

ARTICLE 12

Things We Need to Do Better — Part I don't penalize the defense

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Ball league just finished up last weekend, and as usual I got to work with some of my favorite friends and call some really good games. I also got to shoot (sports photography, that is), and during my review of many of those 10,000 images I shot in the last nine months, I observed (in person and in my digital darkroom) a lot of very marginal calls.

There were whistles that just should not have happened, and they often involved poor officiating of the defense. As I watched (or reviewed images) I cringed. I always cringe when I see an official take away excellent play from a defensive player. Just like a coach, I want to shout out, "NO!! It was no foul. The defense was legal!"

A shot in the paint

In one game, girls from the Ronald Reagan Rattlers were going up against the Douglas MacArthur Brahmas. Those are two large schools with serious players who have a lot of potential of making it fairly deep into playoffs over the next 3-4 years, considering the talent that is appearing in summer and fall ball. So, as with any team who expects to go very far, they (and their coaches) have certain expectations, and so should the officials when they work those games. Officials anywhere who work games involving the better talent should have sufficient respect for the skills of the team so that they restrain their habit of making quick, anticipatory foul calls. Often such calls are wrong calls when the defense does what they are trained to do. Here's an example.

Look at the defensive verticality of the player in the photo. She is straight up, and even on her toes. That's allowed. She can even jump and be legal! How many officials have you seen make a call on that kind of play? Do you know how many officials screw up such a play because they anticipate the call, rather than good play? In a 2-person game, it is likely that neither official has seen this play straight from the side (the camera angle). Both Lead and Trail probably get only, at best, a 45-degree view. Often they get straight-lined. Often in 2-person

mechanics only the Lead can even come close to officiating this play. In a 3-person game the Center sees this just like the camera has captured it. That's a benefit of the 3-person mechanics.

Camps and officiating schools need to critique our judgment

Secretly, I want to start my own officiating school. Why? For the primary reason that judgment needs to be taught, especially on plays like this. When a crew screws it up, they need to be told why and how to do it better. Yet, few camps or schools address the issue of judgment in making calls. I have attended so many camps and heard over and over from clinicians, "I don't critique judgment." That's a load of natural, moist, newly deposited, uh, fertilizer! They need to do it just to help all of us get better. I want to know when my judgment stinks, and I think many of us do. So why not give that information? I know for a fact that D-I supervisors review the tape of every game and express their opinion about judgment on calls and no-calls, and they repetitively tell their D-I officials to lay off certain things and make calls on certain others. So, yours truly thinks we need *more* input — not less — on helping officials change their judgment about certain calls. Officiating verticality in defense is one of them.

How do we officiate that play?

When we officiate the defense, we are looking to see if they get a legal guarding position and keep it through the whole play. Legal guarding position can be acquired long before there is contact in the paint on this play. B1 could have picked up A1 on the side of the lane and then shuffled into the paint and maintained position — and stayed legal. When B1 starts legal, she usually stays legal. Don't think so? B1 can have arms and hands anywhere in her vertical plane. She can (as in this photo) elevate on her toes. She can even jump straight up. If B1 has previously acquired legal guarding position, then she does not have to have both feet on the floor when contact is initiated by A1 in order for the defense to draw the player control foul. Too often we officiate it the other way, however. When we do, we are wrong, and we are penalizing the defense. Who is more likely to initiate the contact on a penetration into the paint? Of course, A1 is. To *properly* officiate this play, we officiate the defense and decide if she does something illegal, and thereby determine who was wrong.

By simple process of elimination, if the players hit the floor — but B1 was legal — then it was a player control foul. If B1 was illegal at any time during the play, then we have another decision (see below). Once B1 sets her feet and A1 moves into her, can B1 move? Only after the shot is away, and only minimally. If B1 moves sufficiently to knock A1 off balance as she returns to the floor, then we *might* have a shooting foul. Thus, it is important that we follow the shooter's return to the floor and see what happens. To do that well, we need to have a patient whistle.

Sufficient contact

At this point we need to review one more issue. Just because there is illegal action does not mean that there is always a call. That, quite frankly, is the hardest thing to teach in basketball officiating, and the reason is that our early training establishes habits that are very often hard to overcome. Another reason is that there are different levels of judgment in making calls on contact. What's incidental contact in a JV game may not be in a Varsity game. There is also the issue of what the players can play through, which usually means less at lower skill levels, thereby inviting more foul calls. Case in point: If B2 walks into A1 on the shot attempt seen in the photo, do we have a call? Maybe. The criteria for making an above average call on what I just described is this question: "Did it affect the shot?"

With average skill levels, it is probably a foul because we cannot reasonably expect A1 to make this shot attempt when B1 walks into her and makes her fade away from the basket even if A1 is not knocked off balance or put on the floor. That's not necessarily true with big girls, though. That may explain why D-I women's ball is played so physically and still the officials are able to get flow to the game. Think through this, and envision it so you know the distinction being made. In the photo above, if the shot is already away, and B1 moves into A1, what do we really have? If A1 crashes into B1, but B1 only takes a step backward, what do we really have? Truly, it could go either way *depending on the level of play, and our expert judgment!*

There are several very good examples of these types of defensive actions shown in this year's NCAA training videos — specifically the women's tape. If possible, get that tape and see for yourself what we should be doing on plays of this type. I recommend it even for high school officials because the basics of good officiating are being taught about so many aspects of the game: traveling, jump stops, hand checks, etc. If you are young and have an opportunity at working D-I basketball, it is the aforementioned type of analysis of plays that you will be asked to do in every game and during breakdown of tapes of your games. Why — if we are really trying to do our best — do the rest of us not do something similar and really try to get better at our level?

Judgment can be taught. Decreasing the number of whistles in games is something that can be taught.
