

Qualities Of A Good Official

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Although officiating involves technical knowledge, there is definitely an art to being an effective referee. The artistry displayed by an official in the competitive arena depends, in large part, on his or her personal qualities. You might assume that these important officiating attributes have been identified and widely used as the criteria in evaluating officials. But if 100 different sports officiating experts submitted their own lists and rankings of essential qualities for an official you could expect 100 different listings and dissimilar rankings. We will not attempt to rank-order the qualities of a competent official nor try to provide an exhaustive list of the essentials.

Here we summarized the characteristics top officials have in common.

- 1) Confidence
- 2) Consistency
- 3) Decisiveness
- 4) Enjoyment/Motivation
- 5) Integrity
- 6) Judgment
- 7) Poise
- 8) Rapport

CONFIDENCE

Competent officials have confidence in themselves and their abilities. This self-confidence transcends any particular game or situation. Confident officials remain in control during adversity. That doesn't mean that they experienced no feelings of self doubt, but they don't lose confidence in themselves just because they made a bad call or experienced other setbacks. Every official has games that he or she would rather forget, but confident officials don't let that undermine their genuine belief that they are good at what they do.

CONSISTENCY

Players and coaches expect officials to be consistent. Their decisions should be the same in identical or similar circumstances, and they should apply the rules equally to both opponents. Inconsistency in officiating is frequently criticized by and/or upsetting to coaches and players. Experience has shown that a lack of consistency creates these and other problems:

Players are always guessing what is allowed and what is not.

Coaches become frustrated and less trusting of officials competence.

Officials try to "even up" calls, thereby punishing a team for previous officiating errors.

Players simply don't know what to expect when an official vacillates in decision making. If an official ignores a foul one time but then calls a foul for the same behavior later in the game, athletes and coaches become confused. This uncertainty often results in anxiety, frustration, anger, and eventually some negative physical behavior by those who perceive they are being cheated.

DECISIVENESS

An official's decisions should occur simultaneously with the action observed, or as soon thereafter as possible. This does not mean that you should make all calls without hesitation. You might need to take a slight pause to comprehend what you have seen. But too long of a pause gives the athletes and coaches the impression of uncertainty, and they are much more likely to question a delayed call. Judgment calls are not subject to formal protest. Therefore, you can often avoid controversy by making quick and decisive rulings. The closer the decision, the more important decisiveness becomes.

ENJOYMENT/MOTIVATION

Top officials enjoy their job immensely. This sense of enjoyment and fun is strongly tied to a positive mental attitude and feelings of energy. Good officiating requires a lot of hard work, dedication, and practice. All this leads to a high level of motivation, which is closely tied to enjoyment.

INTEGRITY

Integrity refers to calling a game in an unbiased, honest manner, regardless of the reactions of players, coaches and spectators; the time remaining; the score; previous calls; or any other potential sources of influence. The best safeguard for maintaining your integrity is couched in the adage, "Call 'em as you see 'em." It is extremely important to protect your integrity both on and off the court. Although you probably are aware of your responsibilities while officiating, you should be equally concerned about maintaining others respect for your integrity off the court.

JUDGEMENT

Good judgment begins with a thorough and complete understanding of the rules and regulations governing a particular sport. Once established, rule knowledge can serve as a guide for determining the legality of play. Then, sound judgment gained through experience will allow you to meet the demands of a variety of officiating situations. The official who continues to study the rules and applies officiating experiences toward personal improvement will likely become competent. When officials describe instances when they exercised good judgment, they invariably find they were:

Totally focused on the game.

Unaware of distractions or able to effectively block them them out.

Unconcerned about previous calls and the subsequent reactions from those involved.

POISE

Sport competition is generally exciting, and the action is often fast paced and rapidly changing. In addition, because of the importance people in our society place on sports, it is not unusual for emotions and tensions of players, coaches and spectators to run high, especially during the initial and later stages of the game. An official must remain calm and poised, regardless of what is happening. Although you cannot necessarily control the emotions of others, you are expected to be in control of your emotions no matter what the circumstances.

RAPPPORT

Rapport is the quality of relating effectively to others. Good rapport with others is desirable in any line of human endeavor and perhaps even more important in officiating. Officials must try to establish good rapport with both coaches and players. As an official, you are not trying to win a popularity contest, but you are not trying to make enemies either. Officials can improve rapport skills by treating players and coaches with courtesy and respect. You should expect the same treatment in return.