



Jason Smith, of Jackson, Mich., uses his experience and common sense to know what his coordinator wants called. Newer officials have to learn the difference between being aware of trends and overcalling specific fouls.

OVERDUE OR OVERDO?

How Superiors' Desires Affect What Gets Called

By Jon Bible

In the local football chapter where I started officiating years ago, it has been the practice to have separate weekly training sessions for first-year officials. The feeling is that people new to officiating need to go through the rulebook in A-B-C fashion and that is best done in their own group with veteran officials serving as trainer. Chapter meetings and

"newbie" training were on Monday nights, and then veterans and first-year officials worked together in sub-varsity games played on Tuesday through Thursday.

The older officials used to joke that we could always tell what rule was the focal point of the first-year meeting that week because, across the board, there would be a sea of flags involving it in the sub-varsity games.

Once, offensive formations were the topic du jour. That Thursday I worked a frosh-JV doubleheader with two first-year guys on the wings. From the start they threw flag after flag for illegal formations. Midway in the second quarter we were nearing the farce stage, so during a timeout I told them not to call another formation foul.

The message they heard on Monday night — not the one

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intended — was that formation fouls need to be called in spades. In other weeks the same thing happened when holding, pass interference and the like were stressed. A lot of first-year officials are afraid to throw their flags even when a real foul occurs, so the result was that often they called virtually nothing the entire day other than what was talked about that Monday.

Those guys couldn't be faulted because they were new to officiating and didn't get what the trainers were trying to tell them. I've seen other cases, however, where the officials knew the message but figured if they called a lot of fouls involving a rule that had been emphasized at an association meeting, they would earn points. Ironically, when appeasement officiating occurs, leadership comes down harder on them for calling a lot of nitpicky stuff.

I was a collegiate baseball coordinator in the 1990s. Around 1992, I was part of the process that resulted in the adoption of the NCAA collision rule, which is designed to keep runners from crashing into fielders. For purposes of education we made the new rule a focal point in our clinics. But afterward we heard of umpires enforcing it even when the catcher did not have clear possession of the ball.

I'm sure that some who were overly aggressive in enforcement honestly didn't get that I wasn't implying that anything other than clear infractions should be called. I fault myself for not being sufficiently cognizant of the fact that my audience consisted of umpires all over the spectrum in skill level and background and making my intent in focusing on the rule clearer and stressing advantage-disadvantage. But I also think that some umpires called infractions not within the spirit of the rule just to prove that they were at the clinic and heard my spiel.

Supervisors and trainers need to clarify their intent when they focus on rules. Are they just trying to educate folks on the meaning? Do they, in fact, want tighter enforcement because they believe

that obvious fouls are being ignored? Do they believe that officials need to loosen up a bit? In many, if not most, cases their intent should be obvious, but it's better to make it clear than to let people guess and, possibly, draw the wrong inference. One cannot assume that the audience will always get the true import of what is intended.

So, when they highlight a rule, leaders should add a caveat: "We've been too lax in this area, and we need to step it up because we're ignoring obvious stuff." "We've gotten too picky here and we need to back off."

For our part, officials probably need to do a better job, in some instances anyway, of carefully listening to, and drawing reasonable inferences from, what management is saying. If we truly don't know what the message is, we need to ask. Once we understand, we need to keep uppermost in our minds the fact that we can't afford to go further than to call the fouls that put one team at an unfair disadvantage. We can't make a bunch of calls just because we think it will pacify management.

Professional and college officials have had years of advantage-disadvantage drilled into them, so they automatically implement that philosophy when they hear a rule being stressed at a meeting or in a memo. Second, every move on the field, and every call, is graded, so they know they can't afford to take an appeasement approach or their evaluations will suffer.

Supervisors must clarify whether they are educating or trying to get everyone to be more aggressive in enforcing the rule. Officials have the obligation to officiate with the call-what-matters philosophy in mind. We can be forgiven a good-faith misunderstanding of what a supervisor wants. Once the message is clear, however, we do everyone a disservice if we start calling a bunch of what may be phantom fouls just because we think it will impress management.

Jon Bible is a replay official in the Southeastern Conference. A resident of Austin, Texas, he formerly officiated collegiate and pro football. □

QUICKTIP

Liability can sometimes be measured by three simple equations: Bad officiating encourages anti-social behavior. Anti-social behavior equals injuries. Injuries equal lawsuits. **Officials who are alert to sense ill-will brewing let the opponents see the striped shirt when something starts to happen.** That includes, of course, not having everybody's back turned on the players ever — no matter what else is going on in the game.

DID YOU KNOW?

Tim Hurst has the dubious honor of being the only umpire to be fired from both major leagues. Hurst kept players in line by hitting them over the head with his mask or by pinching them hard. In 1897, Hurst was barred from the NL for hitting a fan in Cincinnati with a beer stein. Twelve years later, he was given the heave-ho by the AL for spitting in the face of second baseman Eddie Collins.

SOURCE: BASEBALL'S MOST WANTED BY FLOYD CONNER

THEY SAID IT

"The staff is an organization, they're interchangeable, whereas a team is a bunch of skilled people working toward the same goals, same objectives, together. If they don't work together toward it, they never achieve it. A team is hard to get on, real hard to get on, and it's disappointing if you get released and you get knocked off the team. There's a tremendous amount of pride for being on that team, and a big responsibility for being on that team, and I'm not sure that a staff has that."

— *Stephen Walkom, NHL vice president and director of officiating, on why he refers to his charges as a "team" as opposed to a "staff."*



A Perfect Fit: You and Your Offseason Fitness Program

By Jeff Adler

After a period of time, people will reach an almost pre-determined stature of success and behavior in their pursuit of a work- or life-related activity. Many officials seem to fall into that programmed, inevitable evolutionary process. After a few years they will become cast as good, bad or playoff caliber despite their best efforts and their own opinions of themselves. The French have a phrase: Tu est ce que tu es. That literally means, you are what you are. We possess the potential to become more than we are, but we need to convince others of that.

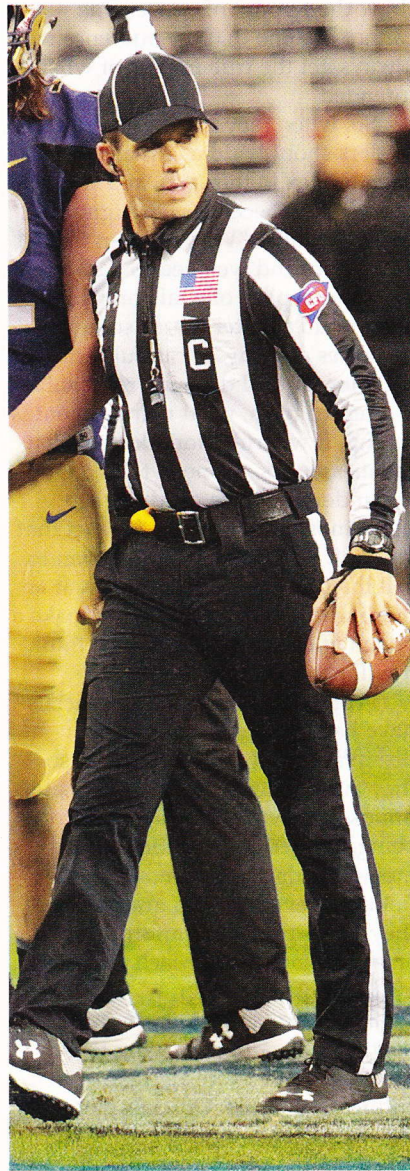
What distinguishes a good official from the ones who are regularly assigned the plum regular season games and the postseason assignments? What separates the haves from the have nots? Despite objective and analytic methods of evaluating officials, assignments will likely end up being based on subjectivity and factors you are unlikely to find documented.

In their quest to work the big game, officials should eliminate the "how do we look" factor by simply standing in front of a mirror. Who will get the call: the fit one or the fat one?

How we look is a difference maker that we should resolve to address not only to accelerate our career, but more importantly to improve our health. Losing that extra baggage will improve your quality of life and your officiating.

The overweight official will react more slowly, become fatigued sooner and have trouble running to properly cover a play. That deficiency is further exacerbated by today's no-huddle and up-tempo offenses.

Some officials perceive that their level of achievement is determined by the type of game they work (e.g. youth vs. high school varsity, high



John Love, Spokane, Wash., has the lean and fit look of an athlete.

school vs. college, etc.). The size and skill of the players varies by level but their competitiveness and desire to excel is the same regardless of the players' ages. Officials need to keep up with the players be they adolescents or adults.

Fitness is (or should be) one of the criteria by which officials are judged. In some ways, assigners are like coaches. Coaches must often compare players of equal ability and decide who starts and plays in the game, and who reluctantly sits on the bench. How is the tie broken? The X-factor might be a player's coachability and communication skills. Those qualities can also be important to officials, along with how one looks or impresses on the field or court.

When determining who gets the most desirable game, the assigner, who has already assimilated a list of the best officials to choose from, considers who will make them and the association look good.

Successful players train and work on conditioning throughout the year to optimize their physical performance. When they show up for the game, everyone including their opponent takes notice. Officials are similarly observed and scrutinized. An official must keep up physically with the flow of the game and perform at a high level throughout the entire contest (and look good doing it).

It is unlikely we'll get to a point at which fans, coaches and media have the same understanding of the rules as the officials, such as confusing Friday night football with what they watch on Sunday. And those people are sure to voice their displeasure when they disagree with a call, especially when they have the opportunity to see it on replay. But a fan or coach is less apt to accept a judgment call if it's made by an out-of-shape official who was out of position or unable to properly cover the play.

Fit is good. Fat is not.
Jeff Adler, Foster City, Calif., has umpired baseball at the youth and high school levels for more than 20 years. He's also a high school football official.

Don't Trip Up When Hitting the Road

By Anthony Solimine

Whether this is your first year or 10th year as an official, there is great anticipation while you await your schedule. You can't wait to get the season started. You hope you know some of the officials you will be working with and hope you'll be traveling to places that you have never been.

Many officials scan the schedule not so much to see the teams playing but to see where the games are being played. Any overnights? Any venues with personal or historical significance? Going to an arena or stadium for the first time?

At some point you will begin to map out the best routes to your assignments. If the games require you to leave work early, you'll need to make arrangements with your employer. If you have kids, the day care or babysitter will have to know.

Being a sports official is a demanding avocation, not only on you, your family and your job, but also on your vehicle. If you think about it, your car is your best friend on the road. The travel to and from your games places a lot of strain on your vehicle.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2011 the average American drove 25.5 minutes (roughly 23 miles) to work. Depending on your schedule, driving to a contest could double, triple or quadruple your time on the road. That means your car must be in good shape.

Proper maintenance is key. Occasional contact with your mechanic will help you stay on top of the proper maintenance for your car.

Here are a few recommended things that you should have done before you leave for big trips:

- Oil change.
- Check tire pressure. Rotate tires if necessary.
- Check all fluids (e.g. brake, radiator, windshield).
- Make sure your spare tire has air

in it. Also check to see if the jack is in working order.

- Ensure the headlights (low and high beams) are in working order.

- Check the wipers and wiper blades.

- Test the heater or air conditioner to ensure a comfortable ride.

Once your car is set underneath the hood, here are a few suggestions for inside the vehicle.

- GPS or travel app. Waze has real-time updates from others on the road. That can be helpful if construction or backups are an issue.

- Printed directions as a back-up.
- Blanket (winter).

- Air pump or temporary tire repair product.

- Cooler containing water, sports drinks and snacks.

- Phone charger cords.
- First aid kit.
- Flashlight.

- Phone numbers of crewmates and the host game manager or athletic director.

- Change for tolls or an electronic toll-paying device with sufficient funds in the account.

- Emergency gas can.

Most officials I know enjoy the camaraderie that comes with driving to and from games. Many discuss the game over a beer before heading home. Be sure to pick a place several miles from the game site to avoid bumping into fans who attended the game. If you'll be having dinner as well, you may have to make reservations. Similarly, if your trip will require an overnight stay, be sure you have made hotel reservations.

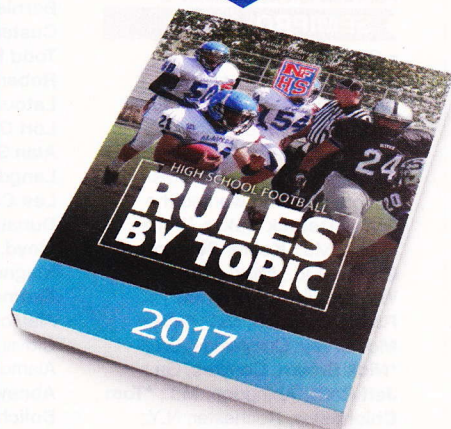
Looking back on the games that I officiated, the stories from the road trip are more memorable than the games themselves. Treasure those moments as they will bring back fond memories that will put a smile on your face for a long time.

See you on the road.

Anthony Solimine, Granite Springs, N.Y., officiates college football. □

GET THE RULES AND CASEPLAYS

TOGETHER

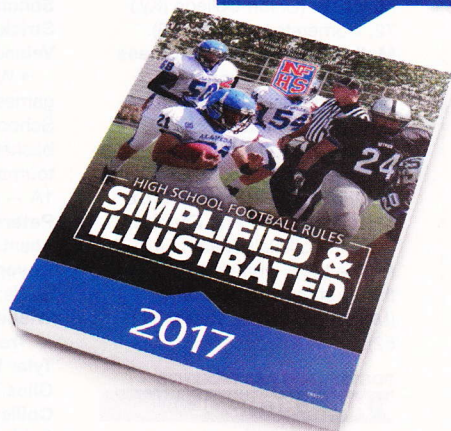


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