



CONCEPTS OF MODERN OFFICIATING

PART I

by Valentin Lazarov

FIBA referee from 1958 to 1982 and an Honorary Member in 1976, Valentin Lazarov became FIBA Commissioner in 1983. A member of the FIBA Technical Committee since 1976, he received the prestigious Radomir Shaper Award, which is given for outstanding contribution to basketball rules and the game of basketball.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the last few years, we have witnessed an exceptional progression and growing popularity of basketball all over the world.

Contemporary modern basketball is a spectacular and harmonious combination of sheer speed, excellent athletic qualities, aggressive defenses, and brilliant player techniques.

It is quite natural and logical to affirm that the development of the game is closely connected with the development of officiating. Consequently, when one speaks about "modern basketball," it is necessary to mention the term "modern officiating." Modern officiating means the birth of new and additional requirements for the officials.

My intention in this article is to update and systematize the new demands and requirements for game officials, since the referees are the people who are actively involved in the application of the latest tendencies in the development of the game on the court.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE OFFICIALS

In modern basketball, the level of the official's performance is a complex

function of numerous direct or indirect factors. This could be illustrated with the following pseudo-mathematical formula:
 $Q = (A + B + C + D + E + F + G + H) \times X \times Y \times Z.$

Where:

- Q = Level or quality of performance of the Official
- A = Physical fitness
- B = Correct criteria for physical contacts
- C = Knowledge of the psychology of players, coaches, fans
- D = Knowledge of the rules and interpretations
- E = Knowledge of offensive and defensive tactics
- F = Teamwork
- G = Mechanics of Officiating
- H = Knowledge of the work of the table officials
- X = Coefficient for talent and personality
- Y = Coefficient for ambition, strong will, and courage
- Z = Coefficient for personal chance

Of course, this formula is only an illustration and its aim is to show in which areas and on which elements the efforts of young and ambitious referees should be concentrated in order to achieve perfection in their performance on their way to becoming TOP OFFICIALS.

The formula could also be very useful for highlighting the main topics in the agenda for clinics for candidates for FIBA referees.



IMPORTANT REMARK

In the following material, I am presenting only a brief summary for each factor, underlining only the major points. The reason for that is that each factor represents a separate lecture lasting between 1 and 4 hours, including diagrams and examples from practice.

A. PHYSICAL FITNESS

The referee must follow the action on the



court as closely as possible and be in an optimal position in order to make accurate judgements. There is a high correlation between accuracy of calls and optimal position of the official. This means that a top official must be as fast as-and in some situations even faster-the players. He must be in top physical condition. Very often it's the insufficient mobility of the officials that is the reason for some calls. Being far away from the action, the

official cannot observe directly when a foul is committed, but they presume that in similar situations fouls are nearly always committed, so they whistle the play as a foul. Or, with today's players having excellent technique, a call by presumption deprives a talented player of a brilliant maneuver and a legitimate play in the last second. The position of the official far from the

action also has a psychological effect on the reaction of players, coaches, and fans. A 100% correct decision that is called far away from the place of the foul or the out-of-bounds situation almost always provokes undesirable reactions.

The dynamic action of the players and the speed at which the ball can change hands requires constant concentration by the officials during the whole game.



On the other hand, the capacity for an official to concentrate decreases sharply once he becomes physically fatigued. The same is also valid for the speed of reaction of the referee, i.e. the speed of his motor behaviour.

This process (showed in the diagram below), however, could be considerably slowed down by some factors, of which the most important is physical fatigue.

Finally, it would be useful to underline the stimulating role of the pre-game warm-up (15 to 20 minutes), not only for maintaining the consistent physiological condition of the official throughout the competition, but also for reducing the frequency and severity of muscle injuries.

CONCLUSION

Top physical fitness is not theoretical in basketball officiating, but an absolute necessity. It was not as important in the

past when the game was less dynamic and aggressive. Nowadays, however, the officials' top physical condition has a fundamental influence on their performance on the court.

B. CORRECT CRITERIA FOR PHYSICAL CONTACTS

The dynamic and attractive magnetism of modern basketball does not allow officials to interrupt the game too often, since for both participants and fans an interesting game is an unbroken stream of spectacular actions. The popularity of the game and its charm strongly depends on the official's criteria for personal contact.

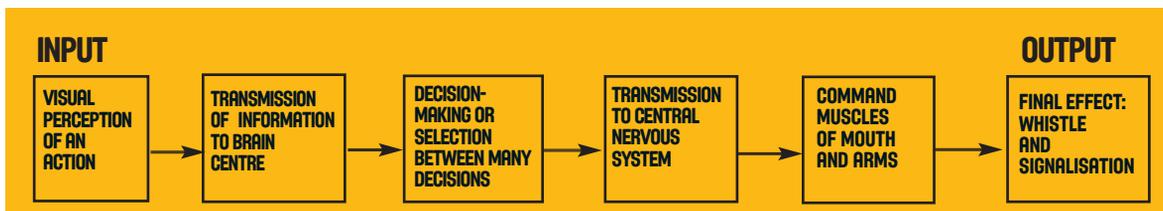
Statistics affirm that in contemporary basketball the number of physical contacts have doubled and even tripled in some instances. Almost every two to three seconds of the game, we witness

one or more physical incidents of physical contact between opponents. However, only 10% to 15% of them are sanctioned as personal fouls by the officials. That means that the referee's approach to this selection must be rather Realistic than Literal.

The art and the style of the official dealing with the contact situations is generally the most criticized area of the officiating process (around 80%).

It is practically impossible to stop the game at each personal contact since it will kill the attractive character of the game. Therefore, on the one hand we must try as much as possible not to disturb the flow of the game and on the other we must follow strictly the rules and keep constant control of the game, as we do not want basketball game to become similar to a rugby game.

All in all, a strict distinction should be drawn between incidental contacts, which are a product of the normal course of the game, and contacts that degenerate into person-



al fouls. What we understand by "Officiating in the spirit of the game" is to apply this quite difficult distinction successfully on the court.

A lot in this area depends on the individual TALENT of the official and his correct FEELING for realistic approach. This also is the boundary between the TOP and the STANDARD referee.

Principle of Advantage / Disadvantage

On the basis of all above-mentioned facts, the classic advantage / disadvantage principle was created. It advises the officials to consider as personal fouls all physical contacts which:

- ▼ Give an advantage to the player who committed them or to his team.
- ▼ Cause a disadvantage for the opponent's player or team.

I always add this very important point:

- ▼ Become systematic and risk leading to an escalation of roughness or losing

control of the game.

Trying to apply this principle on the court, the Officials must be aware it is fully legalized by FIBA Rules which state: "The Officials should not seek to interrupt the flow of the game unnecessarily in order to penalize personal contact that is incidental and which does not give to the player responsible an advantage nor place his opponent at a disadvantage..."

Areas of Application

- ▼ Attractive combinations.
- ▼ Direct drive towards the opponent's basket.
- ▼ Fast breaks.
- ▼ Act of shooting.
- ▼ Passing the ball.
- ▼ Dribbling the ball.
- ▼ Loss of balance near boundary or center lines.
- ▼ Fight for position on the floor.
- ▼ Loose ball on the floor.
- ▼ Screens.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge of the spirit of the advantage/disadvantage principle and the mature and competent judgment of the Official in each individual contact situation should be the KEY factor in deciding whether the physical contact should or should not be considered as a personal foul (see the chart).

The final decision: "Foul or no foul" should be based on the answers to four basic questions:

1. What happened?
2. Who is involved?
3. Why did it happen or who was responsible?
4. WILL THIS AFFECT THE GAME?

THE SECOND PART OF THE ARTICLE WILL BE PUBLISHED ON THE ISSUE N. 24 - JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2007.

