

Official Communication Checklist

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Following are some points to keep in mind when officiating sports at any level. All officials must have a good working knowledge of the rules and mechanics. In addition to this, very successful officials have an understanding of the human relations aspect of their jobs.

BE COMPETITIVE - The players give maximum effort, so should officials. Tell yourself, "I'm not going to let this game get away from me. I am better than that." You are hired to make the calls that control the game. Make them!

DON'T BE A TOUGH GUY - If a coach is on your back but not enough to warrant a penalty, stay away from him (or her). This is especially true during time-outs. Standing near an unhappy coach will only lead to further tensions. Some officials develop irritating characteristics. Don't be one of them.

GET INTO THE FLOW OF THE GAME - Each game is different. Good officials can feel the differences. Concentrate on the reactions of the players. Take note of changes in the tempo of the game. A ragged game requires for a different style of officiating from a smooth one.

DON'T BARK - If you don't like to be shouted at, don't shout at someone else. Be firm but with a normal relaxed voice. This technique will do wonders in helping you to reduce pressure. Shouting indicates a loss of control – not only of one's self, but also of the game.

SHOW CONFIDENCE - Cockiness has absolutely no place in officiating. You want to exude confidence. Your presence should command respect from the participants. As in any walk of life, appearance, manner and voice determine how you are accepted. Try to present the proper image.

FORGET THE FANS - As a group, fans usually exhibit three characteristics: ignorance of the rules, highly emotional partisanship and delight in antagonizing the officials. Accepting this fact will help you ignore the fans, unless they interrupt the game or stand in the way of you doing your job.

ANSWER REASONABLE QUESTIONS - Treat coaches and players in a courteous way. If they ask you a question reasonably, answer them in a polite way. If they get your ear by saying "Hey ref, I want to ask you something", and then start telling you, interrupt and remind them of the reason for the discussion. Be firm, but relaxed.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WISELY - Never threaten a coach or player. This will only put them on the defensive. More importantly, you will have placed yourself on the spot. If you feel a situation is serious enough to warrant a threat, then it is serious enough to penalize, without invoking a threat. Obviously some things you say may be in the form of a threat, but using the proper words can make it subtle.

STAY COOL - Your purpose is to establish a calm environment for the game. Nervous or edgy officials are easily spotted by fans, coaches and players alike. Avidly chewing gum, pacing around, or displaying a wide range of emotions prior to or during a game will serve to make you seem vulnerable to the pressure.

The ability to “handle” players and coaches is crucial to becoming a complete official. To “handle” players and coaches is, in reality, being able to effectively communicate with them in a situation of natural conflict. Good officials are game managers and good officiating facilitates the event, ensuring that the outcome is dependent upon the skills and tactics of the players.

Managers deal with people and the key to their success is the ability to effectively communicate with others. This communication comes in both verbal and nonverbal forms. Verbal communications include the spoken word and the volume. What you say as an official is vitally important by the choice of words you use or do not use. Your choice of words could inflame a situation or be a settling influence. Likewise, the volume of your words, whether loud or soft, often indicates how much you are in control of your own emotions.

Sometimes just as important as verbal communication is the nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication includes body language (posture, physical appearance, gestures, and facial expressions), spatial relationships (space between officials and players/coaches) and paralanguage (how you say things). Good communicators in any walk of life are ones that manage themselves and those with whom they are communicating. They demonstrate mutual respect from a professional relationship while understanding each other’s responsibilities. Being a “buddy” or “enemy” personalizes a relationship that is unhealthy in this arena of natural conflict. You are a “buddy” to coaches or players until a call goes against them and then you become their enemy.

- Be a good listener. Let coaches have their say. Acknowledge a coach’s or player’s concern.
- Do not raise your voice and avoid the use of threatening hand or arm gestures.
- To get respect from players and coaches show them the same respect you deserve. Try to understand their motivation.
- If you make a mistake, admit it.
- Do not always insist on having the last word in a discussion or disagreement.

You as an official must be under control when everything around you may be chaotic. Above all else be professional and approachable.