



CORNY'S CORNER

Line Judges Are Only As Good As You Make Them

Corny Galdones, March 2010

Have you ever thought, "My line judges were terrible."? They likely were, but it cuts both ways. They may have felt the same about you. Did it occur to you that you might have been the root of the problem and not them? Granted, players who are your work team would rather rest or be merry on their time off and may cop an attitude about helping out. It's up to you to put and keep them in the proper mood. Using psychology to win them over is a knack. Reach out and appeal to their sense of duty, leaving their dignity intact no matter what. What about you? Does your attitude need adjusting? The line judges are working with you, not for you. How you go about it makes a difference. Treating them as your equals receives cooperation, while bossing them around produces resentment. Turn them on or turn them off.

Before the match begins, gather all line judges and brief them. Brief means short, not skimpy. Keep it that way. Though their function is serious, don't make it sound like a funeral service. Show a pulse without bouncing off the walls. First, ask the players if they've been line judges before. If yes, many could care less about hearing old, tired instructions again. Try fresh reminders for a change. Here's a quick drill mainly for teens that livens them up and still covers all basics by finding out what they know. Hand them the line judge flags and quiz them on the signals for when the ball lands on the line or in the court; when the ball lands out of bounds; when the ball goes out of bounds off a player; when a server makes a foot fault; when the ball hits or passes outside the antenna; when they're not sure of the call; and where to stand during time-outs and when a server locates near them. Vary these scenarios to your taste. Correct their answers as needed. You want the flag to snap down for "in" and pop up for "out." Demonstrate how it's done. Last, direct them to signal all the time, no matter how obvious the call is. It's that simple, less than a minute. Tailor this routine to the line judges' experience and the match gravity. Grab their interest, run through the ABC's and be done with it. Information overload does little except blow the pathetic, or bore the apathetic, out of their minds. Besides, you have other pressing duties waiting during warm-ups.

Many line calls are clear-cut. As a first referee, own these calls and signal your decision at once but as you signal, lock eyes with each line judge to be sure they're alert, doing their job from the very first serve. Nod your head as seen fit to provide them feedback. If they have a technique wrong, set them straight without showing them up. Some may wander off to la-la land or signal when they feel like it. No, they don't. Keep them in the match. Reel them in by whistle, voice or hand cue, forgiving them with a smile. Hopefully, they'll be on it after that. During play, when a pancake is tried or the ball may have involved the antenna, seek them out for a possible signal. At the end of a rally if the outcome is up in the air, get their input before making a decision, especially the backside line judge for a potential "touch" on a ball spiked out of bounds. Give a "thumbs up" for a really great call of theirs but it turns stale when overdone. On a bad call, overrule it fast. Toot your whistle to draw everyone's attention then tap a palm to your chest to indicate "my call" followed by a confident display of your final decision. In every instance, shelter them from being harassed for their calls by anyone. All match long, engage with the line judges. Most expect it. Otherwise, they won't bother to concentrate. If you don't stay in contact and they miss a call, whose fault is that?

Lest we forget, the scorekeeper and second referee are also part of the work team. Apply similar views and approaches to them. As with the line judges, they should feel they're your partners in calling the match. Work as a team with the work team. It does wonders.