



## Three Rules for Dealing with On-Field Conflict in Lacrosse

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There is some great officiating advice from the movie “Roadhouse” that comes from the scene where Dalton, played by Patrick Swayze, explains his three simple rules for bouncers.

1. **Never underestimate your opponent.** Expect the unexpected.
2. **Take it outside.** Never start anything inside the bar unless it’s absolutely necessary.
3. **Be nice.**

This is good advice for officials, because the job of a bouncer and an official are remarkably similar.

- Both manage a defined area filled with different individuals each day.
- Both are constantly on the lookout for anything that might spark an altercation.
- Both spend more time than the average person dealing with individuals who are not always on their best behavior.
- Both must maintain a professional demeanor when one or more people start acting out in anger.
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If we don’t keep our composure, there is no reason for anyone else to, which is why officials must understand and follow Swayze’s three rules.

### **Never Underestimate Your Opponent**

This is terrific advice for officials, even though we aren’t competing against the teams. We need to know if it’s a rivalry game, a game with a more experienced bunch versus a brand-new program, or a game with preexisting bad blood between the teams.

Knowing the teams involved informs the second part of the rule—expect the unexpected—which is the job description of every official in every sport. We go into every game expecting it to follow a familiar pattern, but we must also be ready to act when something unexpected happens. The only way to do this is to read the rule and case books, and discuss situations with fellow officials. It took five years before I saw the head of a stick fly off on a successful shot, but I had read the section on waving off a good goal so many times that I knew I had to wipe the goal when the head came off unexpectedly.



## Take it Outside

At first glance, you might not think this applies so much to lacrosse. What it really means is don't have an argument or fight in front of the guests—in our case, the fans and players. I will gladly have a discussion with a head coach during an appropriate dead ball situation, but I'm not getting into an argument on judgment or an applied ruling that I know I made correctly. And I am certainly not going to start the argument. If the coach wants to continue after I'd told him to stop, I'll penalize according to my best judgment. He might get the last word, but I get the last action.

## Be Nice

This one is my favorite. It reminds me of the golden rule we all learned in grade school: Treat others how you would like to be treated. As an official, I want to move coaches and players from confrontation to compliance in the smoothest manner possible, and the best way to do that is by simply being nice. Some officials might read this and wonder why I'm encouraging being nice in the face of not-so-nice behavior and insults. I'll refer back to Swayze's character Dalton, who has a great line explaining that a certain insulting word is just "two nouns combined to elicit a prescribed response" (I'll let you fill in the blank). I'm not advocating that you permit a player, coach, or fan to abuse you without consequences. In fact, I strongly encourage officials who have drawn a line about behavior to penalize appropriately according to their judgment. Just be nice about it.

So, where is the line? When do you stop being Mr. Nice Ref and start dispensing justice? For me, it depends on the game.

In a U11 game, my threshold for poor behavior and insults is much lower than, say, a high school playoff game. For one, in the U11 game, there might be all of forty people along the sideline, and I can hear every comment pretty easily. If I can hear it, the kids can hear it, and they don't need to hear variations on phrases for what comes out of farm animals while playing on a lazy Saturday afternoon. Neither do I. Flag down!

A rivalry high school playoff game, on the other hand, might have a thousand people crowding the stands. I'll have a hard enough time hearing my partner's whistle, let alone what a coach is yelling at me. The environment itself creates a higher threshold before I judge the need to address problem behavior, but if someone crosses that threshold, I'll step in.

I hear from several officials that coaches have gotten too over the top, that players have no respect for men and women in stripes, and don't even get me started on fan behavior. I also hear that the behavior is getting worse and people need to learn to respect officials.



I've had many experiences with people acting poorly at every level of play, but here's how I look at it: **I can't control anyone's behavior whether I'm wearing stripes or not, but I can control my attitude.** I choose to be nice until it's time to not be nice. This mindset is not a cure-all. It will not decrease the number of incidents you run into on the field, but it will decrease the number of escalated incidents, because you're not adding gasoline to the fire.