

## ARTICLE 2

### COMMUNICATION ARTICLE

*This article was written by Bill Wriese a retired official in Florida who had officiated for over 30 years.*

*Here are some of his observations and suggestions.*

Most of us during our careers have been able to witness some good officials. Whether these people are basketball referees, football umpires or even netball umpires these good officials all have become successful because they communicate effectively and understand that good communication skills are learned. They also recognize how crucial it is for officials to communicate before games with associates and coaches, during games with the players, the coaches, and the fans, and after games with other officials.

As basketball officials the message we want to send is very specific. It conveys confidence, control, calmness, positive feelings, and fairness. It can be sent verbally or nonverbally (body language). Our posture, gestures and movements, and the tone of our voice combine to transmit either the wrong or hopefully the right message. As officials, we know that our nonverbal messages will usually be more frequent and more powerful than your verbal messages.

To become good officials, we have to clearly and consistently send the right messages. So it is of great importance that we consider what message we're communicating as we perform and try to improve our message sending ability.

#### **TYPES OF COMMUNICATION**

As you already know communication can occur verbally or non verbally. As officials we are aware of the two types of communication. Because of how messages are sent, it is important to know them.

Nonverbal communication is typically organized into three categories:

- \* Body language
- \* Spatial relationships
- \* Paralanguage

#### **BODY LANGUAGE**

Body language is a powerful tool for an official. It includes your physical appearance, posture, touching behavior, gestures and facial expressions.

## **SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Spatial relationship is the space between the official and the player. There are four zones or spaces in which we interact with others:

- \* Intimate
- \* Personal
- \* Social
- \* Public

As an official we tend to move in and out of all four of these spaces during the course of a game. In a game of basketball we as officials will be, at times close (intimate), and at other times comfortable (personal). Therefore, the potential for communication is increased. Frequently, a friendly discourse takes place between the free thrower and the official (personal), whereas nose-to-nose jawing occurs between two players (intimate).

## **PARALANGUAGE**

Paralanguage refers to the vocal components of speech, separate from the actual meaning of the word. "It's not what you say, but how you say it" explains what paralanguage is all about. Because paralanguage is a powerful part of communication, we ask ourselves these questions:

- \* Does my voice have resonance (associated with firmness and strength)?
- \* Do I speak rapidly or slowly?
- \* Can I project in a loud voice?
- \* Can I control the pitch of my voice?

By answering these questions we can then identify personal weaknesses and advantages in the use of paralanguage.

## **STYLES OF COMMUNICATION**

Officials tend to have a dominant communication style, but they also adopt alternate styles in specific situations. We have been able to identify four prominent communication styles:

### **FIGHTERS**

Fighters are primarily concerned with achieving their own goals. They are interested in "winning" the discussion and have little interest in maintaining the relationship. They see relationships as a game, with a winner and a loser.

## **NEGOTIATORS**

Negotiators value their personal responsibilities and their relationships with others. They prefer a give-and-take approach. Officials who are negotiators listen to the frustrated coach or player and compromise when it is appropriate. They demonstrate authority but also show concern for the participant.

## **DICTATORS**

Dictators, like fighters, are primarily concerned with asserting their authority. They give directions and commands and revel in their power they possess. The dictator makes calls with the attitude, "I'm the boss", rather than the attitude "I'm a vital part of this game". Often dictators place themselves above the game and participants.

## **QUITTERS**

Quitters give up and do nothing. They avoid confrontation and conflict with players, coaches, and spectators. They become intimidated when calls are openly questioned, and this leads then to withdrawal and making fewer calls.

## **DEALING WITH PLAYERS, COACHES AND FANS**

In dealing with other participants of the game, we have noticed that there are two poles, that are quite distinct from each other. The first is the official who has a pleasant style, quick smile, calm demeanor and creates a positive environment that has a soothing effect on players and coaches. This in theory is good for officials, however a basketball referee who uses the same tone of voice to enforce a controversial charge call compared to an out-of-bounds call will cause an abusive reaction by either the players, coaches or spectators. In contrast, a finger-pointing or verbal argument with a player or coach might demonstrate your certainty in the call but distorts the real message we want to communicate. At all times we must remember, communication is a two way street.

An article in the Referee magazine suggests some keys to communicating with players, coaches, and spectators at any level:

**Have Your Head On Right** - Don't think your striped shirt grants you immunity from having to take a little criticism. It's part of officiating. Plan on it. Successful officials know how much to take.

**Don't Be A Tough Person** - If a coach is on your back but not enough to warrant a penalty, then just warn the coach in a nice but firm way. This is especially

true during time-outs. Standing near an unhappy coach just to "Show him up" will only lead to further tensions.

**Don't Bark** - If you don't like to be shouted at, don't shout at someone else. Be firm with a normal relaxed voice. This technique will do wonders in helping you reduce the pressure. Shouting indicates a loss of control, not only of one's self, but also for the game.

**Show Confidence** - Cockiness has absolutely has no place in officiating. You want to exude confidence. Your presence should command respect from the participants. As in any walk of life, appearance, manner, and voice determine how you are accepted. Try to present the proper image.

**Forget The Fans** - As a group, fans usually exhibit highly emotional partnership and delight in antagonizing the officials. Accepting this fact will help you ignore the fans, unless they interrupt the game or stand in the way of doing your job.

**Answer Reasonable Questions** - Treat coaches and players in a courteous way. If they ask you a question reasonably, answer them in a polite way. If they get in your ear by saying "Hey ref, I want to ask you something" then ask them to call a time out because you are concentrating on the game.

**Choose Your Words Wisely** - Don't obviously threaten a coach or player. This will only put them on the defense. More importantly, you will have placed yourself on the spot. If you feel a situation is serious enough to warrant a threat, then it is serious enough to penalize, without invoking a threat. Obviously some things you say will be a form of threat, but using the proper words can make it subtle.

**Stay Cool** - Your purpose is to establish a calm environment for the game. Nervous or edgy officials are easily spotted by fans, coaches and players. Avidly chewing gum, pacing around or displaying a wide range of emotions prior to or during a game will serve to make you seem vulnerable to the pressure.

### **Summary**

Communication consists of sending and receiving messages, both verbally and nonverbally. Officials primarily communicate nonverbally and therefore must learn how to more effectively send these types of messages. We have to seek out feedback and reflect on our own style of communication to identify areas in which we are weak. We must also determine whether we are communicating effectively with others involved in the game.

## REMINDERS

**The following points are items to think about before each game you work.**

- Treat coaches, players and table personnel with respect.
- "Cruise control" -- Maintain composure when those around lose theirs.
- Be aware of team fouls, possession arrow and time out situation -- don't leave the game at the bench.
- Knowing who left the game is more important than knowing who entered the game.
- Official nearest table must be certain of ten players on the floor, and cue partner -- do not signal all clear until replaced players are off the court. .
- Referee the dead ball periods -- get good flow by telling the players where you are going to inbound or line up for foul shots.
- No signal if nothing happens (blocked shot, etc.)
- No two handed mechanics.
- Hustle, Don't Hurry.
- Anticipate the play, don't anticipate the call.
- Players commit fouls, not felonies – treat them as such.