

National Federation of State High School Associations



# LET'S MAKE IT OFFICIAL

*Practical Suggestions for  
the High School Official*



LETS



# Officials Code of Ethics

Officials at an interscholastic athletic event are participants in the educational development of high school students. As such, they must exercise a high level of self-discipline, independence and responsibility. The purpose of this Code is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for all interscholastic officials.

**Officials** shall master both the rules of the game and the mechanics necessary to enforce the rules, and shall exercise authority in an impartial, firm and controlled manner.

**Officials** shall work with each other and their state associations in a constructive and cooperative manner.

**Officials** shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession in all interaction with student-athletes, coaches, athletic directors, school administrators, colleagues, and the public.

**Officials** shall prepare themselves both physically and mentally, shall dress neatly and appropriately, and shall comport themselves in a manner consistent with the high standards of the profession.

**Officials** shall be punctual and professional in the fulfillment of all contractual obligations.

**Officials** shall remain mindful that their conduct influences the respect that student-athletes, coaches and the public hold for the profession.

**Officials** shall, while enforcing the rules of play, remain aware of the inherent risk of injury that competition poses to student-athletes. Where appropriate, they shall inform event management of conditions or situations that appear unreasonably hazardous.

**Officials** shall take reasonable steps to educate themselves in the recognition of emergency conditions that might arise during the course of competition.

**Officials** shall maintain an ethical approach while participating in forums, chat rooms and all forms of social media.



# Mission Statement

*The National Federation of State High School Associations serves its members, related professional organizations and students by providing leadership for the administration of education-based interscholastic activities, which support academic achievement, good citizenship and equitable opportunities.*

**We believe:**

- the NFHS is the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs.
- interscholastic activity programs enrich each student's educational experience.
- participation in education-based activity programs promotes student academic achievement.
- student participation in interscholastic activity programs is a privilege.
- interscholastic participation develops good citizenship and healthy lifestyles.
- interscholastic activity programs foster involvement of a diverse population.
- interscholastic activity programs promote positive school/community relations.
- the NFHS is the pre-eminent authority on competition rules for interscholastic activity programs.
- national competition rules promote fair play and minimize risks for student participants.
- cooperation among state associations advances their individual and collective well-being.
- properly trained administrators/coaches/directors promote the educational mission of the interscholastic experience.
- properly trained officials/judges enhance interscholastic competition.

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# **LET'S MAKE IT OFFICIAL**

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL OFFICIAL

Robert B. Gardner, Publisher  
Mary Struckhoff, Editor  
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If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;

If you can trust yourself when all others doubt you,  
And make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,

And yet don't look too good nor talk too wise . . .

- Rudyard Kipling



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# FOREWORD

This booklet was the first professional development project of the NFHS Officials Association. It was written by Jerry Grunska, who at that time was chairman of the NFHS Officials Association Professional Development Committee for the state of Illinois. Mr. Grunska is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on high school officiating technique and philosophy. He is a widely-published author who has contributed greatly to many NFHS publications and other professional efforts.

The contents include an overview of officiating, the commitment, rewards and the satisfaction involved in high school officiating. Also, advice is given on how to obtain a schedule, how to advance in the profession, as well as sections on ethics and what Grunska entitles "Tangible Intangibles."

It is written in a style that will be of interest to the new official, as well as the veteran. It is highly recommended that it be read by all high school officials.

The National Federation of State High School Associations, in cooperation with your state high school association and the NFHS Officials Association, is proud to publish this material in a convenient form to help you sharpen your officiating skills.

– National Federation of State High School Associations



## THE OFFICIAL – AN OVERVIEW

Once you put on that uniform your status as a person undergoes an irreversible change. You may think you're the same sincere and fun-loving individual you were before, but to people who observe you in that distinct garb you are "The Official" ... whether or not your credentials justify that view.

Such an automatic change of status has both its good and its bad points. As a figure of authority and as a neutral party, you will gain instant respect. People will listen to you in ways they may not have before. Your explanation of the technical aspects of competition will carry weight. Deference will be paid. People may even quote you later on. For one thing, you will find yourself escorted to locker rooms. Someone will offer conveniences that you may not even have anticipated.

Once the match or contest begins, however, the preliminary esteem may strike you as having been a charade. Suddenly your opinions are met with disbelief or disdain. Often those in attendance will object vehemently to your decisions, and the once courteous cover crumbles to reveal wild-eyed folks who challenge, who harass, and who berate.

The coldest reality of all is that once the athletic skirmish is over, you are almost a nobody at all. Your usefulness has ended, your presence no longer even acknowledged, unless through some unfortunate chance a wrangle has occurred during the sporting event which carries over in argumentative stages beyond the event itself. You are almost like the unknown soldier: essential but obscure. No annals will record your exploits.

Basically, there really isn't much glory in officiating at all. Even the few superstars at the top live with the precarious awareness of a well-worn rule of thumb: "You're only as good as your last call."

But it is possible to walk away from an event you've officiated feeling that your expertise aided in making the experience as scintillating as it was for onlookers and participants alike. This quiet satisfaction of a job well-done is what makes officiating so appealing to a vast number of people who are joined by this common bond into what is nearly a fraternal order.

Officiating has demands and prices that it has not exacted from you yet. To officiate you most likely will have to unlearn what caused you to enjoy the sport in the first place. You have to stop being an appreciative viewer and learn to search for key elements in the game or activity, actions that are hidden from the casual watcher. Often your eyes must focus on places where fans never look. The first price is that you must give up being a spectator.



The second price is that you must study hard to master the sport. You will learn that the sport has a language all its own in the way its requirements are defined and in the way its configurations are described. You must learn this language so that it becomes a second part of you, so that in critical situations it is automatically recalled to guide your responses and to clarify your decisions. To be good you'll eventually have to react instantly to the definition of a situation as the rule book accounts for it. Furthermore, you'll have to recognize the situation at once in order to react to it properly.

What do you do in baseball, for example, when one baserunner passes another? Or in basketball, when a player shoots the ball in the wrong basket? Or in football, when a kick receiver signals for a fair catch and then runs with the ball?

The third price you must pay is time. An apprenticeship must be served, because, at the risk of offering another cliché, there is no substitute for experience.

Officiating is one of those public activities that persuade people to declare, "I could do that!" Good officiating does indeed look effortless. The official may simply seem to be blessed with a closer view of the action. All officials have to do is waggle their head and flap their arms.

In this deceptive respect it may be a lot like race car driving. The average person may acknowledge intellectually that it probably takes some doing to be skillful. But in their hearts, officials believe they could tromp on that accelerator and spin that wheel just as well.

So, too, the beginning official may believe that he or she could step into the professional arena and "call 'em as he/she sees 'em," especially if his/her first few contests have been free of controversy. But the test of an official is not the ability to walk away from easy games with a head held high. The test comes when a call is vital, with lofty stakes, in intense competition, when a fine distinction must be made or an obscure rule applied, instantly.

Officials earn their keep and gain their status up the ladder of respectability by the way they handle critical calls.

# COMMITMENT

The commitment itself to officiating is a critical call. Sacrifice and inconvenience are accompanying features. At times you will have to flee from your career obligations at the earliest opportunity in order to be on time for the match you are to officiate. You may even have to obtain special permission to leave the office early on occasion, agreeing to make up the time as soon as you are able.

You may have to arise at an uncomfortable hour for early morning assignments. You may have to drive a healthy distance to arrive at the site. Roads may be bad. The route may be confusing. Weather may be horrendous. Each wizened official has tales to tell of perilous travels and challenging conditions.

Once at the site you may have trouble finding the competitive arena. A field may not be adjacent to a school as you expected. Sites may, in fact, have been changed without authorities notifying you. The gym may be a sanctum deep in the maze of a dark edifice.

Sometimes you'll travel long distances with fellow officials. Are you allergic to cigar smoke? Do you like country and western music?

How thick is your skin? Once the match begins it may be open season on officials. Spectators, enthralled by their favorite participant or team and oblivious to the fine points of rules, will often regard you as the enemy, the scapegoat. In some quarters it is almost considered patriotic to boo the ump. When the ignorant shout their displeasure, will your ears redden and your hair bristle?

What if coaches challenge you and demand explanations? Can you be clear



and confident under fire? Are you able to maintain a soft voice that "turneth away wrath?" It is better if you do because problems only tend to intensify when fury meets fury.

When under duress always try to remember that folks are reacting to your role as signified by the uniform. You are a symbol. They are not attacking you as an individual.

In fact you shed much of your individuality when you become an official. Nobody cares whether or not you feel well or whether your car is operating satisfactorily or if you got caught in the homecoming parade on the way to the game. They don't want to hear about your game last week or your prospects for the future. They simply want you to be perfect in your performance, and if you're not they'll hold you accountable.

The pay's not great. It seldom compensates. You may smile eagerly when you receive your first contract to officiate, but once at the game you'll learn that the bus driver for the teams may have earned more. The ticket takers probably also top your stipend. And they don't have to buy a special uniform, take a yearly exam or expose themselves to abuse. It is nice to be paid; it'll qualify you as a professional; but few citizens can truly say that they have accumulated wealth through officiating.

If you are not careful you can accumulate some marital anxieties. Once you become wrapped up in your sport, words such as "addicted" and "love affair" may be used to describe your involvement. Only recently has this "wedge" been openly discussed. The sport can eat up your time much like any other pastime: pitching horseshoes, tinkering with horsepower, or playing the horses. Pointedly enough, the assignments often take you away from the fireside during "prime time" normal socializing periods – Friday and Saturday nights.

Officials try to alleviate these anxieties in several ways. One, they can involve their mate in the sport. They bring her/him along to watch the performance, to critique the act. One can also be judicious. Special presents or saving for a weekend together can be diplomatic ways of justifying the time away.

Whatever your investment in officiating, just like any other investment, is going to demand a commitment and some risk. For your peace of mind, it is well to calculate that risk in advance.



## REWARDS AND SATISFACTION

If your dedication has staying power, if you fulfill your apprenticeship and "hit the books" with zeal, the investment does pay dividends. These may have been the things which drew you to the sport in the first place.

The first satisfaction you'll notice is that in the glowing forge of open competition you'll gradually fashion some skills. You'll learn these from fellow officials, from the manuals, and from observing experts in action. You'll find that as a spectator you acquire "new eyes." Henceforth you'll watch how the action is administered as much as how it unfolds. But most of all you'll learn from your mistakes.

Officials who succeed have a fund of errors behind them, false moves which rankle the mind and which have spurred them to further study, to recollect, and to sharpen their response. If encouraged, many veteran officials will enthusiastically relate their "war stories." This is one of the few professions where insiders are so willing to document their shortcomings. If you find an official who says, "I never missed a call," avoid him or her.

Along with the acquisition of skills will come an accumulation of friends. Rotary and Kiwanis certainly promote interaction among people from separate walks of life, but a different kind of bonding takes place between individuals who have been through athletic strife together. First of all you'll gain a respect for your fellow official's ability and for her/his poise under pressure. You'll find yourself anxious to share your successes and doubts, much like players and coaches talking over their feats and savoring the contest. Because a ready audience is limited to other officials, you'll find them drawing together and reciting earnestly, almost like confidants.

Who else but an aficionado would enjoy the replay of someone's golf game, or bridge hand, or horseback ride?

But the prospect of serving under fire is a major appeal. "We came through unscathed," or "the game was a thriller because of us" are unifying watchwords which make all those who officiate one vast sympathetic fraternity. Individually, you'll sometimes feel that all forces are against you: the athletic directors, assignment chairpersons, townspeople, even the press. It is at least a measure of comfort to know that someone can empathize with you.

Thank goodness another body of people is also likely to tolerate your presence in a comradely fashion, namely, the participants themselves. Young male and female athletes are by and large the most respectful and resilient people you'd deal with. Basically you'll find that they just want to compete as vigorously and skillfully as they are able. They know you are part of the action, that your role is essential if their performance is to be smooth, and most of the time they'll issue an unspoken invitation for you to get into the swing of the thing. Frequently their high-minded behavior belies the antics of those who care for them on the sidelines. You'll get the feeling that you are contributing to their growth. This is the real reason why you are here.

Rubbing shoulders with young people in the arena makes you feel young yourself. Another thing that will make you feel exuberant is working a big match or game. Only by being there can you experience the "high" of the crowd and the participants. If your skin tingles at the playing of the National Anthem and adrenalin adds a fervor to your singing, it's a big game.

Keep in mind that these opportunities are rare and that elements of luck figure in the selection of officials. For example, many assignments are made so far in advance that no one can predict which game will be pivotal. Furthermore, in an ordinary league race there is usually only one champion and about seven also-rans. Simple arithmetic will reveal that the number of major match-ups are few. On the other hand, a clash between opponents at the bottom of the scale, a desperate surge to escape the cellar, can prove to be just as thrilling as a championship bout. What matters is that you take each contest with equal seriousness and expend the same energy regardless of the contest's relative importance. To the participants it's not just the only game in town, it's the only game in the universe.



# OBTAINING A SCHEDULE

To be part of "the only game" you must analyze whatever system exists in your locale for assigning games. This will take some research. Methods vary in different parts of the nation. Games may be assigned by a league commissioner or, in the case of metropolitan athletics, by a city authority. Or individual schools and clubs may be responsible for their own assigning, in which case the coach or athletic director does the job. In certain places assignments are made through officiating organizations. So you will need to learn whom to see and how to join.

Once you've determined the necessary people to contact, simply make sure that the decision-makers know of your availability. Just as any professional person would do, send around a notice stating your name, address, phone number(s), plus your age and the amount of experience you have acquired, and then clearly indicate when you can work.

If membership in an officials organization is required, find out the procedures for joining. Most groups welcome visitors and will make the effort to offer you information and even training.

Do not be too proud to work games at any level when you are starting. If you umpire in a kiddy league or referee a YMCA volleyball scrimmage, you will gain vital experience. Moreover, you will begin to make the personal contacts that are essential to your progress. At some point people who are responsible for obtaining officials will need to recognize your name and your face and will also have to acknowledge your ability and your readiness to improve before they will ask you to officiate for them.



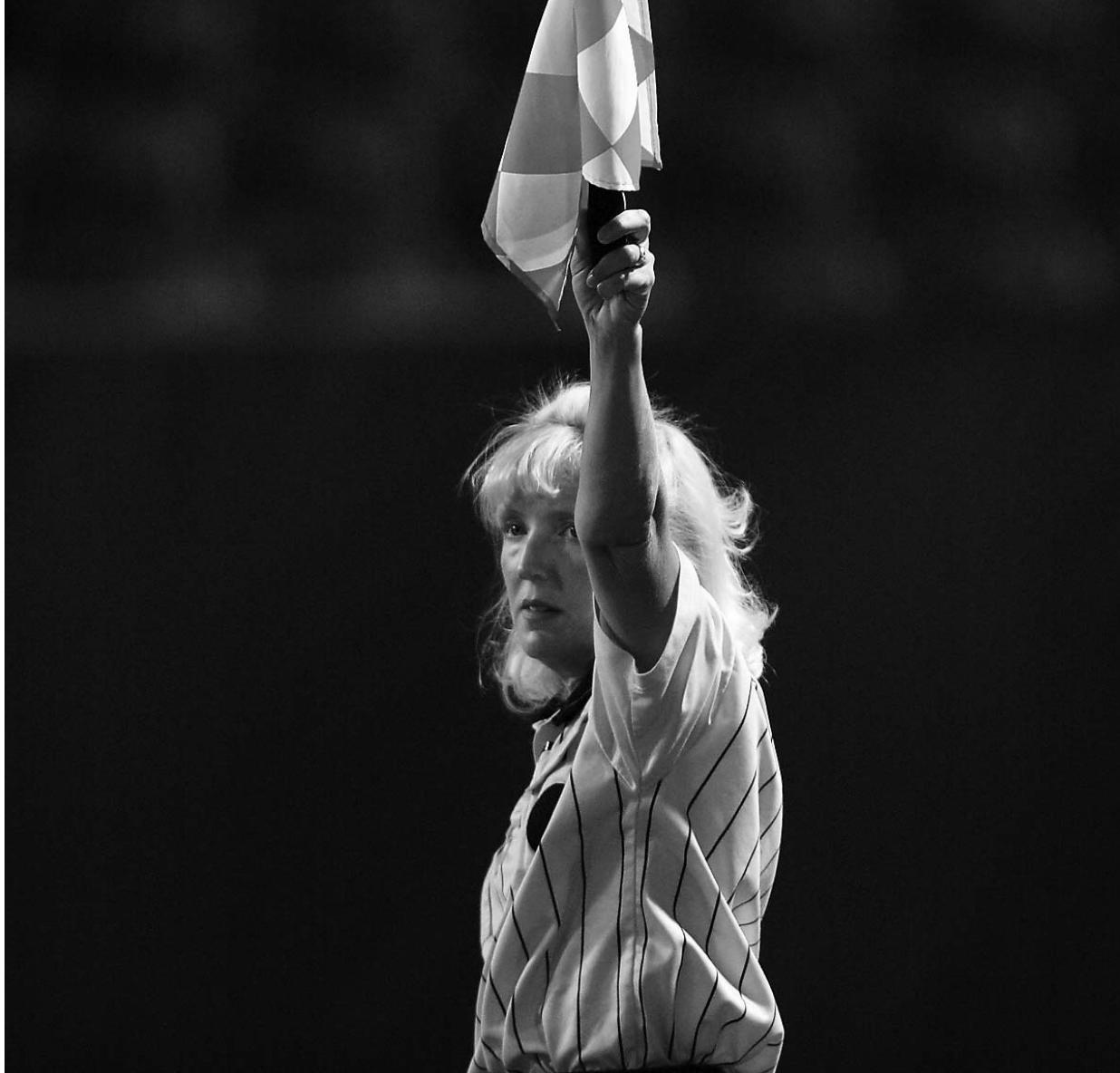
Exposure is the answer to this dilemma. Work as many games or meets as you can, at all levels, for whatever pay is offered, in order to acquire the requisite experience and to convince people of your ambition. If you do this and if your judgment and skills improve, the games will come. Likewise, if you are starting over in a new state after accumulating some experience elsewhere, be prepared to undergo a new apprenticeship or probationary period. Authorities in an unfamiliar territory will be justifiably wary of your claims until you prove yourself beyond question.

A caution: Some people are simply not cut out to be officials. They may be unable to subordinate their personalities in order to succeed. They may suffer when scolded, for instance, or agonize over their mistakes. Or they may not fully understand the "flow" of a sport. Or their judgment may waver. Their stamina may be insufficient. There are dozens of reasons why officiating, as rewarding as it can be for those who fit in, will remain a relatively exclusive avocation.

It should be understood that compromising oneself to obtain games is, in the long run, detrimental to your career. You shouldn't have to beg anyone for games, nor extend a gratuity. Assignments are best earned on the basis of demonstrated ability. Then you won't feel you "owe" anything but an earnest performance when you work.

If you are fortunate enough to come into contact with superior officials, don't hesitate to ask them questions. The truly good ones are generally eager to share their knowledge. They look upon sharing expertise as a way of giving back to the sport which has offered much to them.

Many superior officials openly testify that they themselves were led by someone who they looked upon as a mentor. Don't be reluctant to attach yourself to such a mentor. Watch this person in action when you can and glean from his/her knowledge. Weighing the elements of this leader's approach which fit your philosophy, don't be afraid to pattern yourself after him or her. Imitation is nothing to be ashamed of if the model is widely admired.



## PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Standing still in officiating is probably an illusion. If one is not growing and advancing, one is moving backward. As in any other complex activity, learning is an ongoing process. Complacency and lack of curiosity are its enemies. You can never know enough. You can never "master" the sport. Study should be a constant activity. Rule books and case books should be read cover to cover each year. The official who expects to be on top of the game does it as a matter of course. The rules books of top notch officials are generally rumpled and frayed.

Some officials feel that once they've reached a plateau of understanding, they needn't dig any more. Such officials may think they have arrived, but they are deceiving themselves. They are on a treadmill that is reversing faster than they are

treading. They'll be startled one day when they are tilted off onto the discard pile. The first to recognize this reverse trend will be other officials, your severest critics. The only time you can say you've arrived is when you hang up your whistle for good.

Join a local association. Its members will train you, challenge you, and teach you the ropes – the ropes being how to perform and how to get games and advance to prestigious levels.

In recent years there has been a growth in the number of clinics and seminars held throughout the country. Most of these are regional in scope, and they have a variety of sponsors, from private individuals to major college conferences. Attendance at these gatherings will invariably supply you with useful information. Such sharing of knowledge is designed to standardize techniques and to raise the level of officiating. You might benefit immensely by partaking.

Your state has a system of categorizing and promoting officials. Find out what the steps are, take the exams when offered, and pursue the process avidly. When you do so you'll find yourself moving beyond less conscientious individuals. Don't chance stagnation and mediocrity.

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), through its member state high school associations, offers a national association exclusively for the interscholastic official. Through membership in the NFHS Officials Association, officials throughout the nation are realizing professional growth and benefiting from many services and benefits.

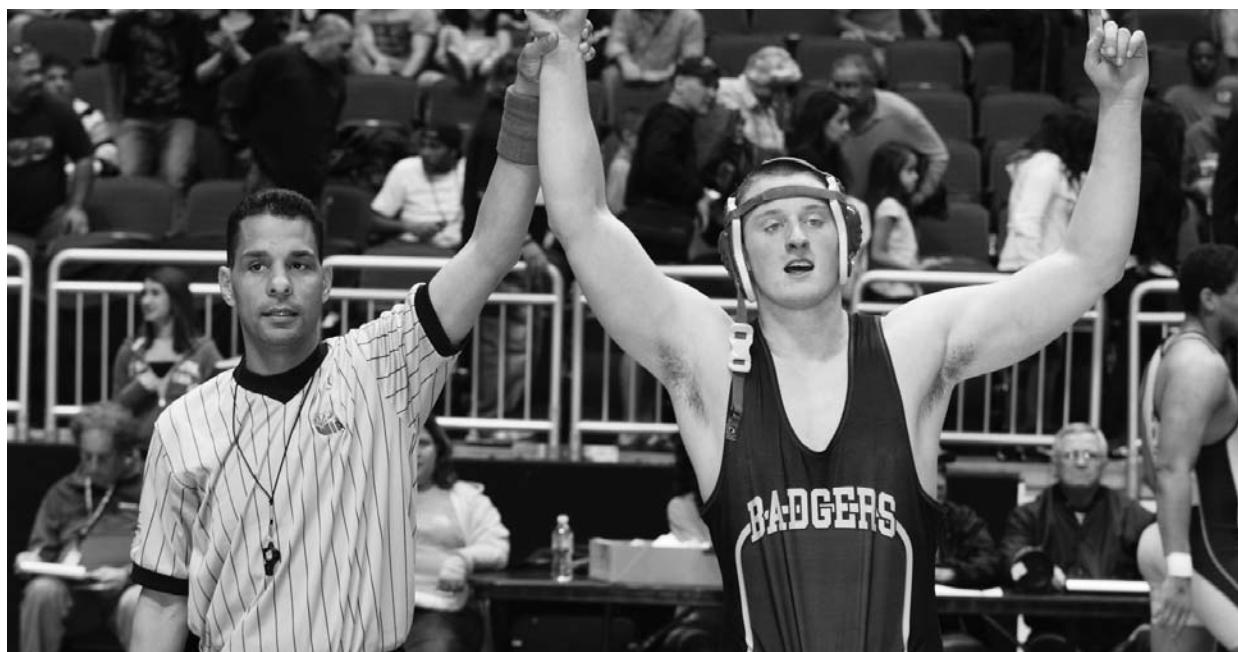
Ask for critiques from people whose judgment you trust. Ask veteran officials to watch your officiating and to point out habits that might detract from your performance. The things we don't know about ourselves are often deterrents to advancement.

Eventually, you'll have to look like an official to succeed. Seeing yourself as others see you will help you evolve a style in your officiating. While correct technique requires a uniformity in mannerisms and signaling, nevertheless each officiating situation has room for a personalized method of behaving. This style you develop should display your physical abilities in their most pleasing fashion. You should exhibit some zest without being an exhibitionist. Participants and on-lookers should feel that you are part of the action, although you should not draw

undue attention from the sport to yourself. In short, you should arrive at a way of behaving that is a cut above drab or mechanical movement, but a cut below flamboyance.

While this style may communicate the genuine you in the officiating outfit, it should enhance and not diminish your system of actual communication. Without a doubt, your ability to communicate may be the most influential aspect of your officiating. Learn the signals of the sport, and deliver them emphatically. Crisp signaling is the mark of a class official. Spectators have a right to be informed. Their impatience is often in direct proportion to their confusion. Also, you must communicate with the participants. Each sport has its constraints and its expectations for talking to players. Learn the limits as well as the requirements for this.

You must also learn the proper and most effective way to communicate with coaches. You must learn when to listen and when not to listen, and in addition you must learn to filter what you hear. No official wants to be accused of "rabbit ears," but neither does one want to shut out reasoned requests. The official must realize that although omniscience has been granted in theory, his or her perspective does have limits. The official should be able to deal rationally with an honest difference of opinion. Your career may rise or fall on your ability to communicate well.





## ETHICALLY SPEAKING

Officiating is a field of honor. Observers may question judgments, but they seldom question integrity. As an honorable person, an official has certain obligations that once breached are considered such serious transgressions that he or she may never recover.

Fulfilling contract obligations is the first of such requirements. Most organizations assign games on a contractual basis. Unless serious circumstances intervene, the official should not cancel a contract. Some school conferences and some officiating groups do provide a system for replacement if emergencies prevent an official from fulfilling a contract. Such a system most likely requires the official to find out who might be available to officiate in his or her place, to inform the league headquarters offering to obtain a substitute, or providing the league with names and numbers of available officials. Never send a sub as your replacement without securing approval from authorities.

Freeing oneself from a contract is a delicate matter that reflects the professionalism and integrity of the individual. It is unethical to cancel a game at one school in order to officiate a more noteworthy game or match. However, if an opportunity presents an unusual chance for advancement, be honest about it and ask to be relieved. Offer to secure a replacement. But accept the contractual obligation if your request is denied. And make this request only if advancement is the motivating factor. Do not do it if money is the principal motive. Your reputation hinges on the basis for your request. Your regard is also contingent upon the frequency of such requests.

Athletics is a culture unto itself and as such it contains its own mythologies and taboos. For the official the unspoken restrictions can be framed as a series of "thou shalt nots," much like the commandments. Some of these, also like the commandments, are easy to define and hard to live up to.

## **Taboos**

1. Never drink alcohol before a contest. Liquor on the breath of an official is the ultimate impropriety. Do not smoke in the vicinity also.
2. Remember, when you are in the public eye, your actions, your gestures, are all subject to a variety of interpretations. Some people will look upon your very uniform with skepticism. Therefore, it behooves you to guard your conduct. If a spectator greets you and you walk over to shake hands, someone is apt to misinterpret that behavior. Don't put your arm around coaches or players. A hands-off policy should be in effect. Avoid the appearance of favoritism. Don't be overly eager or extravagantly charming. It is no time to tell jokes. There is no such thing as your friendly neighborhood official.
3. Coaches may occasionally ply you with questions about last week's game. Be careful not to serve as a scout for coaches. You may feel like the good guy at the time, but unpleasant words about you will get around.

4. Although one must guard against socializing, it is just as damaging to be too aloof. Exchange pleasantries in an even manner. Do not give a distant or indifferent impression. Because you are in a competitive atmosphere, if you have a chip perched on your shoulder, someone will likely knock it off. A book like this cannot structure your personality, but it can present sensible guidelines.
5. Once you know it all, be generous in sharing your expertise with other officials, but do not go around criticizing them. Individual shortcomings of others will certainly surface. Undeserving people will sometimes be promoted over you. Envy may creep into your pattern of thinking. Fight it. To keep your dignity intact, remain loyal to your profession. Backbiters usually get bitten back.
6. Refuse also to be programmed. At some time a coach will sidle up to you and say, "The films show that our opponent..." Handle such insinuations by replying, "We'll look for such violations by both teams, coach. We are determined that neither team should have an advantage." Resist intimidation. Do not let the crowd influence your response. If it hasn't already entered your vocabulary, here is a word that you'll want to have defined: Homer. It's just about the worst thing you can be called.
7. Never even up a call. When you make a mistake, acknowledge it. Admit it to yourself, and to others if necessary, and erase it from your mind. Then go on with a fresh perspective, determined not to "make-up" for the blunder. By the same token, do not rationalize an incorrect call or generate an alibi. Do not describe it differently from what you saw. If you're uncertain of a rule application, admit it and declare that you are going to administer the situation as equitably as you can. Promise to obtain an accurate ruling later on; then do so. One more thing: do not invent violations. Sometimes officials feel they need to call something in order to establish themselves. No one benefits from this kind of creative officiating.

8. Just as there are fine lines in your communications with coaches, so too are there limits in fraternizing with athletes. No matter what their age, treat them as young adults who have attained some stature. By being on a team they have done just that. Never belittle a participant, a play, a situation, or an institution. Never second guess coaching strategy. There is a glut on that market. Besides, others consider themselves far more qualified than you. Do not indulge in put downs or sarcasm with players. They will report you.
9. It follows that one should not curse in the arena. Even if others use inappropriate language, elevate yourself above base language.
10. To hold your function in perspective, keep this next directive in mind as you go about your business: Let the players determine the outcome.

The great scoreboard in the sky has also beeped out some "Lesser Commandments," which are lesser only in the sense that they are easier to observe. These guidelines are followed by the best officials.

## **Guidelines**

1. Strive to remain physically fit. After all, you are moonlighting as an athlete. Therefore, you should resemble one. Obtain a physical exam annually. Exercise. Develop a program for fitness: preseason and inseason. Do not enter a contest without a proper warm-up.
2. If your sport features partners or a crew of officials, prepare for the game with a serious conference, however brief, about procedures. Share with each other your anticipations and expectations. Agree on the duties of each and on your methods of communication. The hardest thing to do in the middle of an event is to improvise, admitting, in effect, "We didn't talk about this before the game."

3. Take pride in your physical appearance. Your uniform should be clean and pressed for each game. If it becomes scruffy through use, discard it. Officials should polish their shoes before every contest. Groom yourself as though preparing for a job interview or as though you were going on stage, because actually you are indeed on display. Your credibility is on the line each time you step forward, and you must reaffirm it each time just as an athlete must re-establish her/his prowess. Looking sharp can go a long way toward helping you be sharp.
4. Do not presume that anyone must cater to your whims or appetites. The schools you visit should furnish you with a place to dress and shower, and if they have them on hand perhaps they will offer you a towel. Anything beyond that is a bonus. Don't expect Band-Aids, tape, aspirin, liniment or refreshments. Leave the premises as clean as you found them. Don't abuse hospitality.
5. Once you're in action, hustle but don't hurry. Learn the difference between hustle and hurry for your sport. One of the most frequent, and justified, criticisms of officials is lack of hustle.
6. Each manual you'll ever read says be fair, be firm. Some people will tell you that you must take command early in the match; show your authority. Seldom is it really necessary to do this. Allow the participants to set the tempo, then adjust yourself to it. If you set your mind to make accurate, emphatic calls—and often an accurate call is no call at all —firmness and fairness will be automatic byproducts.
7. As an independent contractor you must adopt businesslike practices. Return all contracts promptly, and keep accurate files. Record the dates of all commitments faithfully. Keep them where they are readily retrievable. It is a good idea to keep your officiating calendar with you at all times. Have essential maps and phone numbers nearby too. Keep track of income and expenses. The IRS is anxious that you be fastidious in these matters.

# TANGIBLE INTANGIBLES

Each event has a flow or rhythm to it and as an official you will do well to promote that flow rather than disrupt it. It may be some time before you'll learn the elements of this pacing, and apparently some officials never do sense it, but once you understand this subtle concept you will find yourself in tune with the sport. The good official advances on such elusive qualities. At upper levels of officiating, where judgment and physical skill have been meticulously refined, often this indefinable quality separates those who make it to the Big Time from those who never quite reach it.

Another quality which you'll probably spend a lifetime acquiring and which can only be hinted at in this brief space, is, for want of a better phrase, the ability "to make distinctions." Such an ability definitely vies with the key item heretofore mentioned, communication, as the single most important ingredient for success as an official.

Clearly, rules are written to be observed, but a great deal of judgment is involved in applying them. So far, robots and computers, as sophisticated as they may be, have not threatened to take over officiating. You must absorb a considerable amount of "know-how" to have your judgment conform with the expectations of the sport.

You'll hear statements such as, "Go by the book"; "Call 'em the same way regardless of the score or the time left to play"; "Be consistent"; "You can't disregard the rules, apply them all evenly, a violation is a violation." Well, the rules were written with an intent, and their design basically is to equalize competition, to make things fair. The above maxims may sound like solid words to live by but they are in fact largely myths. Events do not furnish neat black-and-white situations, like the officials' uniform. If you offer these excuses to rationalize your calls, you'll become known as a "nit picker."

You must learn to officiate by the "spirit" of the rules. Although you can't simply ignore or set aside rules, the spirit of the rules varies according to the situation. The level of competition, for instance, does matter. The score of the contest should be taken into account. Contestants whose acts are designed to bait

or to humiliate an opponent should be punished for those acts. Then, too, the strike zone ought to be different for a diminutive little leaguer than it is for a 6-foot American Legion slugger. A takedown in wrestling may be different for a 78-pound novice than it would be for a heavyweight state champion. The three-second lane in basketball should be different for the 4-foot munchkin than it is for the 6-10 sky hook. The legality of a swimming turn should be different for a JV beginner than it is for the polished record-challenger. "Illegal use of the hands" in football should be different for the sixth-grade mighty mite than it is for the varsity behemoth. Ask someone to define "spiking the football" for instance.

How different? Who is to define these distinctions? Father Time will help, experience. Common sense will be a factor. But tuning in to fellow officials will offer a more effective channel, and wiring in to a classy veteran official, a mentor, may be the best way of all.

This is not to say you may set aside the rules. Rather you must make adjustments in how you apply them.

Once you learn this abstract system of justice you will have graduated to the status of veteran yourself.

Much has been made about the way sports resemble life. Such a comparison is somewhat strained. Sports may furnish a proving ground for testing the emotions and they provide goals worth striving for, but basically they are pageants and rituals that our society somehow holds dear. Unlike our usual daily existence with all its complications, athletics have a prescribed beginning point and a careful set of rules. Whatever drama they arouse is basically contrived. When the game concludes, neatly and with a calculable result, the winner rejoices briefly, the loser suffers momentarily, the tally gets scribbled somewhere, and life goes on.

For the participant and the official, however, the process that leads up to the athletic confrontation – the training, the pursuit of knowledge and the tremors of anticipation – these intangibles are what ultimately matter. Add to this a sense of service on behalf of others' welfare and you have the role of the official.