



What We Learned

Lessons taken from the NFL referees' lockout

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As an official, I hate to criticize other officials – especially those of another sport. But watching the NFL replacement officials got me thinking about issues that touch all officials' organizations. The labor negotiations between the NFL and NFLRA made for very public drama when the professional football season started in September. Here are some lessons we can all take from the episode.

1. Moving up too fast too soon is bad for everyone.

The replacement refs were well-trained – for their level. You know those people in your group who are new and want to know when they can expect their first college assignment? This is how it would look if they got it. You might know your fouls and setups and have decent game management techniques, but the big stage can instill doubt in even the best officials.

Everything at the highest levels of every sport gets intensified. Experience counts. It was a disservice to the officials, players and coaches to put people who have not been prepared for this situation and then scrutinize them as if they had the same preparation as the professional officials.

2. NFL officials really know what they are doing.

To become an NFL official means you are at the top of the top – the 1 percent of the 1 percent. You rarely make mistakes, you never lose your cool and you *always* look good doing it.

With replacement officials, the general football-viewing audience noticed things they had never noticed before, like just how crisp Ed Hochuli's signals are, how exact Tony Corrente's verbiage is, that Mike Carey does all of the officiating stuff really well *and* knows where the camera is and how to work his microphone.

Knowing how to officiate is one thing. Being able to do it on national TV while making it look like you could do it in your sleep is another. The skill of making it look effortless is what makes a great official blend seamlessly into the fabric of a game.

3. Officials really are the third team on the field.

The NFL was willing to allow games to take place with replacement officials. It affected outcomes and underestimated the role officials play.



To have a game you need players, coaches and officials. You don't need owners, general managers, fans or even a league office. Officials are essential and in a league that operates in billions of dollars, they will get what they pay for. Underestimating the skills and abilities of a veteran officiating staff likely cost the NFL more than it imagined.

The NFL's referees' lockout has made fans much more aware of officials, how they are trained and how important they are to the product. It's unfortunate that realization had to come in this manner. The NFL and NFLRA reached an agreement and the "real refs" returned Sept. 27, much to fans' relief. But in hindsight, the discussion around the lockout can be productive and enlightening for all of us.

Ring of Fire / How to ace your offseason workout

Don't want to be at the gym, but don't want to just go for a run? This workout will kick your butt and give you a break from the monotony.

Decide beforehand how much time you have, and get through as many cards as you can. It takes me about an hour to get through an entire 52-card deck.

- Take a deck of cards with you to a field, shuffle them and lay them out in a circle face down.
- Hearts are sit-ups. Choose any style or change it up throughout the workouts.
- Diamonds are pushups.
- Spades are a 30-yard run or sprint.
- Clubs are wide-stand mountain climbers. Start in push-up position with one foot on the outside of your hand, jumping the opposite foot up to the other hand and back to the starting position. That's one rep.
- The number on the card you pull is the number of reps you need to do of that exercise.

Have water handy – you'll need it – and take small breaks if necessary.