



It's easy to accept any assignment tossed your way. But there are some good reasons why you may want to rethink your decision. Take games if they don't present a conflict of interest, you don't double book yourself and you are physically and mentally ready.
Ray Lombardo, Chatsworth, Calif.

SIT THIS ONE OUT?

Top Four Reasons Not to Take an Assignment

By Lucia Perfetti-Clark

Believe it or not, declining an assignment is a lot harder than accepting one, but there are plenty of times you should do just that. Accepting assignments is generally great for your career. Your assigner is happy. You're making money and hopefully improving your craft. But when should you decline an assignment?

1. Conflict of interest. Whether or not your officials organization has rules, you know when there is a conflict. Sometimes the universe tests you. For three years in a row, I was given an assignment at the school where my husband works. It happens to be a school at the top of my sport, and it wasn't a cupcake assignment either — two top 10 teams. It pained me to decline the assignment, but it was the right thing to do.

I know that because when I helped out at the school's preseason intersquad game, a player asked me, "Are you Professor Clark's wife?" If that happened at an actual game I would not feel good about the other coach hearing that. Do I think I could work the game in an unbiased manner? Certainly. Does that matter at all to the opposing coach? Not at all.

No assignment is worth a hit

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to your professional reputation. So when you sense conflicts, leave those assignments to someone else.

2. Overscheduled. That could mean for the day, week, month or season. But officials should have in mind the maximum number of games and then stick to it. There is such a thing as working too many games; it can lead to burnout and apathy. That is not fair to the players.

Moreover, you may have promised your family the time the assigner is now trying to take. Whatever the reason, do not allow yourself to be overscheduled. Know your number and stick to it. You have to take care of yourself.

3. Not ready. The last thing I would tell an up-and-coming official is to shy away from a challenge. But there are plenty of reasons that an official might not be ready for a "big" game. If you're not physically ready, you haven't studied or gained comprehension of new rules or you're working your way back from an injury, assess your readiness. If the assignment would have you in over your head, thank the assigner but be honest. Let him or her know that as much as you would love to have the assignment, you can't in good conscience take it. Most assigners would rather deal with

your honesty than deal with the fallout later.

Although opportunities are not guaranteed and you need to be able to take leaps when they present themselves, you have to be smart before leaping into a situation you can't handle.

4. You're already assigned. When you work for multiple assigners and you want to take a different game because it is better than the one that is already on your schedule, resist the urge. Dumping lower-profile games is unprofessional and it will land you in hot water. Not all assigning software is created equal, so double booking can happen when the software thinks you have a time machine for travel, or sometimes assigners can't see why there is a block (just that there is one) and they will override the block. Either way you need to call the assigner who is giving you the new assignment. Tell him or her you already have a game, and that you're willing to be moved; you just need to get a release from the other assigner. Remember that assigners know each other. Bad reputations develop from that sort of game hopping.

Lucia Perfetti Clark lives in Baltimore. She is a national rated women's collegiate and high school lacrosse official and trainer. □

Ill-Timed Texting Phubs People the Wrong Way

By Gregg Becker

More than twice in recent seasons (including twice in one week), I've had partners who are more concerned about their cellphones than conducting a pregame.

Some people call it "phubbing," as in "phone snubbing." Whatever you call it, it's distracting and rude. I believe once you enter the locker room and begin your pregame, you should have the respect for the

game and your partners and put the phones away. One partner was actually trying to conduct a pregame while getting and replying to texts.

Another was having a texting conversation as my partner was trying to conduct our pregame. At halftime, the first thing he did was get on his phone and text. We were walking out the door to go back to the gym for the second half when his phone dinged. He ran back in to get his phone so he could read his text and reply as the third official

QUICKTIP

There are many reasons for adding and dropping sports, not the least of which is circumstance. **If you just got a promotion at work or changed jobs and are going to be working 60-plus hours per week, it's probably time to drop a sport or two.**

SURVEY SAYS ...

What is the biggest grooming/appearance faux pas for an official?



BASED ON RESPONSES FROM A REFEREE MAGAZINE SURVEY.

THEY SAID IT

"(Communication) is probably the hardest (skill) to teach. You can teach the rules; they are more or less black and white. But teaching what to say, when to say it and even how to say it is a much more challenging task. You can make the best call in the world, but if you don't sell it vocally with a loud, crisp call or visually with a sharp, prompt hand signal, a player may not accept your call as readily."

— Lois Huggins,
National Chair
of Officials for
the United
States
Tennis
Association



and I were walking down the hallway.

I get it. We are all busy and socially connected. I can be just as guilty of using the cellphone more often than I should. But there are limits. When we are on the other side of it, it's noticeably rude.

If you're having a conversation with someone whose head is down and whose thumbs are moving swiftly on a phone, they don't hear you. What they are communicating is, "What you are saying is not

important to me." We have to be more communicative one-on-one than we are cellphone to cellphone.

Look at it this way: If you were having a conversation with a friend or peer and your three-year-old walked up to you and interrupted, you would say, "Hold on a second, honey. Daddy is talking," and you finish your conversation. Why is it your phone gets more respect than your three-year-old?

When I was phubbed, I tried to point it out in a joking way, but

to no avail. The comment I get is, "I'm listening. Go ahead." Truth is, they're not listening. Once they're texting or on their phone, it doesn't matter what somebody says. They're going to finish that conversation because to them it's more important than the officiating matters at hand.

Technology is great. But there is a time and place. Be respectful of your partners and ditch the phone until after the game.

Gregg Becker, Toledo, Ohio, is a high school basketball official and trainer. □

Talk With Players Ain't Always Cheap

It's one of officiating's great conundrums: How can you listen to the legitimate complaints of players without hearing too much?

Just about everybody — players, coaches, fans, media — has something to say about what we do and how we do it. But when it comes to players, what should we listen to, and how much is too much?

The key to communication with players is what they say and how they say it. In virtually every game, you can anticipate players complaining they were held, their arm was slapped, etc.

If players bring something to your attention in a respectful manner, reassure them you'll take a look as you are able.

If, on the other hand, the comment is disrespectful, personal or brings your judgment into question, it is time to act more forcefully.

Communications experts will tell you there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is physiological; we can't prevent sound waves from entering our ears during a game. Listening, on the other hand, is a conscious choice. It requires our intent and attention. That is something good officials choose to engage in at the right times. □

Michael Shovlin, Bellevue, Wash., answers a player's question.



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