oswald Tower. The philosophy best represented what the Basketball Rules Committee believed and supported regarding the officiating of a contest. The same philosophy is embraced by FIBA through its World Technical Commission.

This philosophy represents a realistic approach that would guide the judgment of officials in making decisions on all situations where the effect upon the play is the key factor in determining whether or not an infraction has occurred. As an illustration, if A1 sets a legal screen on B1 and B1 generates notable contact with A1, should play stop and a foul be called on B1? What about A2, who executed the play just as the coach designed it, used the legal screen and has broken free for an easy lay-up?

If an official did not take a realistic approach to this particular situation and officiated literally, team A would be penalized and the game would be one of continual fouls and whistle blowing.

A veteran official realizes that contact, not only in the instance cited but in other aspects of the game as well, must be looked at in terms of the effect it creates on the opponent. If there is no apparent disadvantage to an opponent, then realistically speaking, no rules violation has occurred.

The official must use discretion in applying this rule and all rules.



TOWER PHILOSOPHY STATED ANOTHER WAY

The "Tower Philosophy" stated in another manner is as follows: if players are unfairly affected as a result of an infraction of the rules, then the player not in compliance must be penalized, but if there has been no appreciable effect upon the progress of the game, then the game shall not be stopped. The action should be ignored. The official must determine immediately if the contact is incidental. For example, the crowd is screaming for an "over the back foul" on B1 when the ball is hit out of bounds but realistically and practically, no infraction has occurred.

PLAY SITUATIONS

Obviously, this philosophy assumes that the official has a thorough understanding of the game. Officials are chosen to officiate basketball games because game organizers believe those officials have basketball intelligence and an understanding of the mood and climate that prevail in the game today. Better officials exercise mature judgment in each play situation in light of the basic philosophy stated. The FIBA office is consistently bombarded with issues concerning trivial and unimportant details about play situations during the game. Much time and thought is wasted on minor technicalities that are of little or no significance.

At countless rules clinics around the world, there are those who sidetrack the "fundamental" discussions far too often and get involved with emotional debates over situations that might occur once in a lifetime.

In many instances, these very same officials have no faith in the value of judgment, and more times than not, lack basic game management skills. Some would call them "excessive whistle blowers" or "interferers", an affront to the game.

They are the very ones who want a spelled-out and detailed rule for every tiny point, rather than rely on judgment and common sense. At the higher levels of competition, educators and commissioners are looking for the official with an advantage-disadvantage and humanistic approach to officiating. Did the player violate the spirit and intended purpose of the rule?

Below are some guidelines that must

be adhered to by officials, coaches, and players for the game to be well officiated.

OFFICIATING GUIDELINES

A. To provide the most accurate rulings, officials must be as close to the play as possible.

There is a high correlation between accuracy of calls and closeness in making the call.

The experienced official "moves to improve" and hustles to be in position to observe the entire play.

B. Officials are constantly confronted with the adage; "If each official takes care of that official's primary coverage area, there would be no necessity for officials to make rulings outside of their primary."

This statement is misleading. All officials are empowered to make rulings on any play, especially if a partner doesn't see, is straight-lined or too close to the play along the endline, screened, or simply misses the play.

An official who says, "It's not my call" or "I'm not calling one right under the nose of official B" defeats the very spirit and intent of the mechanics and teamwork each crew of officials is expected to embrace.

To be sure, there are prescribed mechanics which lead one official to focus attention on specific phases of the play, more so than the other, but to take a rigid point of view and say, "That part of the floor is my sole responsibility, and that part is yours," leads to a poorly officiated game.

For example, with seconds to play in the fourth period of a tied game, the lead official mistakenly gives the ball to team A for a throw in under team B's basket.

The trail official, thirty feet away, observes that the ball was obviously last touched by A-1 before going out of bounds.

The trail official, although calling out of the primary coverage area, insures the correct team administers the throw in.

C. "The experienced official anticipates the play but not the call." In other words, you may understand

the offensive and defensive schemes designed by the coaches better than the players in the game do, but don't anticipate a foul.

Rule only on the action that has been committed.

D. An officials who does not see the entire play, but only a part of the play, places one of the teams at a disadvantage.

If official does not see the initial act that caused the illegal contact and then blows the whistle on what is frequently defined as the "second foul," the anger of the players and coaches gathers momentum and accelerates to a feverish pitch.

This situation is compounded when the official fails to recognize and become familiar with the "match-ups" in the vicinity of the restricted area.

In order to officiate "Post Play" effectively, the entire play must be observed, especially when the players are establishing positions in (or adjacent to) the restricted area. The official must determine who is the first to establish a position, rather than evaluate solely on the instant of contact. The veteran official sees the total scene and rules accordingly.

E. A frequently-used adage is, "It is not a question of who is right, but rather, what is right." Many officials misunderstand the intent of that phrase.

The World Technical Commission prides itself on acknowledging, "One Rule, One Interpretation," and that is the interpretation that has been approved by the National Federation, NCAA and FIBA Rules Committees under whose rules the game is being played. Much too frequently there is a reluctance on the part of some officials to adapt when a rule or interpretation has been changed. More often than not, veteran high school officials might tell impressionable younger officials, "Well, I don't like that particular mechanics or rule change, and I am going to call it the old way, my way." That official is an obstacle to successful officiating. He/she has the responsibility



ty to officiate the game in accordance with the official rules committee's decisions. There is one interpretation and one interpretation only and that is the one established and articulated by the appropriate rules committee. Whether or not an official likes a rule or mechanic is irrelevant.

- F. A veteran official must possess a knowledge of the rules and mechanics when officiating each and every game. Expressions such as, "We'll only switch on fouls resulting in free throws," creates hesitancy and indecisiveness and is never an ingredient of a competent officiating package. Competent and dedicated officials

exude a floor presence and physical condition that is commensurate with the demands of a basketball game. They have sound judgment and cooperate with fellow officials, exercise an air of calmness and confidence and are consistent with their calls. When an official has these qualifications and uses them within the framework of advantage-disadvantage, the game will be well officiated and well served.

LEVEL OF OFFICIATING

Finally, the quality of the game of basketball will never be any better than its level of officiating. The well-officiated contest will have had the play situations judged on the doctrine and

principles of advantage-disadvantage. Sadly, those who lack the basic understanding of these principles often rely on the Tower Philosophy as an excuse for not making a call.

They miss the reality that the spirit and intent of the Tower Philosophy is the basis for making a sound and consistent judgment, one that is used in deciding to blow the whistle or not to blow the whistle, but never to ignore an obvious infraction.

Was the game played and consistently officiated under the basic philosophy that a ruling should be made if one team gained an advantage (or was placed at a disadvantage) that was not intended within the spirit and intent of the rule? If so, it was a well-officiated game.