

Referees – The 6th Man? (An unfair perception by coaches?)

Referees (formally called basketball officials) are sometimes thought of as the sixth man playing for the other team (Ex: making calls against your team but not against your opponent). Youth basketball coaches usually feel that the referee has done a “great” job when their team wins, but when they lose the game – that’s when the complaints start surfacing. It is true that along with the “good” calls there are plenty of “bad” or “no calls” made by referees, but it’s the way a coach handles these calls that effects the team as a whole. In reality, the best way to handle these so called “bad calls” is to move on (without making negative comments) and focus on the remainder of the game.

The Ref has a split second to either make a call or not make a call (they are human and should be allowed to make mistakes, just as coaches make mistakes at coaching).

Stay focused and most of all keep your players focused! Irrate coaches, parents screaming from the bleachers, and players with attitude towards the referees do not help your team’s situation! Once your players lose focus and start concentrating on the refs, they usually do not perform as well. I have seen players make negative “gestures” and “comments” to the referee – only to get another quick call against them (now they have to come out of the game). Players should not make themselves a “target” for the referee (this is the ref’s way of saying, I have to hear it from the coaches and parents, but I don’t have to put up with it with the players). Another good point is that all the time that a coach spends yelling and focusing on the refs – takes away from their time coaching the team. Have you ever watched a coach on the sideline “screaming” at the refs – now take a look at the players – notice how their attitudes begin to pattern the attitude of the coach (now no ones focused on why they are there – to play basketball).

In all my years of experience, I have never seen a ref blow the whistle to stop the game and change a call because a coach pointed it out to them (if a ref calls a foul on a player, then it’s a foul on that player – and the call will not be changed no matter how loud a coach yells). I have seen a ref run by a coach and say “sorry coach, I missed that one” – but never change a call, or call a foul just because a coach was yelling... The thing that makes me laugh is when coaches or parents scream out “Over the Back, Over the Back” – Look it up in the rules book, there is no such foul listed, refs can call a pushing or holding foul, but they don’t call it “over the back.”

One of the worst mistakes any coach can make is to blame their team’s loss on the referees - instead coaches should take a hard look at the following:

1. A coach should examine their performance (play calling, substitutions, time outs, etc) and evaluate any mistakes that they may have made (yes, coaches can learn from their mistakes also).
2. Coaches should review their team’s performance – player’s stats to include turnovers, poor shooting, free throws missed, lack of hustle on defense, etc! A lot can be learned from stats.

Now, was it really the ref who lost you the game? Is it really worth teaching your players to blame the referees for the loss? Think about it!

Coaches – stay focused on your team and the game – Do your job and let the refs do theirs!

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