

Are You a Good Referee or a Great Referee?

By Donna Hess

Read the rules, take a test, pay a fee, buy a uniform and whistle and anyone can become a referee. A good referee is mechanically sound and knows the rules. But what makes a “great” referee? Those who become great referees have done all of the above and more. A great referee has earned the respect of their peers, coaches, spectators and players by working hard to learn the gray areas of the game. These individuals are students of the game and they are never satisfied with the jobs they have done. They can always find something that they need to improve.

Communicate and Listen: From the time you enter the gym it is essential to interact with the coaches, administrators, players, scorekeepers, linesmen and partner. Your demeanor and mannerisms are watched and judged. Hold yourself up high, but be approachable. Listen during pre-game and address the captains’ or coaches’ concerns. Address the captains’ and coaches’ questions during the game in a respectful, but authoritative manner; this shows them that you care and will consider what they have to say. Think before you speak and choose your words wisely. Remember what comes out of your mouth can never be taken back. Don’t get caught up in the intensity of the match...Stay calm and cool!!

Appearance is important. Along with showing up on time or early, well groomed, in a clean, pressed uniform, your behavior reflects your character. Your body language and facial expressions tell a lot about you. Manage them well. Smile and show some humor when appropriate. Be impartial; if you spend two minutes talking to one coach, spend two minutes talking to the other. Perception by others is important. Ask the coaches if they have any concerns and listen to them. Be polite.

Eye contact is very important during a match. A great official will constantly make eye contact with the linesmen, R1 or R2, along with the players, coaches and benches. Checking to see if your partners and teams are ready before you beckon for serve is important. Glancing at the linesmen and giving them a head nod or thumbs up after a good call will go a long way in keeping them in the game. They will understand that you appreciate the jobs they are doing. Eye contact with a player that’s getting a little upset can be a subtle warning to get your point across. Sometimes, additional words might help the situation and avoid cards.

Hand signals and whistle are your tools to the public. A crisp, sharp whistle and clean, polished hand signals display professionalism. Timing is important. Whistle sharply when starting or ending a play. Use the same duration for both whistles. The only time you should differ the whistle duration or blow more than once is when an unusual situation occurs. Like a ball rolls on the court or the players did not hear your first whistle due to the crowd noise and you need to end the play. Time your hand signals. The sequence is: whistle, (count in your head) 1, 2, 3, hand signal, 1, 2, 3, hand signal who gets the ball, 1, 2, 3, drop hand. Look in a mirror and practice, practice, practice...

Judgment calls are the major difference between the good and the great officials. “**A good referee knows what to call. A great referee knows what *not* to call.**” In other words, a good referee knows the book, knows the black and white of the game and calls accordingly. A great referee knows the rules, but stays out of the way and lets the players play. That doesn’t mean

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they don't ever blow their whistle; of course there will be violations that must be called. But for the most part, they will make consistent calls – no out of the blue calls. If in doubt, let the play go on. A great referee has the ability to understand the flow of the game and let a play come to its natural conclusion.

Remember to always strive to do your best; be a sponge and learn from each and every partner you have. Ask questions. We can always learn something new from each other. Give back; mentor a younger (less experienced) referee. We are here to facilitate the game, not dictate it. We are here for the kids. To these kids, this game is the most important thing in their lives at the moment. We need to always remember that. Always give them your best, no matter what level game it is. Be proud of how you do your job and it will show.

That's the difference between a good referee and a great referee.