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BACK TO BASICS – OFFICIATING 101

By Nadine Crowley, FIBA Referee Instructor & Commissioner, CBOC Member

As an athlete in the sport of basketball, I was taught by my coaches to master the basic fundamentals of the sport in order to develop consistent habits. For example, we would start each practice working on the basic skills of ball handling, shooting, passing and defensive footwork before working on set plays or scrimmaging. As officials, our focus should also be on mastering the basic fundamentals of officiating so that they become habitual with a view to increasing call accuracy.

FIBA refers to these basic fundamentals as the Individual Officiating Techniques or IOT's which are believed to be the most important foundation of 2 and 3-person officiating. FIBA deems these fundamental skills as necessary in order to assist referees to “process and facilitate correct decisions” while on the court. FIBA teaches that the application of these IOTs provides referees with the knowledge base to officiate individual play phases in the game.

When instructing, evaluating and officiating, these are the basic skills that need to be taught, assessed, and utilized on each and every individual play phase during a game.

FIBA lists the Individual Officiating Techniques (IOTs) as:

- Primary coverage on obvious plays
- Distance and Stationary
- Active mindset/ Referee the defence
- Staying with the play until the end
- Process the entire play
- Open angle of 45 degrees
- Jump ball: Toss & Coverage
- Throw-in procedure
- Double calls/whistles
- Phantom calls
- Dead ball officiating

For the purpose of this article, I will set out the 5 most important IOTs necessary to referee play phases with accuracy. They are as follows:

1. Maintain Proper Distance from the Play

FIBA notes that, when refereeing a play, the proper distance from players should be between 3 and 6 meters. They implore officials not to move too close to the play, because it narrows the field of vision. Maintaining proper distance will allow the official to maintain a better perspective on the play as the greater the distance, the slower the movement of the players. This wider angle increases one's field of vision, allowing to see more players or the "bigger picture". When we talk about the "bigger picture", we are referring to being able to see the next play that follows, the clocks and our partners. In addition to these factors, it reduces the incidence of "emotional" or "reactive" calls.

2. Remain Stationary

It is recommended that officials should be stationary when making a call. They say that this increases the accuracy of the calls as the focus and level of concentration increase because the eyes are not bouncing. Too often, we see referees move themselves out of the best position to accurately officiate the play. Having said that, it is important to move or position-adjust to get into the right position to referee the defence. This movement should be minimal and only when necessary. We often tell officials to, "move to improve" their sight lines on the play.

FIBA reminds officials to to..."Stop, Observe and Decide" before making a call.

3. Referee the Defence

"The priority of the referee in an on-ball competitive match-up is to focus the attention on the legality of the defensive player while keeping the offensive ball handler in their field of vision." FIBA makes it clear that we are not refereeing the space between the players, but the actual defensive player.

4. Stay with the play until the end

On a drive to the hoop, referees often give up the play early, thinking that their partner is going to pick it up because the ball handler has moved out of their primary. FIBA has identified this as the reason why referees miss obvious fouls. FIBA stresses the need to adopt a "professional discipline", reminding referees to be patient on every play, process the entire play by keeping their eyes and attention on the play until it has ended. FIBA wants the referee to see the start, middle and end of the play before making the call.

FIBA also directs us to mentally focus on the defender until the play ends. A few examples are as follows:

- i) for a shooter, focus on the defender until the shooter has returned to the floor;
- ii) during penetration, stay with the play until it ends at the basket or the offensive player has vacated your primary. Physically, do not start to move. In Trail and/or Centre, referees are often seen "bailing out" or turning to run down court on the shot. FIBA notes that once the referee moves, they often mentally release the play before the ball enters the basket or the defensive team has gained control.

5. Positioning, Open Angle & Adjustments

FIBA teaches referees to find a position on the court where they can observe as many players as possible in order to accurately call the illegal action. To establish the best position to see the entire play unfold, they suggest opening up your stance so that you can referee on ball and other players within your peripheral vision. Once this position is established, the referee will have to adjust his/her position to maintain a clear view of the defensive player and the offensive ball handler. If the referee does not adjust his/her position, this often results in becoming "straight lined" on the play and trying to see through the backs of the offensive player.

If we look at the positions in a 2-person game, when in the Lead, it is important to move along the baseline to "mirror the ball" and maintain an open stance to referee the play in your primary area of responsibility. In Trail, always stand a few feet behind the play, between the last player and the opponents' basket.

FIBA reminds us to: "move to the correct place to maintain your open angle, anticipate where you need to be, always move with a purpose, go where you need to go to referee the play and, if your initial position is accurate, do not move."

I would challenge every referee to start to use these Individual Officiating Techniques on every play phase, in every game and when breaking down plays. I would also urge our assessors/evaluators, referee coaches and mentors to look for these skills when watching and reviewing play phases during games. Hopefully, by utilizing these basic fundamentals, we will increase the accuracy of our calls and enhance the quality of officiating across Canada.

Enjoy the remainder of your season!

REFLECTION ON THE ALTERNATE POSSESSION ARROW

By Sébastien Gauthier, Interpreter of Quebec

This topic may appear simple, but it sometimes causes headaches to officials everywhere across the country. I have observed errors at national championships, U Sports games in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, and obviously at all other levels of play.

How many officials can say that they never forgot the arrow or had to yell at the table to change it while play was in progress. When a jump ball situation occurs and we point in the direction of play, how frustrating to think while looking at the arrow: «Seems that we gave the ball to that team just a little while ago!», or to hear a coach rightfully tell us that the last possession was in favor of the same team. Such mistakes undermine our credibility and may have significantly hurt a team with nobody even noticing at the time of the error or later in the game. These errors are so irritating to officials, players, and coaches that I thought useful to study the question.

First, let us identify why these mistakes occur and sometimes go unnoticed:

- 1- The possession arrow is normally on the scoring table. Both benches can hardly see it since they are situated on the same side of the floor. They are often incapable to detect errors.
- 2- The rule dictates to change the arrow only when the throw-in is completed in case a foul occurs during the throw-in (Art. 12.5.4). Therefore, officials are trained to look at the arrow only when play is in progress. This is not always easy to do and, as the case may be, requires a communication with the table during play.
- 3- During the alternate possession throw-in, players, coaches, table and floor officials are paying attention to the action on the floor, not on the arrow change.
- 4- When the jump ball situation occurs far away from the table, we take for granted that the table people understood our signals. This is not always the case.
- 5- Fundamentally, rules are made for international competition where table officials are well trained and often assisted by a commissioner who supervises everything at the table. We are far from there at our local high school games or at the majority of venues across the country.
- 6- Often, it is not the right person at the table who handles the arrow. By rule, it should be the scorer. The other table officials have their own responsibilities when play resumes, such as starting the game clock or shot clock at the appropriate time. Their attention is not focused on the arrow.

It is clear to me that, although the rule says that the scorer is the one to change the arrow, the floor officials are ultimately responsible to see that it is properly set.

What can be done to improve the situation?

Many fellow officials keep a coin in their pocket and switch it to the other side on every jump ball situation. While practical for the official, this is not sufficient since the arrow must be set correctly for everyone to see. Therefore, we must ensure that the arrow is changed in the proper direction once the throw-in is completed. I introduced a procedure that was explained to the officials during pre-season clinics. The table officials must be informed as well before the start of each game. The procedure goes as follows:

- Before putting the ball in play for the alternate possession throw-in, establish eye contact with the table official handling the arrow.
- Make sure that the table official puts a hand on the device, so he/she is ready to change it as soon as the throw-in is completed.
- Once the throw-in is completed, a quick glance at the table by the official to confirm that the arrow was properly changed.

This mechanic has been tested and has practically eliminated all mistakes when executed diligently. It is a small adjustment to the usual procedure which reaps significant benefits by eliminating embarrassing mistakes. Of course, this is predicated on table officials who are focused on their duties.

Whatever means are implemented, let's hope that errors related to the positioning of the arrow are things of the past and no longer a source of worries.

Have a great end of your season.

WHERE DO I FIT IN?

By Tim Heide, Supervisor of British Columbia and Member of the CBOC

I would humbly suggest that we have all asked ourselves this question at some point in our basketball officiating career. And for those who feel the question has been answered, it has likely come from someone that had or has influence over their career. I would like to suggest that we should all have access to a more objective, uniform and encouraging vision of what is expected and what is available to us.

Globally, there are two very different categories of officiating within the sport. Firstly, officiating can be an avocation, which infers that participation has a lower priority in the context of life. Secondly, officiating may consist as a life sustaining career, which is expected to support one's personal and family lifestyle. Both are absolutely necessary to the sport and potentially achievable, but we must understand the differences between them and set goals accordingly and realistically.

The vast majority of competition around the world involves officials that participate as an avocation. As is the case in most countries, officials in Canada receive a nominal stipend or honorarium for volunteering their time to officiate minor, youth, community, club, high school, Jr College, or University games. We do so for various reasons, such as a way of continuing involvement in the sport, for the benefit of physical and mental exercise, as a means to some extra spending money, or are driven to achieve specific goals of officiating at the highest possible level available within the structure of competition to which we are exposed.

In order to establish realistic goals, it is important for each of us to determine and acknowledge why we officiate. Then we must understand where the opportunities exist, that fit with our goals. For example, in most rural areas, our opportunities are restricted to the competition that exists in our local community. If we wish to set goals higher than can be supported by the available local competition, we will need to be willing and able to travel to, or perhaps even be prepared to move to a location that has competition which will support loftier goals. Goals of working at national championships or of attaining a FIBA license will require consistent opportunity to officiate competition that leads to the respective national championships. Each of us must consider however, the balance between the goals that we set and our desired lifestyle and potential for financial return.

The majority of competition in Canada is based on not-for-profit organizational design and as such, the financial return for officials is reflective of such design. "Club" basketball however, seems to be evolving on the business model, but the financial return for officials isn't yet reflective of such a model.

There are many countries in the world where basketball provides opportunities for officiating to be a lifestyle sustaining career. Professional leagues that exist in many countries and certainly the NCAA in the US, would fit into this category. Even then however, some officials find it necessary, or choose to supplement their officiating

income by other means. If our goal is to make officiating a lifestyle sustaining career, we must consider location (such opportunities don't currently exist in the Canadian competition landscape) and the respective country's employment regulations. Officiating in such leagues is an integral part of a business plan and as such, financial return is dependent on the respective league's revenue streams and overall financial success. Such officiating opportunities would be considered "Professional" and as such, the officials become employees of the league.

If our interest and desire is to officiate in Canada and to establish goals that fit within the structure of opportunities in Canada, the future Canadian Officials Development Model being designed by the CBOC will help clarify and guide us with setting our goals. It will include written description of each category of opportunity and its respective qualification requirements. It will also include visual description of pathways connecting categories of opportunity.

If our interest is in officiating as a career, the structure of opportunities within Canada will still be useful in developing our skills, gaining experience and building our curriculum vitae, but we will need to research the respective "career" opportunity for information pertaining to, and guidance on how to potentially achieve such a goal. It would also be prudent to consider our existing family situation and future lifestyle goals when considering officiating as a career, because for various reasons, it can be demanding and may result in sacrificing what we already have or may want in other areas of life. Let's be sure we do enough research to know what that "career official" life looks like.

Whatever our goals, we must clearly understand the opportunities that are available to us, then make educated choices and ensure that we are personally protected from unnecessary risks. Let's set our goals high, but realistic! Whatever those goals, we must invest in reaching them and realize that the personal growth and satisfaction resulting from such investment, often transfer to many other areas of life.