

Being a Good Mentor

Author: Matt Palumb

Being a good mentor is the lifeline of officiating. Especially in the sport of lacrosse, where there is a shortage in the number and quality of officials. We need to do everything we can to encourage young and new officials to strive to get better and move up to face new challenges. We need to make sure that we are not *"guarding against new officials taking our games."* That type of mentality is a cancer in the officiating world. Instead of worrying about new officials taking your games, use your mentoring to remind yourself of all the little things that have gotten you to where you are. I feel like I was better last year than I was the year before. If you ever think you have officiating "all figured out", you are missing the boat. I've been working at various levels for 23 years, and not a year goes by when something doesn't happen that is new to me and makes me think about what I can do differently to improve.

Ego. Starting with the person writing this; none of us have all the answers, and none of us are immune to mistakes. The first thing I let young refs know is, just like the players and coaches, we are part of the human element of sport. Just as players and coaches don't like every decision they make during a game, you can put the officials in the same category. Mistakes happen. The question is what do you do with your mistakes? You have to be a good self-evaluator. Refs who come out of every game and say: *"Everything was great, no problems, coaches were great;"* those guys worry me a little bit. Sometimes, yes, we get through a game unscathed. However there is at least a play or two that we'd like to have back. The late Warren Kimber would often walk into the locker room after a game and ask the crew: *"Anything you'd like to have back in that game?"* I think it's a great question that you should ask yourself after every game you work. If all three guys are honest self-evaluators, the 15 minute discussion you can have as the crew goes over questionable plays is so valuable to your development. Mentors and mentees alike; check your egos at the door!

Simplify. Don't bombard a new official with a million tips. The tricky part is; what is most important? When I am trying to help new officials, I start with a handful of things that an official can control.

- Appearance - Are we in shape and have the proper uniform that fits right and looks good on us? Rules. Lacrosse has a rule book. There is no excuse to not know the rules.
- Communication - Not quite as black and white as uniform and rules, but communication has saved refs from many a bad call! Can you use your people skills to diffuse tough situations? Nothing wrong with saying, *"I made a mistake."* *"I missed it."* *"I'll get a better look next time."* You can only go to that well so many times during a game, but coaches appreciate the truth.

Keep it fun. Let's remind ourselves that this is not life or death and that there are more important things in the world than officiating a lacrosse game. Are games important? Sure they are. However, there is a reason they're called "games." Do not intimidate a new official by making a game, a play, or a call a defining moment in a person's life.

Let's help our new refs feel comfortable and enjoy it. We need them!

Matt Palumb – Author Biography



- Began officiating lacrosse in 1992
- Started officiating college lacrosse in 1996
- First NCAA playoff game in 1999
- Officiated in every Final Four since 2001
- Played ('88, '89, '90) and officiated ('05, '10, '12) in 3 NCAA Division 1 title games
- MLL official since the league's inception in 2001
- Officiated 7 MLL Championship games
- Officiated the 2002 U19 World Games in Baltimore, MD.
- Officiated the 2006 Open World Games in London, ONT
- Division 1 basketball referee