



## Six Sideline Guidelines for “Official” Fans

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I love watching lacrosse games from the stands, because I rarely get an opportunity to just be a fan. As an official and a trainer, I’m usually on the field or running a classroom session for officials who will be on the field. This doesn’t end with the season either. I’m still working tournament games, breaking down game film, or thinking about new ways to engage officials in learning mechanics. So when I get an off day from officiating, I find my way to a lacrosse game just to watch and be a fan.

If you’re an official who, like me, enjoys getting out to watch games, here are a few guidelines that will help ensure that you enjoy the game and maintain a level of professional distance from the other fans.

### **1. Sit far away from everyone else**

This can’t be helped in a packed house, but most games aren’t filled to the brim with people. If you’re alone or with a group of officials, find a spot that is away from the fans. Several times, I’ve found myself in an area packed with people shouting silly comments. I don’t like listening to that when I’m reffing, and I really don’t enjoy it from the guy sitting two seats above me. Move away and you’ll enjoy the game that much more.

### **2. Don’t advertise your presence as an official**

Leave the association collared shirt and your ref hat at home. That kind of attire will get noticed, and then you’ll be pestered with questions about how the refs (your colleagues) are doing, and your opinion on rule interpretations. You don’t want to have an impromptu training session with people who are emotionally invested in the outcome of the game. If you can help it, don’t shout down the guy yelling “bad call” at your friends because you felt it was a great call. Your friends are wearing the stripes and they can stand up to the comments.

### **3. Deflect questions that come your way**

This is a tough one for me, because my job boils down to answering questions. Still, if someone in the stands recognizes you as an official and wants to know why the refs didn’t call the most obvious trip in the world, you can deflect the question with: “He probably had a better angle from where he was standing,” or “I’m just here to watch the game. I didn’t get a great look at the trip you’re talking about.”



#### **4. Don't argue with those who do not know any better**

As Mark Twain said, "Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience." This is not a knock on fans. I've just heard a lot more naïve comments from most fans because, hey, they're fans! I grind my teeth every time I hear "If the ball hits two pipes, it's a goal!" Remember: You won't convince them of your rulebook knowledge in the heat of a close game. Trying to explain to a fan that the entire ball must pass the entire line and that neither of you are in the best spot to make the call will not end well.

#### **5. Don't get caught up in the game**

If you're at a game to watch your son or daughter play, then by all means get pumped up, just don't behave in a way that will make others question your integrity as an official. If you're just there to watch a game and you don't have a rooting interest, then be cool. There's nothing wrong with applauding a well-executed fast break or a stellar strip by a defenseman, but we're not there to rag on officials for a perceived missed call.

#### **6. Be ready to give feedback after the game, but only if asked.**

If I run into an official I've trained as he's gearing up in the parking lot and he asks me to see how he's doing, I'll make a couple notes and let him know, but I'm not going to give unsolicited feedback if I'm not there to observe the crew. It's not fun to wrap up a well-officiated game and have a fellow official swing by and critique your game without asking. If you meet with the crew for a meal after the game, it's best to just say good game and ask how it went for the crew.

Similar to what coaches tell players all the time, our conduct off the field will impact how others perceive officials. If we are courteous and respectful to folks in the stands while we are enjoying the game, then we've done our job as ambassadors for our fellow zebras.

The last guideline, but by far the most important, is to have fun! You're at a lacrosse game and you're not responsible for anything except to enjoy the game.