

Better Relationships Between Coaches and Officials

By William A. Welker, Ed.D.

Unfortunately, more often than not coaches and officials consider each other to be adversaries. I think I can offer some suggestions that may help to alleviate this uncomfortable condition between the two factions. Both coaches and officials can work together in closer harmony if they understand the concerns of one another. The following is a survey taken of coaches and officials by Robert G. Hoehn. First, the eight "big wishes" of coaches and then the top eight desires of officials.

WHAT COACHES WOULD LIKE OFFICIALS TO KNOW

1. Act in a professional manner. Treat coaches and their athletes with respect.
2. Thoroughly know the rules.
3. Be consistent when making calls and decisions.
4. Keep the athletes moving at a brisk pace.
5. Be on the lookout for dangerous situations, and alert the coach when the athlete runs the risk of injury.
6. Demonstrate a positive attitude toward athletics, not one of supreme authority. In other words, don't act like gods, but stewards of the sport.
7. Refrain from prejudging a coach, school, or athletic team. Give everyone involved the opportunity to prove themselves.
8. Finally, don't cover up a mistake. Nobody expects perfection. If an error occurs, admit to it, and try not to make the same mistake again. Also, avoid coaching an athlete at the coach's expense. Never make a coach look foolish by correcting athletes in a condescending manner.

WHAT OFFICIALS WOULD LIKE COACHES TO KNOW

1. Treat officials in a polite, friendly manner. However, don't come on like college chums meeting for the first time in fifteen years. Being too friendly creates problems when close calls go against the opposing team.
2. Keep negative comments about coaches, athletes, or other officials to yourself. A coach that ridicules others in front of strangers displays good judgment and shows a lack of good sense.
3. Have everything ready to go so the contest can start on time. Provide a safe and secure environment for officials to store their valuables.
4. See to it that officials are paid on time. Either pay the day of the contest or mail checks out the following day. A great way to strain a relationship is to wait four or five weeks before mailing checks.
5. Refrain from discussing a previous contest and close calls. Officials must concentrate on today's match or game, not rethink past competitive situations in which they were involved.
6. Hold conversations to a minimum. Don't distract officials with needless chatter.

7. Know the rules. Read the rule book. Study any new rule changes. Don't waste the official's time with matters in which you should have known the rule.
8. Approach the official with respect, as an equal, when questioning a difficult call.

In essence, coaches and officials need to be thinking on the same wave length. This is really not too difficult to accomplish, especially when both the coach and official follow the values of good sportsmanship.

Dr. Bill Welker, Wheeling, West Virginia, was awarded the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Mideast Section All-Sports Distinguished Officials Award. He served as the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission wrestling rules interpreter, clinician and supervisor of state tournament officials for 28 years and was a member of the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee for a four-year term.

