



## PhD in Stripes

Getting to the top requires a lifetime of continued self-education

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If you're a regular reader of my column – I have to assume there are some out there besides my mom – then you're familiar with sayings that lacrosse trainers emphasize, like being a “student of the game.” Last year, I wrote about being an outlier, as Malcolm Gladwell defines it, and aiming to get in your 10,000 hours of lacrosse work so you can be an expert.

As a clinician, I have found there are some people who are really working for their 10,000 hours but constantly falling short. And then there are people who are nowhere near 10,000 hours but are beginning to excel.

The difference between these two types of officials is the ability to self-evaluate.

Officials who are consumers of training sign up, go, listen and then try to implement in almost robotic fashion. More initiated officials try to assist trainers in their evaluations, ask clarifying questions to sort feedback and analyze game situations. They work smarter, not just harder.

It's similar to completing a doctorate degree. The purpose is to become an expert in a subject area, but the process is supposed to be one that teaches the student how to teach themselves. It's the beginning of a lifetime of continued self-education.

If as an official you strive to earn the highest achievements, you must develop the skills to teach and learn from yourself. Because for most of your games, you will not have a mentor, observer, rater or evaluator watching you.

Reflect on what went well and what you can improve. If a routine play escalated into a major penalty, can you think of the exact moment you should have reacted? Were there times in the game your partner did something with which you disagreed? Did you have the courage to ask about it? Was your communication with the coaches productive, or did it leave you wishing you could have handled the situation better? What will you do to make it better next time?



## A Day in the Life

By a narrow margin over some other Beatles classics, “A Day in the Life” is my favorite song of theirs. Who doesn’t like a little slice-of-life narrative?

Some full-time coaches complain officiating is something people do part time, implying that a part-time effort is given. This criticism is unfounded, short-sighted, and unproductive. Many officials are very passionate about this second job, and they take great pains to assure they can participate in it despite their full-time jobs.

Which brings me back to John and Paul’s classic. A day in the life of an official? It likely starts in darkness between 5 and 7 a.m, to get to the gym for a workout or to get to a desk early so you can leave early. You work an eight-hour day, and then get in your car to drive anywhere from a half-hour for a high school game to 4-5 hours for a Division I college game.

You work the game – about two hours from prep to finish – do the reverse drive home, arrive back to family and loved ones after dinner.

Shower, fall into bed, rinse and repeat.

The saturated game schedule in many areas means the demand for officials is seven days a week. The only days you get off are the ones you block on your calendar, usually because your significant other is wondering what you look like from February to May.

This is not a plea for sympathy or a call for recognition. It’s just a classic slice of life. As Herm Edwards said at the 2012 US Lacrosse National Convention, “Officials never have a home game.” This is so true. Yes, we have other jobs, but we all share our love of the game. Maybe keep a granola bar and a bottle of water at the field for the official to take home.

Those car rides can be brutal.