



by Bill Mildenhall

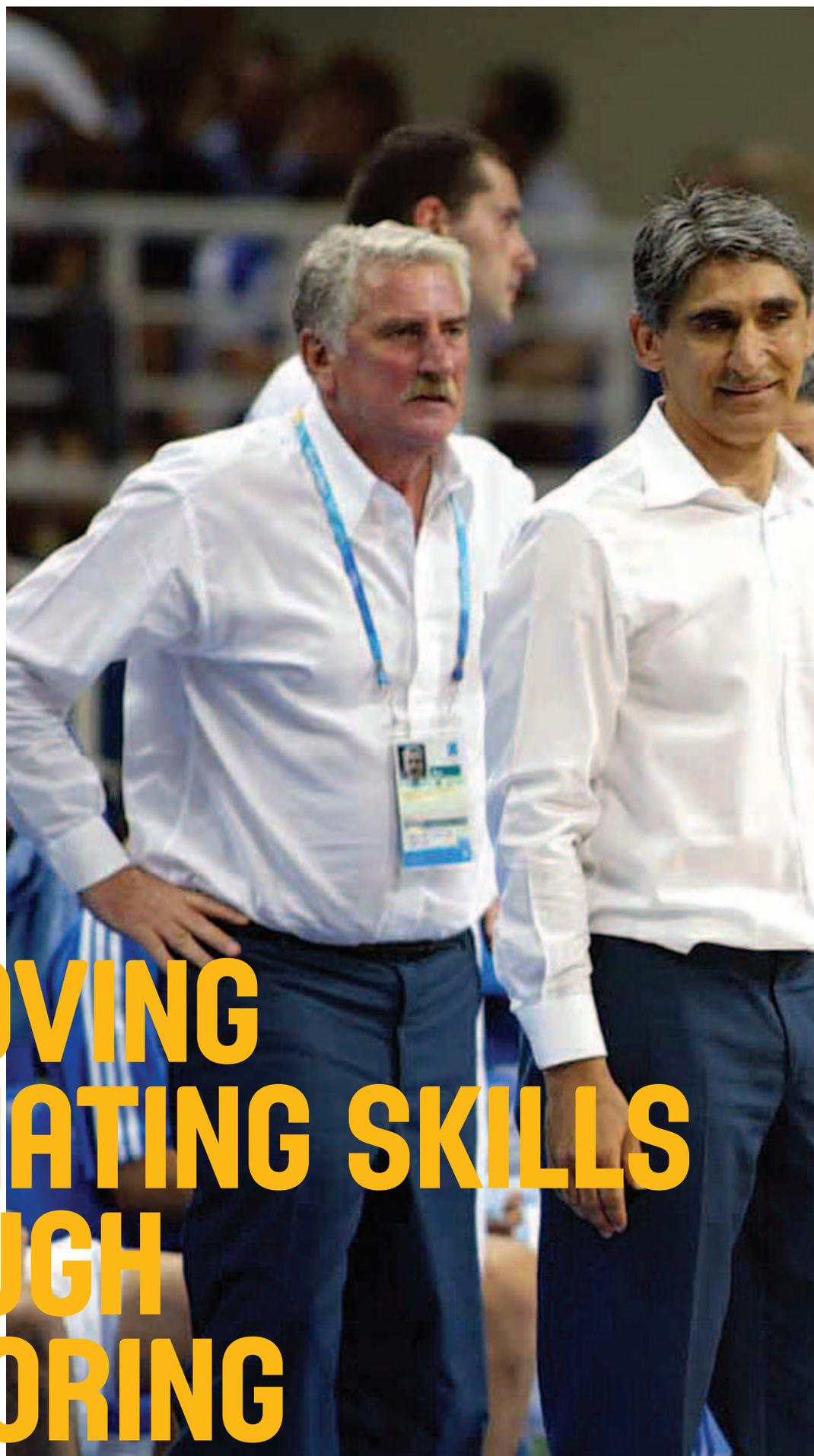
Bill Mildenhall, an Australian FIBA referee since 1978, has been working for the Australian Basketball Federation as the National Referees Manager since 1991. He is responsible for the education, training, and resource production for Australian referees at every level. He has officiated at two Olympics Games, and five FIBA World Championships.

Basketball officiating can be a lifetime career, but the type of career you build is up to you.

I'm sure we all know officials, who have been around for ever and a day, working their low key games, while there are others who have also been around for ages working the elite, more demanding games.

Whatever the standard or level of games, the recreation and enjoyment derived from serving others in a useful capacity is an experience that can never be replaced.

This experience is something that can



IMPROVING OFFICIATING SKILLS THROUGH MENTORING



be enjoyed for a lifetime as long as a referee never ceases trying to improve. If ever an official believes they have learnt everything they need to know, that is the time to retire.

Like in all facets of life, improvement will only occur if the individual acknowledges there is room for improvement. "The perfect game hasn't been worked yet, but that is no reason to stop trying." Officials should never be totally satisfied. They should always be questioning their own judgement and evaluating the way they deal with difficult situations.

The term "the cream will always rise to the top" is very appropriate for basketball officiating, as a referee, who shows exceptional promise, will eventually be noticed. However, it is so imperative that an official is prepared and is willing to seize the opportunity when it arises.

From this basic springboard, referees can work to improve their skills by preparing patiently and persistently in all aspects of officiating, thus giving themselves every opportunity to succeed when the opportunity time comes.

Mentoring is a catchy term that has been bandied around recently as a very effective educational tool to assist officials to improve their skills.

Mentoring is nothing new in sport and in particular to basketball officiating. I am sure we have all turned to an experienced friend or colleague for advice, especially when we are learning something new or are facing a new challenge.

All officials, no matter at what level of officiating, need experienced advisers, who offer support and advice in all aspects of officiating. Successful referees have someone, somewhere, who, somehow cared about their growth and development. They are their respected mentors. Mentoring is a highly effective way for lesser experienced officials to learn the art of officiating. Mentors can bring life to a theoretical concept, usually by referring to first hand practical experiences, and being able to impart this experience to others. "From my experiences the best way to deal with a situation like the one you had in that game is to."

Mentors usually demonstrate practical

officiating skills, act as a sounding board for problems, help identify some weaknesses or just be a source of motivation and a reminder that you are doing a great job.

Mentoring is not only an extremely effective educational tool for inexperienced officials, but it can be just as beneficial for those, who have been around for years. Everyone needs feedback, constructive criticism and someone, who they can turn to for help and support. Mentors for senior officials can easily come from peers, referee evaluator/coaches and from observers who have a good understanding of the craft of officiating.

Mentoring relationships can be formally structured, as in a referee evaluator/coach, or they can grow out of a chance encounter with a like minded official and remain very informal. They can be equally useful for the referee, who is being mentored, and for the referee who is acting as a mentor. Learning is a two way street.

It does not matter what form a mentoring relationship takes, as long as both the official and the mentor see value in the relationship, and it helps them to develop and become better officials.

Establishing a mentor relationship can be achieved by the mentor or by the official, who is to be mentored. Either way, someone must take the first steps to

offer guidance or to seek guidance. It is often advisable for young officials to take the initiative and ask a more experienced official for this advice. Surprisingly, the experienced officials are honoured to be asked and are more than willing to impart their hard learned experiences and advice.

Officiating is a craft that always requires improvement. The challenge for officials is to seek this improvement with the assistance of others. Mentoring is a means to an end. All officials need a mentor and at some stage all officials need to be a mentor.

