



Tips for Productive Coach/Official Communication

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What do sports officials have in common with hostage negotiators, peace treaty brokers and marriage counselors? They must be master communicators.

Some officials wrongfully neglect this aspect of their jobs. They want to be responsible for knowing the rules and calling the game between the lines, but not communicating with coaches on the sideline. There's an art to deescalating heated and emotional conflicts. Officials need to incorporate this as part of their craft. The best officials are the best game managers. Clear and consistent communication is paramount. Coaches who are at ease with the officiating crew--who feel like they are being heard--are more likely to respect and accept your decisions as an official. With players following suit, it makes for a more harmonious contest.

As with any relationship, it does take two to tango, so here are some tips to foster productive communication.

Golden Rule

Coaches

Be aware of your tone and address officials the way you might address a friend or colleague. Some officials hear only the tone of your voice before deciding to ignore it. Whine, bark or yell, and you won't be heard.

Officials

Coaches are passionate. Listen beyond their tones to hear and understand their underlying questions or concerns. Be polite in your responses.

Timeouts and Halftime

Coaches

Use these player stoppages to get answers to complicated questions or to address player safety concerns. This allows for more clearheaded communication between you and the official, rather than talking on the fly.

Officials

Be available to coaches at these times, and listen with an open mind. Answer rules-related questions using the specific language of the rules. If coaches simply need to vent, reassure them that you have heard and understand their concerns.



Rules Knowledge

Coaches

Know what's in the rulebook, and have one handy for games. Knowledgeable coaches will get more attention and better results.

Officials

Know what's in the rulebook. Know it like the back of your hand. Have it down cold. This allows you to listen to coaches and decipher the meaning in their comments. It also will lead to better consistency among your crew. Always have the rulebook onsite.

Self-Awareness

Coaches

You want to win, and with that desire comes emotion. Realize that you see the game through this lens, and that your perspective may be biased. Set a great example for your players by always prioritizing sportsmanship in your dealings with officials.

Officials

Your job is to operate from a position of reason and impartiality, not emotion. The more fired up the coach gets, the calmer you should be.