

MAKE THE

RIGHT CALLS

DURING COVID

Sports at all levels continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a challenging time, and our thoughts are with the thousands of officials who are navigating this "new normal".

We will endure these difficult times and emerge on the other side. We are sports

officials. We are stronger than most. We rely on our courage, character and commitment, and those traits will see us through.

Whether you're able to work games right now or are choosing to sit out until the situation is different, we can use this time to sharpen our

officiating skills. In this special newsletter, *Referee Magazine* and the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) offers some words of inspiration and articles of officiating wisdom to help keep you connected to officiating and tide you over while you navigate such uncharted waters.

FACE UP TO IT

ENJOY THIS SNEAK PEAK FROM THE JANUARY 2021 ISSUE OF *REFEREE MAGAZINE*.

By Brent Killackey

Let's face it, prior to 2020, the only sports officials commonly worrying about wearing facial coverings were football crews enduring near-subarctic temperatures late in the season and maybe some college baseball umpires working early season games in the northern climes.

Now, sports officials of all proverbial stripes are being asked to don facial coverings not to battle the cold, but to battle the spread of the COVID-19 virus.



Sports officials may be required to wear masks, but have a variety of options at their disposal.

© TONY TRIBBLE FOR THE ENQUIRER VIA IMAGH CONTENT SERVICES, LLC



MLB umpires were among those wearing masks this season — at first voluntarily, and then, as a required part of their uniform.

GREENBLATT/UP

This is the new reality for many officials amid the pandemic. Fortunately, manufacturers have stepped up with a variety of options. Unfortunately, more choices mean more decisions — but knowing more about the choices upfront will help make a purchase that will get you through the season.

Here are some things to consider:

- Does the mask or gaiter come in one-size-fits-all or different sizes? Based on your face and head, what will work for you?

- What materials are used for the mask itself and what will you be comfortable wearing? Disposable masks are often made of paper or polypropylene. Reusable options for masks and gaiters are commonly cotton or polyester materials.

- How thick are the layers? Too thick and the mask might be OK for a trip to the grocery store, but uncomfortable to run around the basketball court. At the same time, the mask needs to be thick enough that it serves its purpose of reducing the release of respiratory droplets.

How do the ear loops work? Will the materials be comfortable for long periods of time? Are the ear

loops adjustable, which may help get a good fit and keep the mask from falling down?

- If you wear glasses, does it have a nose clip or tight seal at the top to avoid fogging. (Here's a trick if you're having trouble with fogging glasses: Add a folded layer of tissue paper or fabric along the top of the mask.)

- If you're planning to use a traditional whistle, is the facial covering specially designed for that or will it at least have enough room to accommodate a whistle?

- What color options will work best with your sport's officiating uniform? Generally, something that blends into the uniform will leave the best first impression.

For many officials, choices may be narrowed by governing bodies, supervisors or assigners. NCAA football officials, for example, were asked to wear an all-black facial covering that didn't feature any visible logos, said Bill Carollo, coordinator of football officials for the Collegiate Officiating Consortium, which includes the Big Ten.

The choice of mask or gaiter was left to the individual official's preference, but there was one other

consideration: "Masks need to work with traditional whistles," Carollo said. College football initially tried electronic whistles, but found the devices — at least the ones available at the time, which really weren't envisioned or designed for that type of use — didn't give the desired sound output outdoors.

Indoors on college volleyball courts, electronic whistles have proved up to the task and found widespread use. In the Big 12 and Sun Belt conferences — which started play this fall — masks were being required, according to Anne Pufahl, coordinator of volleyball officials in those conferences. Officials could choose their mask option, but were narrowed on color choices to white, black or grey, she said.

Joan Powell, coordinator of volleyball officials in the Pac-12 and Mountain West conferences — which had delayed the start of their seasons — said in late October that masks and electronic whistles were likely for officials in those conferences. But details were still being worked out.

Powell said she wasn't sold on any particular colors yet, but thought it would be best if a crew matched colors. "The last thing you want is to distract," she said.

Ultimately, it's going to be a season that requires some flexibility and adjustments by officials, including adapting to facial coverings. "We'll do what it takes to get back on the court," Powell said.

Flexibility and adjustments have also been required for officials' equipment and uniform manufacturers, which have had to scramble to meet demand for products that weren't even considerations months earlier.

Ron Foxcroft, founder, chairman and CEO of Hamilton, Ontario-based Fox 40 International, said he never expected "close-proximity safety products" — face masks — to be part of the Fox 40 product line.

Neither did Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Cliff Keen Athletic. “We didn’t get into this business to sell masks either,” said Senior Vice President Chad Clark.

But as it became clear the pandemic would not be over quickly, companies like Fox 40, Cliff Keen and Smitty Officials Apparel, found ways to get masks into the marketplace. There’s even been time to innovate.

Cliff Keen started with a single-size mask, but now offers three different sizes.

Fox 40 developed a Whistle Mask and Whistle Gaiter that both pair with their well-known whistles, holding them in a pouch with a clip. The patent-pending Whistle Mask is in its second iteration, one that improved the aesthetics of the pouch holding the whistle inside the mask, Foxcroft said.

Breathability was a major consideration in fabric choices.

Cliff Keen, which also saw demand for masks for players, settled on a poly-mesh fabric that wicks moisture and provides breathability.

“For us, it’s a matter of minimizing the effect it has on you and we think this fabric does a good job,” Clark said. Cliff Keen also thought about the shape to ensure there’s enough space between the lips and fabric to reduce the impact on communication, he said. Manufactured in house, they were offering officiating masks in black and black-and-white stripes.

Smitty Official’s Apparel also brought a reusable mask into the market, featuring a “lightweight, breathable, moisture-wicking fabric” in eight different colors, plus a black-and-white-striped version, in two different sizes.


Breathability was also on the minds at Fox 40, which worked with Hamilton, Ontario-based Niko Apparel Systems, to use a moisture-resistant polyester fabric. “There’s a real science there between breathability and the ability to

properly capture droplets,” Foxcroft said.

Fox 40 had an additional consideration: the Precision Time System. In high school, college or pro games where the system is used, the whistle sound can’t be impacted so much that it prevents the system from stopping the clock. Foxcroft said the whistle mask, both the original and recently revised version — and the more recently unveiled whistle gaiter — have been specifically tested to work with Fox 40 whistles and the Precision Time System.

How long officials will have to worry about such things and how long masks may be an additional part of officiating uniforms remains uncertain. What is certain is a universal desire for the need for masks to end.

“Like a lot of people, I hope this is a short-lived product,” Clark said. “I’d love nothing more than to see all this come to an end and we get back to the way it was.”

Brent Killackey is Referee’s managing editor and umpired high school baseball. 

DO’S AND DON’TS OF MASKS AND OFFICIATING

DO’S

- ▶ Do know in advance what will be expected. If you have questions, reach out to the school or assigner in advance. Avoid surprises that could create last-minute issues for you, assigners and game administrators.
- ▶ Do wear the mask properly, covering both the mouth and nose. If the school, league, governing body or local or state authorities require it be worn during certain situations (such as anytime you’re indoors or anytime you’re in proximity to others), do so. We lose credibility on enforcing game rules when we can’t follow rules set out for ourselves.
- ▶ Do select a mask color that has been approved or, if left to individual discretion, matches your uniform or is otherwise neutral. Even though masks are not part of our usual uniform, they’re part of it now — and they’re part of the impression we’re giving when we arrive on the field, court or pitch.

DON’TS

- ▶ Don’t cut a hole in the mask for your whistle. (Believe it or not, we’re aware of officials doing this even though it effectively defeats the whole

purpose of wearing a mask and raises questions whether you have good judgment as an official.)

- ▶ Don’t wear something flashy. As a sport official, you want to stand out for the right reason. A cute or silly mask — the ones with an image of a big grin or favorite cartoon characters — might be fun in other contexts, but not when officiating.
- ▶ Don’t forget to regularly wash your mask. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests including your mask with your regular laundry, using regular detergent and the appropriate water temperature setting for the mask’s material. Toss it in the dryer on the highest heat setting, or you can air dry it, placing it in direct sunlight if possible.
- ▶ Don’t be that official who shows up and refuses to wear a mask even though they’re being required by the school, league or other governing body. You’re causing unneeded headaches for game administrators who already have enough to deal with trying to schedule and play games amid COVID-19. If you’re going to be asked to wear a mask and won’t, don’t take the assignment.

RETURN CAREFULLY TO AVOID INJURY

By Duane Carlisle

Whether it was the off-season and you were on break, you sustained an injury or became sick and had to take time to recover, or the world literally stopped because of a global pandemic, preparing to officiate again can be an anxious experience from a physical perspective.

You may have worries about becoming injured due to the long period of inactivity you just went through, or perhaps you're concerned you've lost your progress from before and are frustrated with efforts that now seem fruitless.

Don't worry. With the right plan and attitude, you can bring yourself right back to game-ready status. If done right, you might even come back better than before.

That said, the degree of detraining that you encounter is dependent upon both your activity level and your sport. For example, officials who run constantly during games can keep their fitness form longer without training than the strength and stamina-based officials who must hold position for long periods.

DON'T GO FROM 0 TO 60

You're understandably eager to jump right back into training, but if you've been inactive for several months, the truth is you've probably lost strength, flexibility and stamina. The transitional time from inactivity to game-ready fitness is when most injuries occur.

You know you will need a transitional period of re-adaptation to remind your muscles, your lungs, and your heart what they used to be capable of. If you jump right into training without letting



your body adapt, you could find yourself burdened with injuries and illnesses.

Your main fitness goal during the transition time should be to acclimate your body mindfully and with care, listening to your body's warning signs (excessive pain or stiffness) and allow yourself to take time off if you experience those warning signs.

Pushing through them may cause you more delay down the road if you get hurt, which is completely antithetical to your goals! Give yourself enough time to gradually increase your training so you don't need to rush.

It may seem like you will never get there, especially if you're taking necessary breaks. But trust the process. You'll not only be consistently improving your body, but you'll also be minimizing your risk of injury.

When returning to training or

officiating after an extended break, you have to make sure that you are not putting too much on your plate all at once.

HOW TO START AGAIN

Properly managing the load that is being placed on you during transition training will not only help reduce overexertion and prevent injuries, but it will also positively affect your performance when you return to the sport in full.

When you are ready to start training again, begin with low-intensity drills to reacclimate yourself to exercise and the specific movements that are required by your specific sport. When you have adapted to this lower intensity, slowly progress to more intense exercises.

Watch your heart rate, listen to your body's warning signs and rest when necessary. You will be back to your old self (and perhaps better)

in no time. Patience and persistence always pay off.

AND DON'T GO FROM 60 TO 0

You know the saying - if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Once you're back in shape and you've spent an entire season being fit and performing at your best, the worst thing you can do for yourself is to stop training. Unless you've been injured, there's no reason not to continue the "in-season" workout mentality or a modified version of it.

The reality of leagues dealing with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic may also cause a sudden

stoppage of play and unexpected downtime. You should make up your mind to never go from full throttle to couch potato ever again because the longer you go without exercise and training, the less your muscles will be able to retain the effects of the training you've done.

"Muscular detraining," is when muscles are not able to maintain fitness levels, so if you haven't been training (whether due to injury or another reason) your muscles have effectively "detrained".

You worked hard for the strength, speed and endurance you need to work a full season. By

staying active, sports officials can minimize muscular detraining, because they never fully let their body go without some type of training stimuli. That's why it's better to do something rather than nothing, even if it's not your regular, intense training regime.

When the time comes around to work again, you'll be in a much better place when training resumes rather than just starting from zero all over again.

Duane W. Carlisle, MSc, MSCCA, CSCS Founder, Carlisle Performance Systems Founder, Lightning Fast Training Systems, LLC

STRATEGIES TO STAY ABOVE THE FRAY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the officiating industry took a heavy blow. All officials in some shape or form were impacted and continue to face challenges going forward. Games across the globe were postponed or canceled, in-person training camps had to be dropped and the normal camaraderie associated with officiating was drastically changed. Officials were forced to stay home, and everything thrown at them from the news, social media, television and radio was increasingly negative. All of that information makes it easy to get sucked into the wormhole of negativity.

There are ways, however, to stay above it and proper ways to deal with the emotions officials are feeling during this time. Dr. Megan Buning, PhD, teaching specialist in the Florida State University Coach Interdisciplinary Center for Athletic Coaching, has seen firsthand the impacts on officials as she was in the middle of mental-performance research on collegiate officials when the pandemic began. A former standout pitcher for the University of South Carolina softball team, Buning has found a niche working on improving the mental performance of game officials and was working with a group of collegiate softball umpires across all levels of play when games shut down. Below are some of the ways she encourages officials to understand how to handle the current climate.

FEEL YOUR EMOTIONS

During this time, it is important to understand there is no “normal.” This is an unprecedented time and not everyone is going to handle this situation the same way.

“I would encourage those, that whatever emotion you are having,

let yourself feel it,” Buning said. “You need to allow yourself to feel whatever emotion it is and know that it is OK. These emotions you’re having are normal.”

Officials are often expected to be robots and show no emotion, which is why this time can be so difficult. Experiencing emotions and not being sure how to release them can create additional stress. Officials also get the wrong impression that showing emotion is a sign of weakness, when in reality it is a normal function that all humans experience.

“Particularly in the athletic field, we get pushed into, ‘Don’t show your emotions, suck it up, be tough.’ That isn’t a healthy way to approach emotions, especially something as big as this,” Buning said.

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

A common feeling for officials during this time is the sense of loss. Many officials’ identity is tied to what they do. Having games taken away and lost income are a real sense of grief for them. This is referred to as disenfranchised grief as it isn’t socially accepted as grief. Most people associate grief with losing someone. However, if officiating is a huge part of who one is, losing that large sense of self can cause grief. The significant loss of income and the stress associated with that can also cause grief for officials.

“One umpire lost \$10,000 just like that when they canceled athletics,” Buning said. “That is a big deal.”

And there were several more stories like that all over the country. Buning stated it is important for officials to acknowledge what they are feeling, give themselves permission to feel that and try to articulate what they are feeling. This is all part of emotional regulation and emotional intelligence.

“I’m feeling infuriated that I can’t make an income or I’m feeling at a loss because this is part of my identity,” she said. “You can feel it all at once. Mindfulness — that is powerful.”

She said officials should allow themselves time to just feel what they are feeling and to take a pause. It can be very overwhelming, and trying to deal with everything all at once and trying to solve all the problems at once is unhealthy.

CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLE

In all aspects of life, there are things you can and can’t control. It is important to focus on the things you can control and try not to worry about the things you can’t. One technique is to fill out a Circle of Control. This allows officials the ability to write down the things they can control, the things they can’t control and the things they can influence. Buning said officials often think through these things, but it is important to write it down on a piece of paper as that gives it power.

“It gives a reminder that I can’t do anything about it,” she said. “Leave the uncontrollable alone. You have no control over those. Work on the controllable.”

ADAPT OFFICIATING SKILLS TO LIFE

During these times, it is important for officials to rely on the things they know. There are a lot of things officials do in uniform that translate perfectly to everyday life and it is important to put those skills to use.

“I think something people overlook in the sports world is the fact they know how to adapt,” Buning said. “You know how to adapt, so instead of trying to do the same routines pre-COVID, look at how you can adapt your routines now. They are going to

be more fluid and you have to be OK with being uncomfortable. How can you modify some of your routines to keep you more in a flow so you stay mentally more stable?"

Some of those adaptations include using social media in order to stay in touch with fellow crew members or watching webinars on specific topics related to the sport you officiate.

These social media tools can be new to many umpires and they may

feel uncomfortable using them. Officials are often told to stay away from social media, but during these times it is important to stay social and not get isolated. It's important to take precautions to avoid leaving a big social media footprint during this time, however.

Not everyone is ready to jump into studying rules and mechanics or view webinars immediately and may need more time to grieve. It is

important to use the tools learned as an official to adapt to each new day.

"Use what you use on the field — one pitch at a time, one play at a time, one inning at a time," Buning said. "Today's world may be one hour at a time, one task at a time, one day at a time. Stay in the moment and that will help." *Brad Tittrington is an associate editor for Referee.* [E]

PARTNER PROBLEMS PREVENTED

We don't always get a choice when it comes to partners or crewmates. Certain assigners force you to accept contests before you know who your partners are. That's when you need to show a little decorum.

Upon learning you're paired with an official with whom you have a difference in personalities or philosophies, you might want to talk to your assigner and see whether a change of partners can be made. If not, enter the contest with a clean slate. Perhaps the conflict was a one-time thing. With luck the other official may have received new training and is much improved. It benefits the entire chapter or association if all members work and know one another — particularly on the lower levels. Those sub-varsity games might be the only chance for new officials to work with chapter veterans.

What else can you do to make the best of a potentially bad situation?

Keep an open mind. Just as it's important for officials and players to have a rapport, it's crucial for officials to work well together, too. Everyone prefers to work with certain people — that's human nature. But it benefits no one if you walk into a contest thinking, "This is going to be a disaster."



Sean Martin, Portland Ore. (obscured, left), Cheryl Blue, Lakeside Calif., and Tiffany Bird, Salt Lake City, carry on a measured, professional conference during a break in the action. Getting along with partners, at least during the game, is crucial for a well-officiated game.

If you're a veteran and see that you'll have an inexperienced official with you, be ready to help him or her. Make him or her feel at ease and provide a confidence boost. Remember, you were a young official once. Think back to what a veteran said or did that helped you and try that with your less-experienced partner.

Set an example. There's no excuse for giving less than 100 percent just because you're not thrilled with your partner. If the other official kicks a call or performs a mechanic incorrectly, maintain good body language. Don't let players, coaches and fans see you roll your eyes, drop your shoulders or shake your head.

Coaches who are more familiar with you or those who recognize

that your partner isn't as skilled or confident will sometimes attempt to have you overrule another official. Politely but firmly decline those requests. By overruling, you can ruin any confidence your partner has, or obliterate the other official's credibility.

Don't lose your professionalism. We've all worked games in which too many or not enough infractions were called. Don't consciously try to make up for your partner's lack of calls by making phantom calls, or ignore fouls or violations because your partner is making what you perceive to be too many calls. If your partner makes an error in judgment, don't make a make-up call to compensate. Call what you see and see what you call. [E]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST CHECKLIST

Conflicts of interest can be tougher judgment calls than any you see in your games. It's been said that if you have any inkling an assignment presents even a hint of a conflict of interest, you should pass it up. But like a lot of things in life (and officiating), there are some gray areas.

Your association or governing body may have hard and fast rules which eliminate the guesswork for you. For others, it's akin to a Rubik's Cube. Which way to turn?

The following is a sort of checklist that can guide you as you decide if you're facing one of those problematic situations. Let your good judgment prevail.

☒ **Does the game involve your alma mater?** If you're a recent graduate, it's an easy call. What's difficult is defining "recent." Many believe officials should avoid officiating games at their alma maters for at least five years after graduation. Sometimes a longer hiatus will be necessary,

especially if you were a star athlete or other recognizable figure at the school. If the coach you played for is still in charge, that could be a factor. After all, having him or her coming up to you and giving you a hug before you work the game won't get you off on the right foot with the other team or its fans.

☒ **Are family members involved?** Block schools your kids attend or those for which a family member (spouse, parent, etc.) teaches or coaches. If you have family ties to the school, chances are you're going to know a lot of the people at the school and that's a conflict to avoid.

☒ **Are there business considerations?** If your boss's kid goes to a school and you have an opportunity to be assigned there, think twice. Sports can turn even the most benevolent bosses into lunatics, especially when their kid is involved. Same if you have a customer or business connection with athletic children. Your real paycheck is more

important than the game fee.

☒ **Is there bad blood?** If you've had a run-in with a coach or player that may cause trouble for future games, your assigner is probably aware of the issue. But if not, you should have that discussion. If the assigner feels you can handle the situation, take the assignment and handle the game with professionalism regardless of how the coach responds.

☒ **Do you make the assignments?** Some assigners assign themselves to games, particularly top games, because they feel they can handle them best. That assigning action screams "conflict of interest." If assigners want to officiate, they should do so in conferences in which they are not assigning games. If they don't, assigners will rightfully lose the respect of the officials they are assigning. Assigners will also have no place to turn if a situation arises during the game, since they have to regularly work with the schools. ☒

THESE SIX C'S WILL GET YOU STRAIGHT A'S

Mnemonics are devices intended to assist the memory, as a verse or formula. A popular example, HOMES, is an acronym to help recall the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan Erie, Superior).

There are six qualities that raise your officiating level. If you're a mnemonics fan, sorry, there isn't one to help you. But if you're into alliteration, you're in luck. They all start with the letter C. Away we go.

CONFIDENCE

To have any chance to be good at most anything, you need to have self-assurance, and officiating is no

different. A lot of officials come from the ranks of former players so they understand their game and they're used to being out on the court or field. But participating as an official is a whole different ballgame.

Confidence isn't the same as arrogance. An arrogant official will rub everyone — coaches, players, assigners and fellow officials — the wrong way in a hurry. The right kind of confidence comes with several seasons worth of game experience utilizing knowledge gleaned from hours of studying rules and mechanics.

Rookie officials won't necessarily have confidence, and if they do have

some, it's likely to be ripped out of them after their first few mistake-riddled games. A mentoring program can help instill confidence in newer officials. An association can assign one new official per crew to ride along with them and explore what a typical Friday night will be like. Then, when they work JV or freshmen games during the week, they can call a veteran official to discuss certain situations that arise.

COMPOSURE

Mastering self-control is right up there with gaining confidence, for new officials in particular. Not everyone

MAKE THE RIGHT CALLS DURING COVID

is prepared for the disparagement, condemnation and indignity that officials must face and absorb with aplomb.

It's a natural reaction to "hit back" when you're being attacked. Veteran officials know about the need for composure. That means no shouting down with coaches, players and fans and keeping your wits about you when everyone else is up in arms.

Learning how to deal with different personalities is important. How do you deal with Coach A, who has an explosive personality, versus Coach B, who has a "buddy-buddy" personality? How do you deal with the fans? And one of the biggest ones is how do you adjust to different partners or crewmates?

Going into games with an "all for one" attitude and supporting each other can get you over some speed bumps. Experience is a great teacher. And sharing information with other officials can help.

CONCENTRATION

The ability to block out outside influences comes with time. Goodness knows there are plenty of things at a sporting event that can divert your attention. Everything from wild fans to smells from the concession stand to the band playing your favorite song can serve as a distraction if you let it.

If you can stay focused on your coverage area while blocking out the noises and sights that used to turn your head as a player or spectator, you've got half the battle won. At least you're looking in the right area. Whether you can make judgments based on what you see might be another story.

COMMUNICATION

Hand in hand with learning to concentrate is learning to communicate effectively with your partner or partners. Maintaining eye contact with a crewmate or having a quick conference with a partner

Mike Cafaro of Lilington, N.C., calls a strike with a healthy dose of conviction. That sort of confidence is one of the keys to officiating success.



are keys in game control and field or court coverage.

Communication between officials is vital. Let your partner know when you need help. Have a strong pregame and talk about who makes what call, who covers what base, who has the clock, confirming the downs, etc.

Official-to-official communication devices are becoming more common in sports such as football and soccer. But their value diminishes if the conversation goes beyond officiating the game. Used correctly, the headsets can be used to share vital information with crewmates and coaches. Discuss in pregame meetings when and how they will be used.

COHESION

Give and take communication, whether it's on the field or court, during association meetings or just anytime, anywhere, leads to a sense of fellowship. It's esprit de corps among officials.

Joining an association has multiple benefits. One of them is letting others in the officiating community get to know you so they can help promote you. That's especially important if you're a newer official or new to the area. Athletic directors and assigners are often reluctant to take a chance on new people because they haven't seen them work. Once you break through that ceiling, people tend to accept you as an official, your credit

improves and people start to seek you.

Joining an association also helps officials get a regular work schedule and sometimes find a regular partner or crew. It also gives you a group of peers to bounce questions off of and trade games with should an emergency situation arise that prevents you from working a contracted game.

COMMITMENT


The last and most important part of being a successful official is having a commitment to officiating — a commitment to getting better and a commitment to excellence. Officials committed to the avocation never stop trying to learn.

Being proficient with rules and mechanics can prevent a lot of problems before they happen. But there's more to commitment than that.

There's another overlooked side of commitment that newer officials, or those looking to move up the ladder, tend to overlook. That's the time and financial demands.

You need the proper uniform, including whistles and hats and beanbags and ball-strike indicators and whatever else your sport requires. There are fees that must be paid to local, state or national associations. Educational materials such as rulebooks must be purchased. In some cases, camp attendance is mandatory to retain their license or be eligible for postseason assignments. Those who hope to improve their skills or advance will attend camps voluntarily.

And then there is the time obligation. There will be association meetings, training sessions, rules study groups (if you are so inclined) and the aforementioned camps. And oh, yes — however much time you want to dedicate to actually working games.

So there they are. Not an A to Z guide to success, but mind these P's and Q's and you'll B the best official you can B. 

ETIQUETTE AND TIPS FOR USING VIDEO WITH OFFICIALS

Using video for training purposes is no longer the discovery of the age. Gone are the days we have to give a blank video cassette or DVD in a self-addressed stamped envelope to the home team's coach hoping that in a week or a month we will get it back with a recording of the game we worked for him or her. Lack of video is no longer the problem, and claiming it is not out there means only that someone is too lazy to go hunting for it.

Sometimes clips of ourselves we would rather not see go viral show up online. Those snippets have a different kind of value, more in the way of morbid curiosity for the average fan and a sadistic form of revenge-seeking from the poster.

But for the purpose of this column, let us stick to the topic of video gathered and screened for training officials. Even though our collective hearts have been in the right place for years, there are still some out there who have not grasped the protocol and decorum necessary regarding use of this valuable training tool.

GET IT READY FOR PRESENTATION

If you just put in the video at your local association meeting and wait for plays to come up for discussion, or fast forward until you reach specific points, you will be wasting the precious time of your fellow officials. Instead, invest in editing software or use the tools of your fellow officials to document the footage you need effectively. Pull the plays that you want to use and save others for future presentations.

YOU DO NOT OWN THE FILM

That said, there are provisions in the copyright law for limited use of video clips for educational purposes. You may do a slam-bang job of gathering, editing, narrating and spiffing up the video you show at one or multiple camps or meetings. But you cannot sell or widely distribute the video for your own gain. Think of your efforts as giving back, not making a buck.

TAKE THE SOUND OUT OF IT

Unless it is relevant to the discussion, remove any commentary or ambient sound from the video. Exceptions would be if a referee's skill at announcing penalties is being scrutinized or officials' in-game audio is picked up by sideline microphones.

USE A LIMITED NUMBER OF PLAYS

Too many plays can overload the mind and take away from what you were trying to emphasize. Limit the plays so that people will be able to remember the key points of the presentation. There are many game situations that officials do not get to practice regularly because of their rarity in the game — plays such as momentum inside the five yardline, basket interference, passing a runner, etc.

FOCUS ON ONE ASPECT

Each meeting or pregame discussion can focus on one particular area of concern, for example, umpire rotation or penalty kicks. Just as too many plays can cause focus issues, so can too many topics.



Positioning and signaling are among the things that will show up on video. Presentations that use video can show not only things that could be done better, but things that are done well. Erica Phillips, New Bern, N.C.

CARIN GOODALL-GOSNELL

FOCUS ON MECHANICS, NOT JUDGMENT

Every official has missed a big play. There is little, if anything, to gain by highlighting the mistake. Even if the play you are showing has a missed call, try to focus the attention on what could have been done to get in better position to see the key elements of the play better. Was the official slow to cover a play or too close to the action? Was the official screened out?

POINT OUT THE POSITIVES

It is important to learn from your mistakes and those of others. However, it is also a good idea to show plays that are positive in nature. Video breakdown shouldn't be just negative plays. Officials can learn from good examples as well.

PROTECT EGOS

A leader can use him or herself as a negative example to establish credibility when using video. Someone who is critiquing others can constructively soften critical blows heaped on others by directing some inwardly. Open the session with, "Hooboy, you wanna see an official kick the heck out of one? Have I got a clip for you!" and you could very well

have the crowd in the palm of your hand.

In that same vein, any official in the group who is going to be shown making an error should at least be forewarned. People who are ambushed in that way in a room full of their peers tend to be defensive. What is intended to be an instructional session turns into a debate or worse.

Best case is giving the official a head's up and having him or her provide a first-person tour through the thought process on why things broke down, the lessons learned and how things will be handled differently down the road.

Video is like any other resource. Used correctly, it can enhance, educate and inform. Misused, it can do far more harm than good. Do some good. 📺

16 SURE-FIRE WAYS TO IMPROVE

Tens of thousands of words have been devoted to helping officials improve their performance. No attempt has been made here to identify these as the best tips. But you would have to agree that if such a list were compiled, these 16 would belong.

1. WATCH THEM WARM UP

Make use of that dead time before the game. Watch players warm up. Does the point guard carry the ball? What range does the field-goal kicker have? Which outfielder has the strongest arm? Which player can "bend it like Beckham?" Those things and more provide info that might come in handy.

2. HEAD OFF TROUBLE

Make a casual visual inspection of players before a game and you may avoid a future headache. If you see a player whose uniform is illegal or who is wearing jewelry, point it out to the coach. That will give the player time to make an adjustment or take off the illegal item.

3. PICK UP YOUR PRESENCE

Presence is hard to define, but you want it. Physical appearance is part of it, but it goes further. How you stand before the start of the game, shoulders upright with head



Laser focus, as demonstrated by Amy Milton, Durham, N.C., is one of the most important aspects of officiating. Regardless of the level of the teams or how well they are playing, officials must pay attention from start to finish.

©AMY GOODALL-GOSNELL

held high, never folding the arms in front of the body, gives an air of confidence and approachability that is noticed. Look people in the eye while communicating and keep your cool when emotions around you boil over as well.

4. GET NOTICED OR GO HOME

Has anyone ever told you that the best-officiated games are the ones in which you do not know the officials

are there? They are wrong. You want game participants and fans to notice you positively for your appearance, your hustle, proper mechanics and great calls. Officials who are not noticed are not doing something right.

5. DON'T GO THERE

Do you exhibit the appearance of being impartial? Great officials know the difference between perception and reality and act accordingly. Do

not be extra friendly with one of the coaches prior to a game, just because you have seen his or her team more often than the other coach's team. Be upfront with conflicts of interest to your assigner, even if you know you can be impartial no matter what.

6. CALL WHAT MUST BE CALLED

There is a difference between preventive officiating and failing to penalize when in possession of knowledge that a violation or foul occurred. Officials who cannot or will not penalize taunting and baiting, unnecessary roughness, illegal and dangerous tactics, and equipment and uniform violations cannot, by definition, call a good game, nor can they practice effective risk management.

7. ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE

There is an old officiating axiom: "If you go to the game with a bad attitude, you'll have a bad game." Your attitude affects those around you. A positive attitude helps you perform difficult tasks. If you have had a bad day on your job or a driver cuts you off on your way to a game, set aside minor frustrations and strive to develop a positive attitude toward the game.

8. MOVE ON FROM MISTAKES

Remember, you only have control of the present moment. The call you made five minutes ago is beyond your control and the future is always out of your reach. Keep an active mind and stop yourself whenever your mind wants to shift back to a "mistake" or worries about what's going to happen.

9. FOCUS THROUGHOUT

Focus and keep your attention on the task at hand — the game you are working. Whether it is a blowout or tight ballgame, keep your

concentration. If you feel yourself becoming distracted, focus on specific mechanics during a game. By telling yourself you need to improve a specific part of your game, it will help you to avoid being distracted.

10. KNOW EVERYONE IS READY

After a stoppage, ensure that your partners are ready before putting the ball back into play and/or resuming the game. There does not need to be any extended communication, just eye contact, a nod of the head or a thumbs-up so that you know everyone is ready to go.

11. OFFER LATITUDE AT TIMES

When a coach complains, ask yourself if you got the call right. If you think the call was questionable, give the coach some latitude. Do not allow him or her to interfere with your concentration but lend an ear. When you feel you got the call correct, your limit on what you will hear goes down. Most importantly, do not be afraid to use warnings. Those warnings can prevent situations from escalating further.

12. BE A GREAT DEAD-BALL OFFICIAL

It is amazing how a game that progressed smoothly and without incident can go downhill if officials miss something that happens away from the play or after the ball is dead. Dead-ball officiating is one of the factors that separates average officials from great ones. Fouls or rule violations happen even when the ball is not live.

13. GET THE GAME MOVING AGAIN

When the game is stopped because of a call — one that results in controversy — the best way to turn down the heat is to get play started again as soon as possible. If the coaches, players and fans have

something else to watch or think about, they will turn their attention to the play and will not have as much time to bark about the last one. If a complicated rule is involved and you need to explain things to a coach, do it. And do not resume the action if it puts another official or either team at a disadvantage. But you will often find that the noise will dissipate if a new play develops.

14. SET THE PACE

Games go more smoothly when you set an even tempo. A game that "flows" allows players, coaches and officials to interact without disruption. In such a game, players usually do not commit an inordinate number of fouls or violations. In turn, your mechanics become second nature. You can help set the pace by hustling, encouraging teams to return to the field or court after timeouts and by being ready to resume play when the players are.

15. STRETCH AND REHYDRATE

The postgame stretch is just as important — maybe more important — than the one before the contest. Stretching helps warm muscles retain their elasticity and can prevent cramping. And do not forget your fluid intake. You must replace what you lost by drinking water or sports drinks. Even chocolate milk can help replenish necessary nutrients.

16. BECOME THE RULES GURU

Every association has that individual who is known as the rules guy or gal. He or she is well-versed in the rules and is the go-to person in meetings and on the field or court. That individual is respected and for good reason. Make it your goal this season (and write it down) to be the most educated official in your area. Then dig into the numerous resources available to help you reach your goal. 📖