



CONCEPTS OF MODERN OFFICIATING

PART II

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C. KNOWLEDGE OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLAYERS, COACHES, AND FANS

The basis of the spectacular and attractive basketball game is the quadrangle: players, coaches, officials, and fans. The relations between these four factors are of critical importance for the smooth running of a game. These four groups should exist together with reciprocal tolerance and respect under the slogan: "NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BASKETBALL GAME!"

Even for the top officials, it is almost impossible to officiate successfully without minimum cooperation from the coaches and players.

Nowadays, the basketball game has become more dynamic, more athletic, and more aggressive than in the past. The influence of the financial factor has also increased tremendously. Sponsors are spending large sums for basketball and they are expecting positive results from their teams.

This is one of the reasons why players try to give their best in their performance on

the court. Together with their coaches, they are often overexcited and hyper-strained like charges of dynamite. Any supposedly wrong decision made by an official can lead to an outburst and quickly provoke a conflict situation.

From here stems the necessity of sound psychological knowledge by the model referee. In a field in which only referees endowed by nature can succeed, the study of the voice, the movements, the gaze, the posture, the signalization, the general behavior, and the human approach are all part of the psychological education.

The official is an educator and a pedagogue, as compared to a merciless combination of judge and executioner. His whistle is a tool and not a weapon! He must act as a "Hand of steel in a velvet glove." A friendly smile, a soft gesture, or a public warning applied at the right moment is often more effective than technical or disqualifying fouls. A warm, calm, and humane attitude is both disarming and relaxing!

It is a well-known fact that some average referees are more wanted and respected than their more talented fellows. I always remember what my teacher, the late FIBA President Robert Busnel, used to say: "I have many times seen a referee leave the court at the end of a closely contested game, who is congratulated by coaches and players. His skill at applying psychological tricks reached such height, that it hid his technical imperfections on the court."



D. KNOWLEDGE OF RULES, INTERPRETATIONS, POINTS OF EMPHASIS

The basketball game has become so dynamic that an official must react in a split second and make the correct decision in a nearly automatic way. Practically, he has no time to remember details of this or that rule. His fast and timely reaction, however, is based mainly on his continuous and analytical study of the rules and their interpretations, the periodic amendments, as well as points of emphasis and instructions presented by the World Technical Commission of FIBA.

Unfortunately, very often the method and style of the lecturers teaching the rules in



the clinics are not on a satisfactory level. Young officials must be informed about the history of the major rules and the purpose for their origin. Instead, much time and thought is wasted in discussing theoretical play situations that might or might not happen but once in a century!

Consequently, much more important subjects about the educational spirit of each rule are left aside, such as the creative ways of the rules' application on the court or the admissible limits of tolerance. As a result, officials currently named "whistle blowers" are trying to replace sound judgment with tiny details and lack a realistic approach while officiating the game.

E. KNOWLEDGE OF TACTICS IN OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

It is a key requirement for a top official to have the ability to respond differently and to adapt his positioning on the court in accordance to the character of the game and the different tactics applied by the teams. He must be able to notice changes in the tactics at any moment or the surfacing of new elements in the game. Consequently, he has to know the areas where critical situations may appear. However, all this is possible only if the official has sound knowledge and appreciation of current tactics and techniques in offense and defense, which are applied by the players on the court. For example, to correctly officiate the

numerous screens during the game, the official must be completely familiar with the technique of screening and the tactic based on the screen.

This is the reason why some FIBA National Federations have already approved as a mandatory obligation for new officials to pass some tests for coaches and get acquainted with the basic elements in this area.

F. TEAMWORK WITH PARTNER(S) AND COMMISSIONER

In contemporary basketball, a close cooperation (i.e. excellent teamwork between official-partner, official-commissioner, and official-table officials) is of first importance.

One must have faith and confidence in his fellow official(s). No one is supposed to dominate since officials must work as a real team. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance from each other any time you are blocked on a play or you are screened-out!

Sometimes, we witness situations of disagreement or double whistling in the officials' decisions. Very often, this could be solved after visual contact, discreet signals, or a very concise consultation (5 to 6 seconds) between the officials, but this should always be at a distance away from players and coaches. During such consultations, mutual confidence and spirit of friendly cooperation are strongly advised and recommended.

Long discussions and explanations between officials while surrounded by players and coaches very often creates critical situations. A brief, but thorough pre-game conference will assist the referees in producing a good team performance.

Young referees should also be briefly advised in the area of the so-called moral code of the officials' partnership on the court, by using some specific examples of what to avoid:

- ▼ Official X calls a foul. While signaling to the table, a player makes some insulting gestures behind his back. His partner(s) is a silent witness, but does not intervene because the unsportsmanlike behavior is not addressed directly to him.
- ▼ Official X calls a foul. While signaling the table, a player contacts the free official insulting his partner. His reaction is: "It was his decision. I have nothing to do with this call."
- ▼ During some critical moments of a tough game, official X hides and does not react to some clear infractions in his vicinity, even though he is in excellent position, thus leaving his partner to take the "unpopular calls."
- ▼ During an interval of play or after the game, official X criticizes some calls of his partner in the presence of players, coaches, or fans.
- ▼ During a game, official X, sitting as spectator between fans, openly criticizes the decisions of his colleagues on the court.

Some officials underestimate the importance of good cooperation with the commissioner. Predetermined during the pre-game conference, discreet signals between officials and commissioners



could be applied successfully in some specific situations during the game. For example, such cases can occur when a basket is scored or a foul is called almost simultaneously with the end signal, and the officials are not quite sure if the action was before or after the signal.

H. KNOWLEDGE IN MECHANICS OF OFFICIATING

Recently, more and more attention has been paid to the improved and more competent application of mechanics on the court.

The speed at which the players move individually or in groups creates serious problems for the official's visual perception of the game and total court coverage. Therefore, it is quite impossible to expect from one official that he be able to observe the actions of all ten players and the ball on the court.

The new mechanics for two-and three-men officiating is a practical system created as a working method to eliminate the

problems of the officials in this area, prescribing one official to focus his attention on specific phases of the play more so than others. The key factors of mechanics are:

- ▼ Move to the right spot.
- ▼ Be placed in an optimal way in order to see.
- ▼ Know what to look at or what to observe.

It is strongly recommended that all officials follow and apply all the prescriptions of the official FIBA Mechanics on the court. However, to take a dogmatic position and declare that "This part of the floor is my sole responsibility and that is yours" leads to very poor teamwork. The basic principle for an official should be to make decisions on ANY PLAY if he is absolutely sure in his judgment and if his colleague does not make a call because of lack of courage, lack of concentration, or simply because he happens to be screened out. A comment



such as "It wasn't my call" defeats the very spirit and intent of the Mechanics. Unfortunately, some self-proclaimed lecturers and "experts" are trying to deify this system by transforming it to the most important topic in some Clinics, underestimating the leading role of subjects as: "Feeling for the game," "Criteria for physical contacts," and "Relations between officials, coaches, and players." Much time and thought is wasted on digging up invented hyper-technicalities that are of little or no significance. Thus, Official-Robots are created, who are more concerned about being in "optimal position" and not trespassing the border of their zone than in making a sound and mature judgment. I was shocked by the officiating in some games in a recent continental championship. Imitating some pseudo-evaluators, I could ironically say: "In this game the Officials demonstrated brilliant Mechanics but with some lousy calls they ruined the efforts of coaches and players throughout the year."

H. KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORK OF THE TABLE OFFICIALS

Normally, this topic is almost never listed in the programs of clinics for officials and such an underestimation has no justification! Obviously, some experts forget that a very small omission of the scorer's table can ruin the effect of an excellent officiating during the whole game! Consequently, that is the reason why a top official should have a sound knowledge of the duties of the table officials. Problems arise very often during the game are connected to the table and they have to be solved. During their first year, some countries use their new referees to work mainly as table officials. Special attention should be also paid to the teamwork between officials and table officials.

"X" - COEFFICIENT FOR TALENT AND PERSONALITY

To be a PERSONALITY means that, because of your talent, your behavior,

your integrity, and your social status you are respected, trusted, and accepted by players, coaches, and even fans on such a level that some of your poor calls are not criticized or attacked by any of them. For example, when it comes to top players, Michael Jordan presented such a personality. For officials, accepted as personalities, officiating is much easier because they meet understanding and collaboration from players and coaches. Therefore, try to become a Michael Jordan among the referees, but never forget that this is a long and difficult process based on hard work, natural qualities, and serious ambition for perfection.

"Y" - COEFFICIENT FOR AMBITION, STRONG WILL, AND COURAGE

The worst "crime" that can occur on the court is when a referee is totally aware of an illegal action of a player, but does not have the necessary courage to call it, especially in a decisive moment. If one wants to be respected, one must be tough in tough situations and always be ready to take personal responsibility for a tough call. Of course, hard work and ambition will not alone assure one success, but who is determined to succeed must sacrifice many pleasures of life and be willing to start at the bottom of the ladder.

"MANY ARE CALLED, BUT RELATIVELY FEW EVER REACH GREAT HEIGHTS."

"Z" - COEFFICIENT FOR PERSONAL CHANCE

It is a fact that some referees are "born with a silver spoon in their mouth" and are luckier than others. For such exceptions the long way to the top takes less time and is much easier.

FINAL CONCLUSION

This article is addressed mainly to:

- ▼ Young and progressing officials.
- ▼ Candidates or recently incubated FIBA referees.
- ▼ Lecturers at clinics.

My aim was to prove that in order to meet the new requirements of contemporary basketball, a referee must exercise regularly and act in a professional manner, just like the players.

"HE WHO DOES NOT GO FORWARD GOES BACKWARDS!"

We have to admit it is hard, very difficult, and sometimes painful, but all efforts are necessary if the official deeply loves basketball and if he is anxious to stimulate and not restrain the progressive development of the game through his officiating.