



10 Tips for More Effective Game Management

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As an official, you have three responsibilities: Keep the game safe, keep the game fair and act in a professional manner.

The difficult part comes when you make a necessary and appropriate safety or fairness call and one sideline rants and raves. Maintaining your cools when the crowd is booing, players are grumbling and coaches are complaining is not easy. Knowing the rules, being in the right spot and looking professional are all well and good, but what you need in these situations is solid game management skills.

The first thing you need to realize is that officials manage the game, we do not control it. We react to what happens. If we are lucky, we react before something bad happens. More often, we react after an incident occurs. To manage a game effectively, you need to manage people: players, coaches, table personnel and sometimes even spectators.

You have a number of tools in your toolbox, the most obvious being your whistle and flag. Less obvious—but much more important—are your communication skills. The better you can communicate what you want coaches, players and game personnel to do, the more likely they are to do it.

Here are ten tips to help you to manage a game more effectively.

1. Be Professional

Your interactions with players, coaches and table personnel begin well before you arrive on the field.

- Did you send an email to the home team's coach confirming the game site and time?
- Do you know where your partner is and where to meet?
- Are you both dressed in neat, clean and identical uniforms?
- Did you inspect the field, introduce yourself to the coaches, and conduct your coaches' certifications in a timely manner?
- Did you fill out a certification card provided by your local officials association?
- Did you inform the coach on when you would ask for captains?
- Did you ask about the National Anthem?
- Did you conduct the coin toss when you said you would?
- Did you inspect the goals?
- Did you certify the table personnel?

The coaches expect you to look the part and to do your job, and if you deviate even slightly from these expectations, you have opened yourself up to criticism before the game even begins.



2. Be in the Right Spot

Employing proper mechanics is essential to good game management. Coaches and players may not have a firm grasp of mechanics, but the closer you are to the play, the less likely they are to argue a call. If it's close, sell the call!

3. Be Focused

Being in the right spot won't help you if you're looking in the wrong place. Focus on your area of responsibility. Do not ball watch! During live-ball play, concentrate on your keys: on-ball and off-ball, goal and crease as the lead and the shooter as the trail official. During dead balls, remain focused on the players. Keep an eye on the goal scorer and the defenders. Be vigilant as the teams cross and move to their huddles during time outs. You will miss things, but missing an offside in transition is better than missing a late hit on the shooter or the goalie, or two players jawing and shoving after a goal.

4. Be Quiet

How you say something is often more important than what you say. You may simply be explaining why you made a call or what a player did, but your tone may give the exact opposite impression. Never throw an angry flag. When reporting penalties, do so in a calm and controlled manner. Your goal is to keep everyone calm. Your volume should be loud enough to communicate but not so loud as to confront or to incite.

5. Be Open

The rules do not require you to address questions from the coaches unless it is a coach's challenge (Rule 7:13). But do not make the mistake of refusing to talk with them at all. If a coach, even an assistant, has a question and asks in a respectful manner, it is in your best interest to keep the lines of communication open.

Coaches are going to talk. Yes, every coach is trying gain an advantage and influence. That is part of the game. They are going to disagree with you. They are going to yell and scream.

"That was a slash!"

"How can you not call that?"

"Ward!"

"They're offsides!"

"He's in the crease!"

You don't need coaches to agree with your every call. It is never going to happen. So, as far as most coaches comments are concerned, ignore them and do not respond. You do not always need to be talking. Learn to listen! Sometimes coaches just need to vent. Let them. For the most part, treat the yelling and complaining as white noise.



6. Be Calm

When speaking with coaches, be calm and composed. Watch your tone and your body language. Choose words that avoid confrontations and do not demean the person you address. If you are trying to control behavior, the last thing you need to do is incite more misbehavior. Avoid sarcasm. It is unprofessional and easily misinterpreted by coaches. You do not want to throw gasoline on the fire.

7. Be Brief

In the same vein as being calm, be brief. Once the game starts, focus on what you need to communicate to manage the game and no more. Saying too much will get you in trouble more often than saying too little. Remember, your goal is to have a safe, fair game. It is not to win arguments or punish players, coaches or fans.

8. Be Quick

The best way to get a coach and players to stop complaining is to restart the play quickly. Once the ball is in play, players play and coaches coach. The added advantage is that once play has started, you must now move away from the table area and into position.

9. Be Humble

You will screw up. Get over it. Own it. Deal with it.

Do not try and hide behind the stripes. Do not pretend it did not happen. How you handle making a mistake can have a huge impact on your ability to manage the game. "Coach, I missed that one," goes a long way. If it is in your power to fix it, then do so (Rule 7:13).

10. Be in Control

Sometimes, these tips and techniques are not enough or the behavior on the field requires that you take more serious action. If a coach is out of control, the most important thing is that you remain in control. If you can, you want to avoid going nuclear. Immediately flagging someone for unsportsmanlike conduct for arguing with you leaves you with no other option left and a second violation will result in an ejection.



Use [the Ramp](#). The Ramp is a series of options you have when dealing with coaches.

- Talk it through with the coach. If he disagrees with your brief explanation, so be it. Restart play quickly and get the game moving. Hopefully he will get back to coaching his team. You may even want to get away from the coach and move to the far side.
- If that does not alleviate the issue, your first option is a verbal warning: “Coach, that’s enough.” Be calm and quiet. You don’t want to appear to threaten a coach or player.
- Your next option is a loose-ball or dead-ball conduct foul. This gives the ball to the opposing team without putting anyone in the box.
- Next is the 30-second conduct foul. You are now giving the opposing team a man-up opportunity. The in-home serves these bench penalties. Do so calmly and quietly. No angry flags.
- Your next option is the nuclear option, a non-releasable unsportsmanlike conduct for one, two or three minutes. And finally, a second unsportsmanlike conduct, which by rule must be a three-minute non-releasable ejection foul.

Follow these steps and try and leave yourself as many options as possible when dealing with players and coaches. You never want to paint yourself into a corner, such as:

“Coach, the next word out of you gets a flag!”

Sometimes, you can let the coach vent and move on. It’s just white noise.

That being said, there are lines that cannot be crossed. These include:

- Profanity and racist comments
- Player or coach questioning your integrity as an official
- Threats
- Out of control behavior

This type of behavior demands that you skip the first few steps of the ramp and move immediately to unsportsmanlike conduct.

Remember, your goal is to keep the game safe, keep the game fair and to act in a professional manner. So the next time you find yourself on the field surrounded by an angry crowd, disgruntled players and irate coaches, use these ten tips to better manage people and in turn, manage the game.

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