

## The Crew Saver

As sports officials we often have to possess just enough ego to carry us through our avocation on a game-by-game basis. Sometimes that ego is backed by a hard-bound knowledge of the rules. For others it's the ability manage a situation or a game with an aplomb that is clearly recognized by the participants and peers. More often, though, that ego can manifest itself in a presumably negative manner in situations where we believe a partner has trespassed upon our territory or our area of coverage.

I'm certain everyone reading this who has donned the stripes – whether it be football, hockey, lacrosse, etc. – has been told very early in their career not to “step on your partner's toes”, or “don't cook in my kitchen”. It is very sage advice. Barring the exception of a veteran referee working with a trainee that may need a helper or two in any given game, each official on a lacrosse field should be responsible solely for his area of coverage. To have long-toss bombs or whistles coming from every angle can be chaotic to crew and coaches.

Basically, the credo is to let the guy who has eyes on the play to live or die with his decision to let go what may appear to be a foul.

What if the official closest to the play does not have eyes on the action, though? Wouldn't it make sense to offer a helper? Wouldn't you want some help in that moment when your horse blinders prevented you from seeing some dastardly incident? Absolutely, yes! That's why we have what's known as the “Crew Saver”; a must-have flag from your partner on that bone-crunching illegal hit, the two-handed swing of the stick to an opponent's back, or even the push into the crease when you, the lead official, feet straddled at GLE and toes on the crease line could use a little help as to how the attacker got there before you call him for a violation.

Essentially, the Crew Saver is when everyone in the house knows a foul occurred except the covering official. It's a call that has to be made, yet the official who seemingly is the right person to make it is actually the last to know about it.

Just recently I was a crew chief in a major local high school rivalry game. The field judge on my crew (3-person game) was one with a few years of experience, and was inarguably working the biggest game of his career. I trusted his ability to get through it, and one point of emphasis I made in the pre-game was for him to cast his line in his own pond and “don't fish in mine”. Then I added the “However...” and went on about Crew Savers.

I explained there will be times when your partner is straight-lined to a play or possibly screened. If you see a clear-cut, 100%, no-doubt-about-it, crystal clear violation or heavy foul that just has to be called, allow your partner a brief moment to be the first to fling. In that moment eye him for the possibility of the straight line or screen and if that appears to be the case; fire away! Other Crew Saver situations involve loose ball line play. Typically when a ball is being bandied about on the ground by opposing players near a line the ‘On’ official is looking down at ball & feet to ensure he knows who knocked it out of bounds or committed the line violation. So what if a push or worse happens high or just outside the fray? How's the person closest to it going to see it if he is uber-focused on the turf below?

He's not. That's where the Crew Saver comes in.

Midway through the second quarter there was a loose ball contested heavily atop the crease. As the Lead, I mowed the lawn along GLE to get as close as possible to the cylinder to ensure everything around or in it was on the up-and-up. As the goalkeeper tennis-raked the ball a symphony of opponents' sticks chopped at his attempting to pop the loose before he dragged it into the crease, I suddenly heard the crescendo; a loud thud that I knew was just off to my left above the goal line. "Uh oh," I thought as I heard the nearby visiting team bench erupt about some egregious action that just happened (according to the coach) "RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU!" Except, no; whatever happened did not happen right in front of me, it happened nearby but adjacent to the action I was primarily responsible for.

Then the aria occurred as the shouting from the bench reached its height. Over the cacophony I heard the sweet sound of "Flag Down!" followed by a whistle from the trail position. As I turned left I saw the aftermath of some extreme physical action by the defending team. Two bodies strewn on the carpet, player in white on top of the player in dark who looked like he just got run over by a steamroller. The screaming from the bench quieted immediately and there at trail awaiting to give me his call before reporting it was the fresh-faced junior official, all bug-eyed and visibly nervous about having just tossed a flag in his crew chief's area. I'm sure the smile of relief and nod I gave back put him at ease for the moment.

Later on in our post-game debrief, the conversation went something like this: "That flag you had near the crease was a great call. It was the call of the game. It was an absolute crew saver."

The lesson here is that we all own and operate in and around our own neighborhoods. We don't need be too eager to help where help is not wanted. But when that one moment arrives, when that call that-has-to-be-made occurs, and it's sure-as-shootin' that the official who should've made it has eyes elsewhere, that is the time – and the only time – for over-extension of your coverage.

Who knows? It just may be the call that saves your crew.

***Written by: John Bistowski***

---

John started officiating lacrosse in 1999 in Eastern Massachusetts for the sole reason of staying in shape and sharpening his officiating skills for football. In the 17 years since, he transformed from a football official who did lacrosse on the side to a lacrosse official who did football on the side to a lacrosse-only official. John is the current President and Training Chair for the San Diego County Lacrosse Officials Association.

He's had the privilege of officiating high school State championships in Massachusetts and California, NCAA playoffs, two MCLA national championship games, LXM Pro games, National Lacrosse League games, and most recently the North Carolina vs. Maryland Division 1 game played on the West Coast in March of 2015. John is also an active LAREDO Clinician for US Lacrosse.