

These Are a Few of My Favorite Things

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I am a dork. I mean, seriously. I am a huge dork. So is my good friend Jacob Tingle. But we'll get to him later. Why, you ask? It goes back to how I spend my Sundays in the fall. I am a huge NFL fan. Inevitably, almost every Sunday I am at the local watering hole, which just happens to have a zillion TVs with every game on. I watch my beloved Patriots and root for my fantasy football teams. (No wives invited.) As you know, on the first penalty of every NFL game, they show the white hat, and they put up the official's name. As my buddies are cheering on a Marshall Faulk run on one TV, I am looking at another, and hollering out, "Hey, it's Mike Carey!" I did that for every single game on every single Sunday.

I am the Rain Man of identifying NFL officials by name. (Insert Dustin Hoffman voice here) "Bernie Kukar...d-d-d-ddefinitely Bernie Kukar. Of course it's two minutes to Wapner." It got so bad that they started testing me. We would meticulously watch for penalty flags in each game, and as the first one was thrown, the tension would build. The R would pop up on the screen. "Ed Hochuli," I would say, "he's a trial attorney in Phoenix." Thirty seconds later in the Titans game, I would say, "Easy, that's Johnny Grier, he is from Temple Hills, Maryland." And so on. Of course, I was right every time.

Naming the Big Dance officials

Jacob Tingle and I used to play the same game at University of Maryland home basketball games in the 1990s. Thirty minutes before tip we'd race to name the guys on the court. "Larry Rose...Steve Gordon, and...." ""Frank Scagliotta!" Jacob would chime in. It's a pretty fun game, I strongly suggest you try it, especially during the NCAA Tournament. I'll be doing the same thing as I watch the tourney this year, and so will Jacob, 2,000 miles away. We always converse the next day about who had which game. Like I said, I am a huge dork. So is he. Being an aficionado of college basketball officiating, and using my secret talent, I decided to do a little preview of the upcoming March Madness. I decided to name my favorite officials and the one trait they bring to the table that I think makes them great. Jacob chimed in when he felt like it.

Favorite things

So, as the old song goes, "these are a few of OUR favorite things" to watch come tourney time. If you created the ideal Men's March Madness referee from scratch, he would have...

...the **call selling** abilities of Ted Valentine. Teddy Ballgame sells tough calls like nobody else. Some call him flashy, some call him showy, but I call him "money." When there is a difficult call, he always, always, always steps up and makes you believe he is 150% correct . . . *even when he's not!*

...the **mechanics** of Rick Hartzell. Sure, he puts a little mustard on his calls, but I love it. Don't you take your signals to another level every once in a while when you know the assignor's not around? Rick does that. I actually used to go to a camp in Virginia where I became famous among the staff for my Rick Hartzell impression. I had a whole routine worked out. It always brought them to tears. The greatest day of my life was during my third year there, when the D-1 staff was imploring me to do my Hartzell. Sure enough, I start doing it, exaggerating every signal, and around the corner came *Rick Hartzell!* In the flesh! They had totally set me up. He was the unannounced guest speaker that day. Thank goodness Rick Hartzell was the one laughing the hardest at my Rick Hartzell impression. *Whew!!*

...Jacob loves the **court presence** of Frank Scagliotta. He writes:

If you've been officiating for any length of time, *court presence* is a phrase you've heard. The first time I saw Frank was at a Maryland game about 8 years ago. If you've ever seen Frank you wouldn't guess he is a basketball referee. Shorter than most of the point guards out there, he doesn't fit the "new mold." Could he survive with all the 7-footers?

Once the game started, Frank really began to shine. Court presence. The intangible that separates the great referee from the exceptional. There was no doubt who was in charge that night at Cole Field House. The way he carried himself, the look on his face, the interactions with players and coaches — Frank was the boss and everyone wanted it that way. None of us are born with great court presence. Sure, some have a good start. Steve Welmer benefits from being 6'8" and having played the game at a high level. But if you're not blessed with the height, you can still develop your presence. Think I'm wrong? Watch Frank work. Athletic appearance, strong posture, recognizing potential problems and dealing with them before they blow up. Also, there's his experience. There's no short cut for experience.

...the **rules knowledge** of Stan Rote. I know of more than one big time official that still calls Stan Rote to this day for the answers to the NCAA test. Legend has it that he is a walking rule book. There is no substitute for being a rules expert.

...the **professionalism** of Donnee Gray. Nobody looks better making calls than Donnee Gray. He is the consummate professional. He exudes trust and confidence. "Smooth" is the word I would use to describe him. What's more, nobody treats people better than Donnee. Trust me, I know from the days I

worked for him. He still calls me when he has a game in Boston and invites me. Just pure class.

...the **judgment** of Karl Hess. I used to have University of Maryland season tickets, and I saw Karl officiate a lot. He is the one guy who sticks out in my mind as having perfect judgment. His calls are all right on, he looks good making them, and he brings a certain intensity to every game.

I even saw him whack Gary Williams once. I was a huge Maryland fan yet had to admit Karl's T was right on. He is my favorite official to watch. At several camps, numerous D1 refs have told me they think Karl is the best there is. I agree.

...the **facial expression** of Bernard Clinton. Bernard is an up-and-coming guy on the east coast, and his facial expression kills me. I say "expression" (not plural), because he only has one. He could be mad, happy, upset, sad, excited...it doesn't matter. He still has this borderline bored look (but in a good way) on his face like he has seen it all and will never get rattled. For a coach, I am sure it is calming.

...the **communication skills** of Tim Higgins. When I see Tim ref, and how can you miss him, I always see him talking. He talks to coaches, players, spectators, fans, table personnel, ball boys, janitors...anyone who will listen. I see (and work with) too many officials who don't use their voices. Our voices have so much power in this game. Tim is the perfect example of how communication can keep us out of trouble.

...the **overall genius** of Ron Martel. Ron, one of the greatest officials of all-time, who also doubles as my assignor, is the best all-around referee in the history of Mr. Naismith's invention, even though I have never seen him officiate. Please, everyone forward this article to him. Often. I need the games.

...the **love of the game** of Duke Edsall. Can't leave out my mentor! Nobody enjoys the life of a big time college ref more than Duke. He loves the people he works with, the people he works for, and even the fans. Look for the official with a smile on his face when you're watching games in the tourney this year. That'll be him.

A fan of referees

So anyway, I am a huge dork. I am not just a referee, but I am a fan of referees. I actually take pride in being able to identify them on TV. How dorky is that? More importantly, I know I have a long way to go in officiating and I have so much to learn. I am so excited that March Madness is here because I get a chance to see the best officials in the business *at their best* working the best games there are under the brightest lights of the year. I know that studying the officiating in these games will make me better.

Jacob sums it up best:

When you watch a game live or on TV, check out the officials. Do they have "it"? If they do, watch what they do, watch the way they carry themselves, watch their mannerisms.

Steal what you like and try it out for yourself. It takes time but becoming a great official is possible. Keep working games and every time you go out there, work hard at getting better.

I couldn't have said it better myself! Thanks, Jake.