

REFEREE.COM

**THE GUIDE TO
GAME
TIME**

FROM THE EDITORS OF REFEREE MAGAZINE

STICK WITH YOUR ROUTINE

Stay on your regular schedule of eating, sleeping and drinking. Self-discipline is an excellent self-confidence builder. Don't significantly change the physical training routine that has worked best. Now is not the time for over-training.

VISUALIZE YOUR PERFORMANCE

Spend a little time each day thinking and rehearsing how you want to perform. Don't wait until the night before the contest to do all your mental preparation. Cramming too much information at the last minute can overload the circuit.

KEEP MIND AND BODY IN BALANCE

Prepare yourself mentally and physically for anything that might happen during the game; being caught by surprise may be a sign of trouble. Don't try to make major changes in your physical-skill level. To work your best, you need to be able to shift into cruise control, do things automatically.

AVOID STRESS

Do everything you can to achieve a physical, emotional and intellectual high for the game. Avoid things that are likely to make you particularly tired, depressed, sad or upset. Avoid negative emotions. Don't get involved in activities, events or situations that are likely to lead to personal problems or major conflicts, which can leave you physically and emotionally drained. Staying alert, positive, energized and focused during your game may be impossible when you are emotionally spent.

LEARN TO HANDLE CRITICISM

Most comments from spectators, players and coaches should go in one ear and out the other. Granted, that's easier said than done. But turning a deaf ear to such criticism is crucial to maintaining focus and keeping a positive attitude. Constructive criticism from supervisors, assignors and veteran officials should be sought. If you solicit comments after working with a respected veteran, be prepared for what you might get. It's possible you'll find out you're not as good as you think you are.

DON'T BLOW THINGS OUT OF PROPORTION

Try to always keep things in perspective and don't magnify things into being worse than they are. When things go bad, over a period of time we start to stereotype everything that happens to us as "bad luck" because we are using the same magnifying glass to look at them. Some individuals take infinitesimal situations and blow them into catastrophes. Always ask yourself, "What difference will this make a year from now?"

AVOID ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

When we think in terms of extremes, we set ourselves up for failure. If you look at a continuum where there is good on one side and bad on the other, we all want to be good. But as soon as something doesn't turn out the way we want it to, we view the outcome as bad and tend to extrapolate the performance into who we are. In fact, in order to "not be bad," we try too hard to be good and we are bound to make mistakes. Perfectionism makes it hard

CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE ALL THE TIME

If you walk onto the court and plan on keeping everyone happy and have them like you, then you are in for a major shock. If we try to be pleasers, we cater to others and that causes us to deviate from our main goal: to remain objective.

WHY ME?

Don't bog yourself down with "uncertainty questions" such as, "Why me?" When things go bad we often seek answers of an absolute nature. Let's face it, not all questions have answers we understand. When we question ourselves, we sometimes analyze ourselves to death, which adds undue stress.

BE MENTALLY PREPARED

Always mentally rehearse your game. Players and coaches go over mental game plans all the time, and officials should too. It keeps you able, ready and mentally on your toes. Before every game, visualize techniques and things that are likely to happen during the game.

SHRUG IT OFF

Shrug off a bad game as an unfortunate incident. Don't be too hard on yourself or treat yourself like a victim of circumstances. Here is a general rule of thumb: If you think it, you will feel it, then you will act it and you will eventually become it. Turn it around for your benefit; if you think like an achiever, you're bound to become one.

TAKE ONE GAME AT A TIME

In fact, take one day at a time. There are always enough worries in current situations, so why spend your energies thinking about tomorrow. The best exercise in mental toughness is to develop moment to moment awareness. And how do you do that? Keep your thoughts focused on the present.

HOLD YOURSELF TO HIGH STANDARDS

You have an obligation to hold yourself to a higher-than-normal ethical standard. How you comport yourself away from the game is as important as how you act during games. Poor decisions or bad behavior in everyday life can eradicate all of the good will and good impressions you earn when you're officiating. Remember that integrity is defined by how you act when you think nobody is watching.

REALITY IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS PERCEPTION

There is a real irony involved with the conflict of interest question. The most important factor is not whether or not a conflict exists. It doesn't matter if you absolutely and honestly believe there is no conflict. It does matter if others believe there is one. The most significant factor is "perception" — that is, what everyone else might think. A very real problem exists if, regardless of what the true circumstances are, other people have the perception that there is a conflict of interest. Many officials may be able to work a fair and impartial game at their alma mater, or for a coach who is a friend, or at a school that a family member attends. But that is not the point — never will be. The perception of impropriety will be the only point of focus.

DON'T CRITICIZE OTHER OFFICIALS

Under no circumstances should an official point out a peer's inadequacies or offer a negative opinion about another official to a coach or player. Let your work and the work of others speak for itself. If an official you've worked with or observed asks for a critique, be honest but supportive. If your opinion is not sought, don't offer it.

YOU REPRESENT THE OFFICIATING PROFESSION

Remember that saying that the best officiated game is one in which no one knows who officiated? It's bunk. Competent, professional and impartial officials deserve acclaim, especially from other officials. Think how the public's perceptions of officials would improve if every official remembered that they represent the entire profession every time they work a game.

YOU WILL HAVE TO NAVIGATE CONFLICTS

A truth of officiating is this: Regardless of the level you work, you will encounter situations that are apparent conflicts of interest. Sometimes you can foresee those events; other times they come to light shortly before the game is to begin. Let your partners know as soon as possible. Let them help with the situation. At the earliest opportunity, tell the coaches and overseeing administrators what has happened: You did not know about the conflict; you'll do your job in a professional manner within the rules; and now that you are aware of the situation, you will avoid it in the future. Don't be defensive or overly apologetic. You're a victim of the circumstance and need to handle it in the most effective and productive way.

WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T DO IT!

When you see a conflict ahead, avoid it. When you are assigned games, look ahead at the contest with a watchful eye toward situations that could be viewed as potential conflicts of interest. If you can foresee a possible conflict, turn the game back. Better yet, do not accept the contract in the first place. Don't ever work a game in which you are concerned that someone might question your integrity due to a perceived conflict of interest. There are other games with other schools and other participants. Do not put yourself into a position of losing what you've likely spent years developing — your reputation and sense of character.

POUR NO GASOLINE

Coaches, players and fans will say plenty during most games. Much is designed to do no more than vent frustration. Understanding which comments or questions merit a response is a key to success in officiating. Yelling in kind can turn a small brush fire into a four-alarm blaze. More often than not, the “right” response will not be verbal. You might nod your head slightly, smile momentarily, glance at whoever said something, hold eye contact for a moment or two, shake your head, or hold up a stop sign. Each alternative communication has a particular meaning; learn to use them wisely.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Prevention is your best tool when it comes to player fights but when push comes to shove, you should try to control the situation to the best of your ability while keeping self-preservation at the forefront of your mind. Rely on your partners, use the coaches when you can and make sure to have a pregame plan in place in the event of a fight.

CONTINUE TO OFFICIATE IN DEAD-BALL SITUATIONS

When the whistle blows, that's when trash talking can start. That can lead to a push or a shove and things can quickly slide downhill. If you have a held ball call, particularly if two players are scrambling on the floor, get close to the two individuals involved and let them know you're there. If they see your striped shirt, they'll generally get up and move away from each other. If you're the line judge and a runner is driven out of bounds along your sideline, don't worry about staying at the dead-ball spot. That's why you have a beanbag. Stay with the players. Again, just the fact that they know you're there can prevent problems.

TALK TO PARTNERS SO PLAYERS CAN HEAR YOU

Talking to your fellow officials in front of the players can head off an abundance of difficulties. If, for instance, two post players are jostling one another, at the next free-throw situation say something like, “Bill, keep an eye on 25 white and I’ll watch 34 red.” That lets the players know you’re watching them. Use a normal conversational tone and don’t stare down either player. You’ve gotten your message across in a non-threatening way.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BALL

That technique works particularly well in baseball. If a pitcher has been complaining about your strike zone, ask to see the ball. Wipe it off, or in fact actually change it, then walk about three-quarters of the way to the mound and toss the pitcher the baseball. Then tell him in a normal voice that you've heard enough for one day. He'll get the message that, 1) you have indeed heard enough and, 2) that you're doing your best to keep him in the game.

CHECK YOUR LINEUP CARD

If you're having problems with a player, pull out your lineup card between innings and ask his coach to come to the plate. Then tell him that his player is stepping beyond the boundaries of protocol and that you'd like his help in getting the player calmed down. Don't threaten and don't let the coach use the occasion to start an argument, but let him know that if he won't take care of the situation, you will.