



by Ronnie Nunn

REFEREE MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

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I am not a mountain climber, except for some experiences in hiking as a Boy Scout during the early developmental years of my youth. Hiking with all that gear was tough and demanding and it took a long while to reach the top. It cer-

tainly doesn't compare with serious climbing that documentary television shows reveal, but it includes skill and caution to reach the peak. Even for those attempting facsimile mountain climbing in some of the more progressive fitness centers, it proves to be a task as well. They've included this exercise and feat as an additional way to focus and concentrate in reaching a goal.

Refereeing basketball has many of the same principles as those needed to climb mountains. First and foremost, the accomplishment doesn't come quickly.

It requires strength in mind and body, good footing, guidance, safety precautions, and other quality traits. Mostly, it is a step by step process. All of us wish for immediate gratifications in our pursuits in life but, in reality, greater accomplishments come after hard, disciplined and step by step work.

At various levels we all think we're better than we are and think we should be selected ahead of the other official chosen for an assignment. Officiating is also a STEP by STEP process.

Not one official I've ever seen has impacted any division, any conference,



and any international or pro level category with skills that reflected unprecedented value or expertise.

Players do most of the impacting in basketball.

Coaches, when they have talented players, can create an environment that leads to winning results.

Credit should be given to those who mesh talented people into winning teams. Certainly, other coaches can create winning attitudes though the results may not be reflected in the win column.

Nonetheless, the best referees demonstrate their value after being taught, mentored and supervised in their climb. Basic criteria for accomplished officials are skills culminated in play calling, game management techniques, experiences in various venues and diplomatic, yet firm, decision making to name a few. One of the most important criteria is **ACCEPTANCE**. Each of us forgets this immeasurable piece. It's often found in the minds and eyes of onlookers: Coaches, Supervisors, Athletic Directors, General Managers, Owners, Media and Fans. Even when your skills and abilities register high on the proficiency scale, it's not until a certain period of time passes that the official gets his/her proper respect.

Networking has its value on the refereeing climbing system. However, choosing the right training programs will develop your skills and will ultimately increase your opportunities for success. Sometimes the "Old Boy Network" looks like the political way to go but, in the long run your skills and continued experience are your closest allies. Remember that there are others competing against you with "Old Boy Network" ties as well. Secured and polished skills are two of the safest ways to proceed.

Here are some recommendations for successful "Referee Mountain Climbing":

- ▼ **SACRIFICE** your time and money when looking for the best training program. Find the "Harvard" of Officiating camps and attempt to sign up.
- ▼ **LOOK** for the training program that provides growth in you as a person and as an official.

- ▼ **NETWORK** in your local area by finding and asking for opportunities to referee and hone your skills in small venues - i.e. high school summer leagues, year round recreation leagues, etc.

- ▼ **COPY** and /or **MIMIC** quality and successful officials with respect to their signals and court demeanor and call selectivity.

- ▼ **NEVER** attempt to move upward too quickly. You may find yourself overwhelmed with a lack of expertise. Returning to that opportunity can either be distant or never.

- ▼ **BE CAUTIOUS** about presenting yourself in competitions before getting the proper instruction and proper experience. First impressions are lasting.

- ▼ **WORK** towards unifying your performance with your partners rather than being a "know it all".

- ▼ **REMEMBER** to review your game and critique your abilities. You can never be someone else so, build on your strengths and minimize / eliminate your weaknesses.

- ▼ **UNDERSTAND** that refereeing at the higher levels is a process defined by slow and deliberate productivity.

- ▼ **REFRAIN** from anxiety knowing there's always a veteran official ahead of you and he/she has the believability and credibility that will later be yours.

The goal is to be a believable and respected official. Remember to enjoy the climb. There's a great view from the top.

CREW DYNAMICS / PARTNERING

The above title and concept is essentially at the core of successful officiating today. Neither the individual official nor his / her crew can succeed in their respective work without giving strict attention to Crew Dynamics and Partnering.

Crew dynamics include terms like mechanics, primary and secondary coverage, rotations, call selectivity, calling

the obvious, open and closed angles, consistency of calls and game management in naming a few.

Partnering describes the way we interact with our fellow officials. It includes our attitudes, character, demeanor and the manner in which we work together for the common good of the game and ourselves.

There is a strong need for the assimilation of these two components in every officiated game. We are more involved than ever with this thinking since the "Three Person System" of refereeing basketball games has become more broadened. We must refine it and sophisticate it to meet the needs of excellence required of officials today.

The most important and necessary piece in officiating is to get the play called correctly. There's nothing new in this thinking at all. However, the method in which to accomplish this goal needs fine-tuning of the individual and the crew. A more notable and obvious example in getting the call right for officials and the viewing public is often seen when a controversial call is made that requires a conference of the officials. We've all seen these on particular plays like, out of bounds, a score or no score concern, a rule interpretation, etc. The process of coming together must always continue. The results of those conferences reinforce to all that the officials continue to demonstrate, that getting the right call is at the foundation of the integrity of the game.

However, it's clear that officials cannot conference on each and every call. The concern now is, how can we make the right call individually and as a crew, as the game moves as its rapid pace and yet, employ working methodologies and dynamics to reach the lofty goals of making correct calls?

As mentioned above, there are several ways to optimize Crew Dynamics and Partnering that will result in raising the percentage of correct calls and correct no-calls in a game. Let's review the following 10 steps:

1. Understand what's required of you from all three positions on the floor - Trail, Lead and Slot [Center].

2. Understand, interpret and apply the guidelines to the type fouls / violations you'll encounter at each position.
3. Be clear on your primary coverage at each position for yourself and your crew.
4. Recognize secondary coverage and apply yourself to help on those plays that clearly require a whistle.
5. Recognize the Purpose of Rotation. Give meaning to your movement and know that you should rotate in the lead to the ball side [strong side] as often as possible.
6. Remove from your mindset a "sense of urgency" in attempting to judge plays in your primary or secondary that are unclear and inconclusive. **DEPEND ON AND TRUST YOUR PARTNERS FOR HELP!**
7. Reinforce for yourself and the crew that, all plays are either fouls/violations, or they are not. Inconclusive [borderline] plays are not fouls or violations. **THEY ARE INCONCLUSIVE AND THEREFORE CANNOT BE JUDGED AS INFRACTIONS.**
8. **DON'T GUESS!....** Refer to item 6 above.
9. Don't be offended by a whistle in your primary blown by your partner from his/her secondary. He or she should not whistle the play unless it can be clearly validated as a foul or violation.
10. Understand that some calls creep through that are missed by all on the floor at one time or another. It is the nature of the business. However, we must attempt to keep those instances to a bare minimum and "make them the exception rather than the rule".

In summarizing, it's more and more evident to all those who watch our game, play in it, coach it, scrutinize it, and follow it, that there's a continued need and a demand for excellence in our work as officials. We must use the current tools available to us in making us better by securing mentors, using video tape, honing our skills work in productive summer and winter leagues and attending camps that teach, instruct and develop the current edge approaches



that result in bettering our abilities and chances to officiate basketball games at all levels.

Crew Dynamics and Partnering are major keys in the development of those officials who wish to reach higher goals and meet greater successes wherever their officiat-

ing schedule may take them.

Be encouraged to know that education of the issues and individual talent will promote you from within yourself, while the results of your hard work, schooling and skills will promote you to those who will undoubtedly take notice.