



CORNY'S CORNER

Be Nothing Less Than A Great Referee

Corny Galdones, August 2004

Anyone can become a good referee. Becoming a great referee is a lot tougher. A great referee isn't an automatic entitlement, but an accolade earned from and bestowed by others. There is one fundamental difference between a good referee and a great referee. A good referee knows the game and is technically sound. A great referee understands the game and the expectations and responsibilities that come with the position. A great referee is aware of forever being under scrutiny and performs appropriately, whether it is for officiating a match, interface with players, coaches and personnel, or off duty activities.

Judgment calls separate the good from the great. A good referee knows what to call. A great referee knows what not to call. That's easier said than done. Here's a simplistic implementation. Blow your whistle to initiate play. Then DON'T GET INVOLVED. Stay out of the way of the players and the playing action. By no means should you swallow your whistle. There will be times when a violation must be whistled to stop play. If unsure, let the play flow toward normal conclusion. Don't interject yourself into the match with a call from out of the blue that is inconsistent with your previous calls or kills a rally. Go without notice and don't influence the match. The teams are there to compete, not to hear your whistle. Smooth the progress of a match by interrupting play as little as you can.

Another area of officiating distinction is dealing with coaches and players. Remember, the match is about them. It's not about you. Never! A great referee facilitates, while a good referee administrates or worse, dictates. Treat coaches and players as your equals and with total respect and courtesy. The same goes for anyone you come in contact with in the sport. Use people skills in communication and address. Although the match is for their enjoyment and fulfillment, which you must permit, set limits on the behavior that's acceptable. Let the coaches coach. Don't interfere with their business. If they start coaching you, then draw the line. Let the players and coaches vent their frustrations, provided they're not abusive or disruptive. If they start pushing the envelope on their conduct, put a stop to it. A great referee uses sanctions as the last, not first, resort to control misconduct. Of course, a great referee seldom gets to this point by taking preventive measures at the first sign of potential trouble so that the adverse situation doesn't escalate and get out of hand.

A great referee knows image is everything. Foremost, self-assurance in your ability isn't enough. Can others rely upon you in everything you do? Taking care of No. 1 isn't enough; look out for the sport and the other guy. Getting the job done isn't enough; tend to the mundane details. Doing your duties isn't enough; be a willing team player. Acting civil isn't enough; be dignified. Being on time isn't enough; be early. Making the right calls isn't enough; be beyond reproach in judgment. Confidence in your decisions isn't enough; project poise. A proper uniform isn't enough; get it spic-and-span. Correct signal mechanics aren't enough; be crisp and polished in their display. Moving up the ladder isn't enough; wait your turn. Staying out of trouble isn't enough; avoid it at all costs, including conflicts of interest if there's any shadow of doubt. To put this and more in proper perspective, perception is reality.

Being good is never enough. Any referee who practices this philosophy and improves to have suitable skills altogether, not just whistle blowing, will likely win the praise and esteem of peers and others as a great referee. Here's a fitting adage. Good, better, best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best. Be the best that you can be.