

“WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE.”

This is the famous line used in the 1960’s movie called Cool Hand Luke. It starred Paul Newman as a prisoner on a work farm in the South who kept trying to escape and was caught each time. It was said by the warden to the prisoners after he was caught for about the 3rd or 4th time. He wanted to let everyone know there that trying to escape was not an option.

I believe the failure to communicate also applies to the relationship between coach and official. I have seen in the last few years a lack of trust on both sides and I do think it has to do with a lack of understanding and communication between coach and official.

First let me say I have the utmost respect for coaches. You have a very hard job trying to field a team, get gym time, get them playing as a team, and putting up with parents. Along with the pressure to win, these are just a few things you deal with every year and I commend you for doing what you do.

So how did we get to this point and how do we correct it?

How did we get here?

1. High turnover rate with coaches and officials. Back in the day, coaches and officials got to know each other because they saw each other numerous times over the year. This helped build a relationship between coach and official which is needed for the growth of our sport. Now every year new coaches and officials come in so this relationship never gets a chance to be built, leading to lack of trust of both parties. It turns into an “us vs. them” mentality.

2. Lack of understanding the roles coach and official have. The coach’s role is to coach his/her team and try their best to win. The official’s role is to call the game fairly with no partiality for who wins or loses. However some coaches and officials don’t understand this, which again leads to an unhealthy relationship and mistrust by both parties.

3. Lack of communication between coach and official. Communication is a lost art on both sides. Some coaches think that by yelling, using hand gestures, or trying to officiate, etc. it will get the official’s attention and help them get calls. When the coach acts in this manner it takes away from what the official is trying to accomplish which is to call the game fairly. If you have a question about a call/no call when the time is right, (for example during free throws) ask the official in a professional manner what he/she saw and they will hopefully give you an answer. Think about how you would you like it if the official started coaching your team? I bet your response would be “Stop coaching my team and call the game.” So we need you to coach your team and let the official officiate the game.

Some officials think that by ignoring a coach he/she will stop and start coaching their team. This never happens, and if not addressed will get worse as the game continues. Some officials refuse to, or don’t know how to communicate with coaches which makes it difficult for the coach who

is asking a legitimate question in a professional manner. The official should take the time to explain himself/herself when the situation permits. There is an old saying. "If you make the call, you better have an explanation."

How do we make it better?

I believe it starts with respect for each other. Officials need to respect the coach and the job they are doing. Call the game fairly, and if there is a question or situation the official needs to communicate in a professional manner. Coaches need to respect the official and the job they are trying to do. Coach your team, and if you have a question about a call or situation ask in a professional manner. This will help build a healthy relationship between coach and official. In the end we are in this together for the health and well-being of the game.

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