



Working with New Officials

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Reviewed by the Men's Officials Training Group (MOTG)

Special thanks to Harold Buck for additional review.

July 13, 2015

Several years ago I worked a pre-season scrimmage as the Referee with six new lacrosse officials. I was apprehensive about this scrimmage because I was the only experienced lacrosse official on the field. The challenge was to make sure I worked with and watched all six officials while keeping the scrimmage safe. The only way to do this efficiently is with a thorough, yet simple pre-game.

When working with a new official, simplify their responsibilities. I can't remember my first game, but I do remember what my Referee said, "*I want you to blow your whistle on that sideline, that end line, and that goal, conduct faceoffs, and throw your flag anytime there's contact that makes you cringe. I'll cover everything else.*" I did just that. And while the game is still a blur I felt good that I could blow my whistle and throw my flag.

I put together a short pre-game list for when I work with new officials in a two-person crew to simplify things and start building their confidence. Unless the official asks questions I keep to these six topics:

1. You'll stay far side all game.

If I know the coaches communicate reasonably with officials we'll work the usual two-person rotation, otherwise keeping the new official on the far side for their first few games is prudent. However, there are games where the far sideline is not the best place for the new official and it may be smart to have that official remain on the bench side if the coaches act properly so you can handle the spectator sideline. Another option is "The Wheel," where the Referee starts bench side the first quarter, flips to the far side second and third, and then comes back for the fourth quarter. The Referee is bench side during the quarters that are usually more contentious and the Umpire gets experience on both sidelines.

2. Trail watches what on a shot?

I always ask the new official this question. If there is one thing I want my new partner to do right it is watching the shooter on a shot as the Trail Official. The very first shot when I am the Lead I watch the shooter and the official to see if his or her eyes stay on the shooter. If they are then I focus on my responsibilities as Lead the rest of the game. If they're not I will file that away for a quick discussion at the next extended dead ball. Remember that just because the new official does something correctly once that does not mean he will do it correctly all of the time. When in doubt, put your eyes on the shooter.



3. You have that sideline and that end line.

There is no way for one official on the opposite side of the field to correctly whistle out of bounds calls and be believable. This is a mechanic the new official has to learn and learn quickly. I keep a close eye on his restarts and if he messes up a restart I'll jump in with my whistle to get everything settled.

4. You have that goal and that crease.

Same principle applies as the out of bounds calls here. The new official has to get comfortable recognizing when he needs to blow the whistle. Some can be hesitant. If I'm getting that vibe I'll tell them to look at me and if I'm giving them a thumbs up signal to blow the whistle because it was a good goal.

5. If alarm bells are going off in your head throw the flag even if you don't know what the penalty is.

Many new officials get hung up on what the penalty is and never get the flag out of their pocket. Tell him to throw it, and then talk about it on the dead ball. This is much better than the new official not throwing the flag when he knows there is a penalty but isn't sure what it is. Who cares if he confuses the cross check signal with the slash signal? The key is that he makes the call!

6. I will back you up all day.

Part of building confidence is telling the new official that you support him. He is going to mess up and you both need to roll with the errors and use them as teachable moments. As the more experienced official on the field, you are going to work much harder than you normally would during a game with a capable partner. The more work you put into the new official the more he will get out of his first few games and he'll be more likely to stick with it.

We can fall into a very bad attitude when we share an assignment with a new official. We start thinking about how much more we need to do to make the game go smoothly. If you let that attitude take hold of you the new official is going to see it and get discouraged because you're not taking the time to help. If it happens one time, that can be understood. But if the new official keeps getting more experienced partners who treat him like a burden instead of a good official looking to break out and succeed, then he'll be gone within a year.

Make it your mission to build the confidence and skills of every new official you work with. They might surprise you later saying you were an official who really encouraged them their first year and that's why they stuck with officiating.