

# Good Communication Between Basketball Officials and Coaches Is Key

## Four rules for helping the game flow and increase enjoyment

Frank Sinatra's hit song, "I've Got You Under My Skin," describes perfectly the conflicted feelings officials and coaches have towards each other. Their mutual passion for the game is rivaled only by their intense wariness towards each other.

While they may not see eye to eye very often, and have different goals - the coach in winning the game, and officials in managing it - they should be able to agree on at least one thing: that those goals can best be achieved by creating and maintaining the flow of the game.

## Four Rules

Game flow, or the fluid physical and psychic movement of the game, involves a degree of concentration and communication between all stakeholders, including officials and coaches. In my experience, there are four rules of official-coach communication and expectations that both should follow to achieve game flow:

1. *Keep a respectful tone.* As simple as this sounds, some coaches and officials find this challenging. Speaking to each other in a professional and respectful tone, instead of yelling, sarcasm, or condescension, can go a long way in keeping heads cool and reducing the chances of flare ups by coaches, which often result in technical fouls. Officials need to take the initiative and set the tenor of communication before the game when they greet the coaches before tip.
2. *Officials explain calls, not rules.* Even the most experienced officials and coaches will often disagree on calls. The rules are, well, the rules. Officials should not be asked to explain a rule, nor should the coach expect them to. Explaining a rule takes attention away from the players on the court, which is the priority for both parties. Coaches should, however, expect officials to acknowledge their question or comment about a particular call and address it at the appropriate time, usually during a dead ball.
3. *Officials' calls are final (at least most of the time).* When an official calls a foul and reports it to the scorers' table, the call is final and cannot be overturned. No official has the authority to overrule another official. If a crew has a double whistle, where two or more officials see a foul or violation or both, they will come together to discuss and agree on the call before anything is reported to the table. One of the few situations where call intervention might be appropriate is on an out-of-bounds. A crew member may have a different, and perhaps better, angle to see which team last touched the ball before it went out of bounds than the calling official who "owns" (i.e. is responsible for) that boundary line. In some cases, the calling official may ask his partners for the point of view. Crews should discuss how to handle these situations during their

pre-game meeting before they even come on to the court in order to ensure that when they arise, their response is fluid and keeps the game flowing.

4. *The timer and scorekeepers are officials, too.* Very often, the home team assigns a student or parent to operate the scoreboard clock and keep the master scorebook. Even though they are from the home team, during the game they become part of the officiating crew. Coaches should remind the table volunteers that inappropriate cheering or jeering of a team may result in their removal from the table. The person operating the clock, in particular, is even more important to the officials than the scorer, because starting and stopping the clock actually affects the flow of the game and may affect its outcome. As a result, many schools request that the official's association provide a timer who is also an official.

These are guidelines for better communication for coaches, officials, parents, and anyone who loves the game of basketball. Understanding and following these rules can help alleviate some of the friction coaches and officials naturally experience and increase the enjoyment everyone involved in the game of basketball, from coach to player, official to fan, at any level, from youth league to the pros, deserves.