

OFFICIATE WHAT YOU SEE

Officiate Only What You Can See

I realized I had to stop trying to officiate every single play in a ballgame. Sounds ridiculous, huh? In retrospect, I had believed I needed to have a whistle on every play that just didn't look right. The fact that I was guessing about 50% of the time hadn't occurred to me. The more I watched myself on tape or observed a game in person, the more I was convinced that this was a major mistake that we make as basketball officials. This point is summarized in two ideas. First, don't guess. Second, trust your partners if you're not in a good position to make a sound judgment call on a particular play. Too often, we make a call from a poor position only to have players, coaches, fans, and other officials give us the ol' "What was that?" look.

Have a Patient Whistle

The second thing I realized I had done was to develop the ability to have a "patient whistle". More often than not, we must allow the entire play to finish before we make a decision on blowing the whistle. This is easier said than done. However, when officials let the play happen before they put air in the whistle, the percentage of calls they get right goes up dramatically. Too often, we react to a sound or anticipate illegal contact. Hold your whistle for at least a second and you'll get more plays right.

Officiate the Defense

The third element is an oldie, but a goodie. We've heard the phrase "Officiate the defense!" for years. I've had it explained to me in great detail by a number of successful basketball officials. Why then, is it so hard to do this? As we played or watched the game for most of our pre-officiating lives, we watched the ball. That is where the action is. As officials, however, we must train ourselves to watch the defensive player. It's extremely difficult to do it right. Only by watching the defender can we be sure who initiates contact. If contact occurs and we are watching the defender, we can correctly judge if he or she is adhering to legal defensive principles. Otherwise, we're guessing. Here's a drill taught by Bailey Marshall for developing this skill. When observing a game (camp setting or otherwise), call out the number of the primary defender. I sometime use it in actual games to force myself to find the defender and get my eyes off the dribbler. You'll be amazed how clearly the block/charge can be officiated if you're watching the defensive players.

Simple...But Not Easy

As I've mentioned, almost every camp teaches all of these principles. None of them are easy to incorporate into your game. It takes work and repetition before they find their way into our habit patterns. Work at them. I believe they are worth the effort. They were for me.