

Officiating: The Ultimate Professional Development

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I am a sophomore in college and this upcoming season marks my fourth year officiating. I absolutely love it. Officiating provides a perfect transition for players who are not going to continue their career in high school, college, or beyond; allowing you to stay in the game (and get paid for doing so).

Here are some of the reasons why I think officiating is ideal for high school and college (and beyond) students:

1. If you were a player, you already know the game and officiating just lets you stay in the game longer

I played girls lacrosse for five years in high school, but I became a men's lacrosse official which puts me into an unusual situation of being completely new to the sport I officiate. While I love the men's game and have had mentors push me to excel in the game, I lack a player's experience on the field which can be a huge advantage. But now that I am in the game, I have endless opportunities to stay a part of it. I had the opportunity to officiate with a gentleman from Minnesota this past season who said he had been officiating for 41 years. 41 YEARS. If you truly love officiating and you stay in shape, there is no reason to abandon the game you love.

2. It teaches you how to operate in high pressure situations

My least favorite thing is getting yelled at. When coaches, parents, and fans critique your every move, the field can become a very uncomfortable place. This might be the championship game or the cross town rivalry. The tensions run high and the pressure mounts as you are forced to operate at the very best of your ability. As uncomfortable as it is, I know that the field is the most stressful workplace I will ever experience. If I can excel on the field, I can do anything. Dealing with pressure to excel on the field translates easily to dealing with stressful situations in the professional world.

3. You are forced to learn how to communicate effectively

All of my mentors have stressed and reiterated that calm communication is vital to effectively managing the game. Coaches have run off the sidelines to yell and scream at the officials. As an official, you can't just run and hide, you need to step up and learn how to deal with the noise and chaos and still remain in control. Clear communication often diffuses tense situations and keeps everyone calm. But even if no one is yelling, learning how to both connect with the players and coaches but maintain professional distance is critical to managing the game. In the professional world, communication and interpersonal skills consistently rank on the top 10 skills employers look for in a candidate. If you can capitalize on your on-field experience and learn how to communicate effectively while officiating, you are well on your way to professional success.

4. Networking

Most officials don't officiate full time, instead they are doctors, lawyers, business men and women – anyone can be an official (with the proper training and certification). As a college student who is constantly on the lookout for ways to transition smoothly from the academic world to the professional one, I see my fellow officials as valuable resources and connections. If I have made a good impression as a hardworking partner or trainee, that speaks volumes to my partner and establishes my reputation on and off the field. I consider every game I officiate to be an opportunity to build my reputation and to make connections.

5. Officiating requires quick, on-your-feet thinking

As an official, you do not have the luxury of time. Everything is happening at once and in a split second, you need to recognize fouls, identify the rule, correctly administer the penalty, and get the game going again. I have dealt with plays involving multiple penalties and changes in possession and I don't have the opportunity to stand there, count on my fingers and figure out what happened. It is one of the biggest moments in a game where everyone is watching the official instead of the players. You must learn how to act and react in the moment and stay professional while doing so. The ability to adapt in an ever fluctuating environment is not limited to officiating, but it is essential for operating in the professional world as well.

6. Officiating provides applicable experience to any job type

Leadership skills? Check.

Communication? Check.

Ability to handle responsibility? Detail oriented? Ability to react quickly? Check, check, check.

I have gone through multiple interviews in which the interviewer was more interested in my officiating experience than my seemingly more applicable professional experience. It doesn't matter what profession you want to pursue when you graduate, officiating perfects so many different skills that you would be hard pressed to find a field in which your experiences were not relevant.

7. You get to schedule your own hours and the pay is good

In the organizations I have worked for, I get to pick the days I am available and my travel limits, allowing me to focus on my academic schedule first. And I definitely don't complain about the pay. Being an official is hard work, but the pay certainly beats whatever you would get at the restaurant down the road bussing tables.

I am immensely thankful for the opportunities that officiating has provided and I look forward to many more years as an official. I would encourage anyone who is interested in officiating to contact their local officials organization to learn more. Stand tall and wear your stripes with pride.