



by Alexei Davydov

DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?

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IMPORTANCE OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Learning foreign languages is especially important today. Many people need a foreign language in their work. Moreover, with increasingly more people traveling every year, a foreign language is critical in helping people get around.

The total knowledge of mankind is known to double every seven years. Foreign languages are needed as the main and most efficient means of information exchange for the people of our planet. Even ordinary people often need knowledge of basic foreign languages in order to translate the simple instructions.

IMPORTANCE IN BASKETBALL

Basketball is played in more than 200 countries. The basketball world has entered an era of globalization. Game specialists of different national origins will have to communicate with each other in order to keep the uniformity of the Rules and Regulations. It's not uncommon to have hundreds of players and coaches now playing and working in different countries. They can't feel comfortable unless they are able to communicate with the citizens of their "adopted" country.

This all applies to international referees as well. The life of a sport referee is quite different from the life of coaches or players: the team members always travel in a group. Their club or Federation organizes their trips, team managers fulfill necessary formalities in the airports or railway stations, arrange visas, check-in and checkout in the hotels. Contrast this with the referee, who usually travels alone and is a personal travel agent for himself. As soon as he is notified of a game to be worked, he has to contact and send requested information to organizers, and communicate with colleagues. As soon as he arrives in the new country where the game is to be played, he must pass through passport control, check-in in the hotel, and then order a meal at the hotel.

I have never forgotten the fantastic story I was told about a Hungarian referee in the 1970s who didn't arrive the day before for a European Cup game in the Bulgarian city of Burgas as had been expected. Instead, he came in only three hours before the opening tipoff. He was flying the previous evening in accordance with the referee regulations, but his plane from Sofia had one stopover and the referee left the plane, thinking this was his destination city. Since he didn't speak Bulgarian, or any foreign language for that matter, he couldn't communicate with people around him. The next morning he was finally able to contact the Hungarian embassy, and they were able to arrange a new flight for him to Burgas.

Speaking foreign language(s) helps officials in their work with



other referees, commissioners, supervisors, and organizers during a competition. Moreover, if he stays for a while in another country, the referee must be able to communicate to local people. What I have found is that after learning a new language, I become more tolerant of others. I learn what they think about various issues and I am able to have a discussion with them. Many conflicts in an international basketball game develop because of a lack of understanding. The referee must be able to listen, understand, and talk. It is very important to reply, if an official feels it necessary, with the right words. The explanation made by official, must be short, sharp, and clear. Everyone must understand what he is saying.

ENGLISH

The language of the world today is English. Over 350 million people speak it as a mother tongue. The native speakers of English live in Great Britain, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand. English is one of the official languages in the Irish Republic, Canada, and the South African Republic. As a second language, it is used in the former British and US colonies.

Many countries are integrating into the world community and the problem of learning English for the purpose of communication is especially urgent today. English is the major international language for communication in areas of mass entertainment. It is becoming clear that people can't live without knowledge of English. In my opinion, the present and future of the 21st century is connected by computers, which are also connected with English.

BASKETBALL ENGLISH

Why do all the referees need to know English? There are some reasons for that!

There are five official languages in FIBA, but English is the language used during the Technical Meetings and in cases of disputes.

English is understood by top FIBA referees, but beginners must also speak English fluently. According to the decision of the FIBA World Technical Commission, all candidates for a FIBA Referees license must pass a language test.

English is the language of basketball literature, basketball science, and education. Thousands of books, magazines, and articles in newspapers devoted to our sport are printed in English.

The U.S. continues to be the leading country in basketball generally, and in basketball literature particularly. It is well known that reading books in the original English, listening to American commentators, and communicating with English speaking basketball specialists will help a lot. In addition, a large number of different specialized basketball magazines offer a great assist in understanding modern technique and tactics of the game.

By knowing English, one can learn the history of the game, its culture and spirit, while at the same time can develop a deeper understanding of the philosophy of officiating. In this area, much knowledge can be acquired from American literature. The publications of Dallas Shirley and Edward Steitz, former Rules Interpreters, can be used as a veritable manual for basketball officials. Some rules can be changed, but the game of basketball stays as original and it is very important for referees understand its essence. Officiating in basketball develops with the progress of entire game. With enormous interest I have read books written by two great NBA officials of the past, Richie Powers and Earl Strom.

Learning is a never-ending process. In the 1960s and 1970s, FIBA published a very interesting magazine called "FIBA News." They later published "International Basketball," which was followed in 2003 with "FIBA Assist" technical magazine,



and every edition of this publication contains articles devoted to officiating. World-renowned international referees, commissioners, FIBA referee instructors, and referee supervisors, shared their experiences and views on different aspects of officiating. These materials represented an excellent educational tool for improving knowledge, helping to better understand the spirit and intent of the rules. FIBA video has the same goal. Different instructional materials on officiating can be found on the Internet at the web pages of the FIBA Zone Commissions and other organizations, officially recognized by FIBA. Again, the majority of these materials are in English. Some national federations translate the most important articles, but it always takes time before that happens.

In many clinics for officials we have heard about importance of the pre-game and post-game conference. Such a conference during an international competition will be useful if participants are able to communicate with each other in good English. Usually the discussions last up to twenty minutes and we talk about what we have experienced in other games, remind ourselves of key points in the game, and review various technical aspects of the game. Boards with figures are widely used to diagram certain plays, but conferences can't be held without words. We always must be ready to discuss a game with colleagues, commissioners, and referee supervisors. For future progress, we need something more than just "Good game!" or "O.K." A command of the English language will go a long way to helping referees improve their skills.

In a game, it is often necessary during a timeout to discuss how the game is developing or if there is a need to review a certain situation. The referee needs to communicate to his partners, commissioner, players, or coaches. He may defer some questions to the scorers table or ask for verbal help from his partner if he does not speak English.

In a game of the 2005 FIBA Women's World League, played in May in Havana between club teams from Brazil and Cuba, an official from Senegal, Mrs. Henriette Diouff, called a foul on a defensive player when an opponent with the ball drove to the basket. The offensive player scored the basket, but Ms. Diouff canceled the basket and said two free-throws should be awarded instead. Following complaints from the offensive team (in Spanish and Portuguese) a referee from Venezuela, Roberto Oliveros, took part in the discussion. Because of the lack of understanding English between the referee partners, it became impossible to solve the problem correctly. In an episode such as this one, it was critically important that Ms. Diouff say clearly in English: "After a foul called during the act of shooting, a completely new movement of the offensive player was made." And this had to be clearly understood by Roberto Oliveros.

It is sometimes necessary to give a verbal warning to a player. For example, "Get your hand off" is what most of referees say to defensive players to keep the game clean. "Don't touch the ball after a successful shot by your teammate" is another thing you may need to say.

Very often, a verbal joke during a tough game helps a referee break the tension and provide a good atmosphere for the whole match. "Look. He is standing under the basket for more than three seconds!" says a defensive player to the official. Sometimes it is possible to react like this: "I counted only until 2,85 seconds. Perhaps I counted a little slowly."

"That was a foul? I didn't even touch him!" says the player whistled for a personal foul. "I can't agree," says the referee, "I think it was good call. It might be the only good from me in this game and it really is the correct one". In most international games, such communication should be done in English.

Modern basketball needs referees who speak English even in

national competitions. In Russia, for example, each club of the Men's First Division has foreign players. The champion of Russia - CSKA Moscow - has six players that don't speak Russian at all. In addition, the former coach of CSKA, Dusan Ivkovic is Serbian. His assistant was also a Serbian, Ivan Eremic, while now an Italian, Ettore Messina, is the new coach. English is the official language at the practices of CSKA.

Last month, CSKA asked my father, a former FIBA referee, to meet with the players and talk with them about the new basketball rules of 2004. They wanted him to explain also the difference between FIBA and ULEB Rules (CSKA plays by FIBA Rules in National League and ULEB Rules in Euroleague). My father spoke for two and a half hours with players, answering their questions, and-of course, it was all done in English. Eugeny Pashutin, the CSKA assistant Coach translated everything into Russian for the two players who did not speak English.

The bottom line is this: If the Russian referee needs to talk to some foreign players or coaches during the game of our National Championship, he must be able to do it in clear English.

NOT ONLY ENGLISH

I'm sure that it's not enough for the referee to speak only English. A good referee must know at least one more widely spoken language, like Spanish, or French. It is not a secret that sometimes it is difficult to find a person somewhere in Paris or Bruges, who will be happy to speak English with you. In the airport of Santo Domingo, however the personnel only speak Spanish. Throughout the day, my father only found one person who spoke English.

In European basketball, being able to speak Serbian is a plus because there are many ex-Yugoslav players and coaches working for European Clubs.

I try to learn as many foreign words as possible when I travel around the world. For example, you can always make Koreans smile if you say "Hamsa Kamnida" ("Thanks"). On the other hand, you can make some Lithuanian boy happy when he brings you the ball that rolls away from you on the court by saying "Aciu" ("Thanks"). Speaking some easy words with your colleagues during your trip will be also positive.

I was really surprised during the FIBA Referees Candidates Clinic in Amsterdam (where I got my license), when the Greek FIBA Referees Instructor, Stavros Douvis, said to me and another Russian Referee "Good morning, friend" in clear Russian. We are all human beings and we are all happy to hear our mother tongue, especially when we are far away from home.

It has been said that a person's name is the sweetest sound for him. I can add that a person's native language is as sweet as his name when he is abroad. You may say that German is not a melodious language or that Korean sounds funny to a European. However, if you will say to your German colleague Gotten Morgan ("Good morning") or Anjan' Haseo ("Good morning") to a fellow Korean referee, it's a simple phrase, spoken in their own language, which will make them especially happy.

NOT EASY

Learning a foreign language is not always easy. It is a long and slow process that takes much patience-just like learning how to play basketball or referee a game. One must work hard to learn any foreign language. I have been studying English for many years. By learning the language, I have also learned about the customs and history of many English-speaking countries. That's why I advise friends and basketball officials of my generation to do the same. Find the time and put in the hours of study and you will reap the benefits.