

The "F" Words of Officiating

By Gary Whelchel on June 23, 2015

Officials

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The proverbial "F" bomb.

Many times it is the igniter that fuels an ejection, precipitates a fight, or raises the ire of an official.

However, the officiating avocation is loaded with "F" words. Let's wander down the road of "F" words we deal with as officials.

FUNDAMENTALS: In the beginning, we all learn the fundamentals of the trade – the building blocks of officiating. It is the Foundation (another "F" word) on which officials build to advance and get better. They learn basic positioning, the simple rules first, how to look and dress, and straightforward concepts dealing with the game. It is from this basic beginning that officials add and build upon their expertise, and get better. And, many times at the end of the day, it is the foundation of fundamentals that they grasped early on that rescues them from a disaster later in their careers. From the mouth of Vince Lombardi; "Excellence is achieved by the mastery of the fundamentals."

FOCUS: Tune in; don't tune out. Staying focused in some contests can be a challenge even for the most prepared and fundamentally sound official. The softball blowout or the lopsided basketball game can become difficult to officiate due to boredom and lack of excitement. However, these are the types of games that need officials' focus the most. Often, it is in these contests that "weird" situations emerge and tempers escalate.

Focusing can also relate to an overall officiating career through setting goals and working toward achieving those goals. Have a destination in mind and journey towards that destination with a clear focus on how to get there. "If you are unhappy with your officiating journey because you are constantly focusing on things you can't change, start focusing on things you can change - like yourself." (Sonya Parker)

FOLLOWING: In a way, sports officials are followers, as in following the rules and the mechanics of the sport and of the local association. Additionally, following established policies and procedures that an association may have in place are designed for a smoother flow of management of the association.

FEEL: Got game? Got game feel? Can you sense the direction the game is headed? Do you know when to pass on a call, or when to make a game changer? Are tensions building? Should the game be tightened up? Should you approach the coach regarding a player or a call? This is the proverbial "it" factor. And in reality, either you have it or you don't.

FRATERNIZING: Simple - DON'T! You may think that being seen with a coach or player is harmless. You may think that laughing and joking with one coach and not the other prior to a game is innocuous. You may think that putting your arm around a player's shoulders to explain a simple rule can't hurt. Unfortunately, perception becomes reality. Your actions are seen and read within the context of the person observing your actions.

FAMILIARITY: This relates to fraternizing, but goes a bit deeper in relationship. Maybe you need to inform your assignor that you have seen a coach or team way too much this season and need to be re-assigned. When everyone associated with a team and the school refers to you by first name, maybe it is time to assess your familiarity with that entity.

FAIRNESS: The basis of what officials do all day, every day.

FRUSTRATION: Spending today complaining about yesterday won't make tomorrow any better. What is it that frustrates us most in this avocation? Game assignments, or lack of? Unreasonable participants or unruly fans? Don't limit your challenges, challenge your limits.

FUN: Amid the turmoil and issues that may arise in an athletic contest, officials have been charged to adjudicate, they must never lose sight of the fun factor. Enjoy yourself and enjoy this avocation called the officiating experience.

(F)PHILOSOPHY: Technically, only phonetically an "F" sounding word, but one that plays a large role in molding officials and how they see the games they officiate, the rules they enforce, and the management they implement.

Officials should develop a solid philosophy of officiating early in their careers, and be flexible enough to massage it and adjust it as they take this ride through an officiating career.

According to a National Association of Sports Officials report, "officiating philosophy is described as who we are and how we handle game situations. Remember, we have the responsibility to be the guardians of the game. This is an awesome and important responsibility that we need to take seriously. The game belongs to the players. Remember no matter what the age of the players, it's their game, not ours."