

Managing Intimidation

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It's early in the game and the coach decides to complain about every play – even the obvious out-of-bounds play that called itself. If you have a history of “leaning” or look vulnerable on the floor, it's likely that the coach will move in for the kill. I've witnessed many cases where officials melted under pressure and resorted to make-up calls. An official that consistently gets intimidated is one that will never move up the ladder. These officials complain that politics or some other external factor is holding them back. In reality, though, it's all about lack of guts.

Knowing you are being worked

I broke into Div. I men's basketball at the age of 22. While there are many young officials working collegiate basketball today, there were very few back when I started. It was great to be working at Texas and Colorado, but the pressure was unbelievable.

Every call that I made or did not make led to one or both of the coaches getting upset. At the time, I was merely concerned with surviving. The coaches were working me even on plays where I was not involved. When this happens, it's obvious they are singling you out.

Today, after 12 years of working at the Div. I level, I can easily identify when a coach is trying to work me. For example, in a hard-fought WAC conference vs. conference game last season, a coach stared at me during an entire time-out period. He was visibly upset about a couple of calls that I whistled against his team. I avoided eye contact with him, but we both knew what was going on.

After the time-out ended, my Trail position placed me right in front of his bench. He said, “I can't believe what you are doing to the kids!” I ignored him. Remember to avoid responding to comments, as this will get you into hot water.

The irate coach persisted

“Did you hear me?” he hollered.

“Coach, I heard you. I know that you are upset. It's important that you keep your cool.” As I was saying the final words, the ball was inbounded and he got back to coaching – at least momentarily.

Later in the half, I had a no-call on a play where his guard drove hard to the basket and had the ball swiped cleanly by a defender. This no-call ignited the

coach. The home crowd was also extremely displeased. The coach, fueled by the vociferous crowd, slammed his fist on the scorer's table. The bang of his fist hitting table pierced the crowd noise.

After taking a deep breath, I whistled a technical foul on him.

Staying focused after technical

The technical foul was warranted, but the coach was still very angry and wanted calls to go his way, as if this would make up for the technical foul.

At the next time-out, I told the crew that we had to stay focused. We should not succumb to the intimidation tactics of the coach. It is our job to call the game fairly, even when our calls will not win a popularity contest.

The visitors won a on a well-executed 3-point play that fell through the net as time expired. Knowing that the home team coach wanted a piece of me, I sprinted off the court and into the locker room. Staying behind and welcoming a discussion with an angry coach is a lose-lose situation for officials. It's best to avoid these situations.

The post-game discussion

All of us agreed that the coach was attempting to intimidate us to make calls for his team. We stayed strong and called the game fairly. I'm not sure if the coach called our supervisor, but I'm confident that the film would support the game we called.

In short, officials that can keep an intimidating coach at bay are the ones that supervisors will seek out as leads. If you have fallen victim to intimidation, you must recognize it immediately and take the initiative to be strong.

Coaches might not always like your calls, but if you can make gutsy calls under pressure, coaches will respect you. In the end, this approach will lead to a long and successful officiating career.