

2015 Pre-Season Bulletin 4

Working with Coaches

Much of our pre-season preparation involves new rules and mechanics. One area that is often overlooked is our people and communication skills...how to resolve conflict and deal with players, coaches and game administrators under tense and difficult circumstances. Below, I've shared some ideas on how officials and coaches can eliminate or resolve potential problems.

Make eye contact. A coach wants to be assured that he has your attention. Don't act distracted. Never call coaches by their first names. They'll feel most comfortable, particularly in front of their players, simply by being called "coach." Show respect to get respect. That means using rule book language, keeping communication brief, adopting a neutral tone and avoiding any personal remarks. Stick to the issue(s) at hand in a straightforward way.

Ask coaches to deal with problem players. Be sure to identify the problem in explicit terms, without making the player to be an evil person. Sometimes it's hard to do, but it can be accomplished with a careful choice of language.

Remain calm under all circumstances. If a coach moves toward you to "get in your face," pivot sideways so that you are shoulder-to-shoulder. It is hard for someone to speak in an aggressive, confrontational way when the proximity between parties is side by side. Let coaches have their say, many times all they want to do is vent. When a coach approaches to protest or argue, adopt an instant "listening mode" and let the aggrieved individual finish his remarks. Don't interrupt.

Use non-confrontational body language. To be aware of body posture, facial expression, head tilt and arm position, one must say, "I am going to appear receptive and contemplative. I can think best and measure my words that way. I am determined to not escalate the problem." If you make a mistake, admit it. A simple apology is sufficient; do not elaborate or rationalize or make excuses. When a coach raises his/her voice, lower yours. A soft voice has a way of triggering a reciprocal soft reply.

Get both coaches together when necessary. Sometimes there is a need to reach uniform agreement with a joint consultation. Weather problems, and the shortening of a period or periods are examples.

Support your fellow officials. Never betray partners by showing that you doubt their judgment. Indicate faith in someone else's decision by saying your crewmate may have had a better view or a more favorable angle than the calling official.

Acknowledge the coach by saying, "I hear what you're saying," "I understand," or "I see what you mean." Are all equally effective. If the next sensible step is to confer with a crewmate, make that next move firmly.

Give praise when appropriate and promote sportsmanship. When a coach makes a positive statement about the opponents or towards an official, be sure to acknowledge it. Sometimes a smile and nod of the head are enough.

Determine from where the coach is coming. Put yourself in their shoes just as you would in trying to understand a player's viewpoint. That means having some insight about a coach's motivation and overall goal. Sometimes how the coach will be viewed in the eyes of his players and team supporters is the primary stimulus for good behavior.

Keep your ego under control. Often a mere glance will carry a significant message, whether it's negative or positive, whether it is meant to curtail dialogue or to encourage it. A quizzical expression can signal a desire for additional input, whereas a frown may denote closure.

Permit the coach to disengage. Recognize through facial expression, body language when it is time to cease a dialogue. Nothing is gained by insisting on the last word. Don't use your hands when talking to a coach. Your gestures will reveal more than you'll want to convey.

Remember that a coach's job depends on many factors and doing your best is one of them. He prepares hard for many hours, so officials should work hard in being consistent and fair. Help the coach be a better coach by allowing him to coach and not be overly concerned with the officiating. Listen to him, answer his questions, and provide him the respect that he deserves within the spirit and intent of the rules and you will reduce his anxieties about the one aspect of the game he cannot control and should not be focused on—the officiating.

Refereeing a game is not brain surgery, but managing people in a highly emotional environment takes constant awareness and skills. The most successful officials have these skills.

Encroachment-Free Kicks

Question (from a coach): After my kicker places the ball on the tee in the center of the field for a kickoff, there are four teammates to the left side of the kicker and six teammates to the right side of the kicker. While the kicker is running towards the ball, one player who was lined up to the left side of the kicker runs to the right side of the kicker and a) gets back to the left side of the kicker prior to the ball being kicked, or b) does not get back to the left side of the kicker prior to the ball being kicked. Is this legal? All players are within 5-yards of the ball at all times.

Answer: In a) it is not a foul, legal play. For 2015, jeopardy for not having at least four players on each side of the kicker attaches when the ball is kicked. In b) a dead ball foul for encroachment, 5-yard penalty, re-kick. Rules 6-1-3, 6-1-4 New, 6-1 Penalty.

Training Video

This week's training video shows an illegal block by an offensive player who is not on the line of scrimmage at the snap. The block also does not occur in the free blocking zone. Wing officials must be alert for these types of blocks; depending on the formation, this blocker may be your key. This play can be viewed by clicking on the following link; **remember, you must be signed in to Arbiter/the Central Hub to access the link.**

<http://osafootball.arbitersports.com/Front/105991/Video/player/3388/5894>

For the 2015 season, besides video clips that will be voiced-over and telestrated, Brad and I will also be posting links to training videos that we believe all officials should watch. More information on these will be included in the weekly SRI Bulletins.