

"LIKE MINDED" Terms and Concepts for Successful Basketball Officials

Limitation: This brief presents generalities and concepts. It is not intended to apply to each specific circumstance. Each basketball game and each basketball play is unique. All play and all games should be judged fairly, without bias and with independent courage. This document is a framework and reference and is solely intended to serve only as foundation, not intended to determine how to call each play or game.

A. GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

1. **Action Area:** Any area where officials evaluate action, reaction and response in competitive match-ups. Like cells in the human body, the game of basketball is a series of competitive match-ups in action areas. Officials are charged with the responsibility to judge each competitive and semi-competitive match-up (Primary and Secondary) in their primary area of responsibility. Best officials are knowledgeable of playing concepts that allows them to anticipate action areas (i.e. post player changes sides of lane; ball screen set at the high post or 3 point line; baseline cutters moving across the court assisted by screens).
2. **Competitive Match-up:** A contested basketball play, on or off the ball, between two players. The degree of intensity and the relative importance to the game is, usually, determined by the intensity of defense (a backcourt press, two (one offense and one defense) low-post players, a dribbler with a path to the goal, etc) and/or the proximity of the match-up to the goal.
3. **Connected to the Play:** The necessity for a referee to stay connected to a play from start to finish. Officials must constantly work to improve their angles and referee the whole play to conclusion. When the play starts, stay with it until complete all the while improving floor position and creating the best available open look.

Tip for Officials: Staying connected to the play is particularly important for Trail officials who must judge action areas that move from strong side above the free throw line extended areas to strong side below the free throw line extended areas.

4. **Field of Vision:** Includes the "primary focus coverage" area as well as secondary areas with a feel and sense of "general awareness". Field of vision should also include the location of your officiating partners, a sense of their area of primary focus as well as the benches and scorer. All players should be observed at all times. While an official will certainly have primary focus on the competitive match-up in his primary area of coverage, the field of vision can and should be expanded to include general play.
5. **High Certainty:** The criterion necessary to make a call out of your primary area. There are (hopefully infrequent) times when a play occurs that is so obvious that

it simply must be called. If for whatever reason it is not made by the primary official(s) then the other crew member should make the call. However, this call must have a high degree of certainty. If a television replay must be used to find the call that a crew member makes out of his primary area then, by definition, it did not have a high degree of certainty.

6. **Primary Coverage:** is the action area designated by existing mechanics standards where an official should focus their main attention and is responsible for fouls and penalties. There are 10 players on the court. Within the framework mechanics, it is most likely that officials can breakdown the competitive matchups into 3 groups of 4 players (2 offense and 2 defense), 4 players (2 offense and 2 defense) and 2 players (one offense and defense). These three groups of “4,4, and 2” can be each observed by one crew member as Primary with expanded field of vision to include Secondary coverage particularly when officials stay connected to the play and see the whole play.
7. **Purposeful Movement:** a faster than normal pace i.e. (walk to fast walk or run, run to sprint) to (i) get a better angle on a play; (ii) be in position to accept a play that is coming into your primary area or (iii) will result in an official improving his field of vision in an action area.
8. **Secondary Coverage:** is the action area designated by existing mechanics standards where the official should focus only secondary attention and is not primarily responsible for fouls and penalties.

B. CONSIDER THESE CONCEPTS:

1. **Elephants vs. Ants:** "It is imperative that officials can determine the difference between an elephant and an ant.
 - a. Call the elephants.
 - b. Don't make ants into elephants." - Ed Rush, NBA Supervisor of Officials July 2005
2. **Quality Calls on 4's and 5's:** Teams and players practice and train hard to be competitive in the modern game. Post players and strong forwards are involved in more play in crowded competitive areas near the basket. These players are called to defend against players who have eluded other defensive coverage, rebound all missed shots, defend their own area or player, and score when near the basket. With all the possible contact and coverage, it is imperative that officials sort the play and call the fouls that matter. “Cheap” fouls on 4's and 5's can cause a significant competitive disadvantage to a team, and while unintended, unfairly influence play. Make solid, verifiable calls on 4's and 5's.
3. **See the Whole Play:** It is vitally important that officials see the (i) start, (ii) development and (iii) finish of every play. No exceptions to this fundamental concept can be made. When an official “replays” the play in his mind he must be able to visualize all three parts of the action. If he cannot, he must determine

which of the three steps was missed and then make every effort to improve his techniques. Corrections could include purposeful movement, staying connected to the play, or getting a better open angle to always see the play to conclusion.

4. **Referee the Defense:** While it may be more enjoyable and “fun” to watch an offensive player make a great play, it is the defense that determines (i) the legality of position that provides the basis for your call and (ii) is the source of whatever “trouble” can result from a contested play. It is the defender who
 - a. determines verticality,
 - b. determines a legal guarding position on a player with or without the ball,
 - c. determines the speed and direction of movements that are being screened,
 - d. determines rebounding and post positions and
 - e. determines the intensity of the competitive match-up.

Referee the defense ... the defense is the determinant of legal vs. illegal play. There are some that are teaching "Referee the Offense", but this is still in its infancy as far as teaching concepts. Stick with "the defense" and you will make more consistent calls.

5. **Referee Outside to In:** Court positions determined with purposeful movement should be established with the field of vision applied Outside to In. We believe a good frame of reference for Lead officials is a step outside (toward the sideline) of the position of the ball to a maximum 2 metres from the sideline. This does not oppose the FIBA mechanics to "pinch the paint" (see Morgan Munroe's memo) but Outside to In keeps the Lead from having to turn their head and shoulders on a play that begins wide in the periphery of their Primary and gets quickly passed into the paint, which is now their Primary or immediate Secondary. For Trail and Center officials, Outside to In positions are determined by the necessary angles to judge the play correctly.
6. **Referee the Players, Not the Court:** With arms extended to periphery in the field of vision, all 10 players should be observable. It is the position of the players, not the court that determines the competitive match-ups in your primary area.
7. **Dead Ball Officiating / Unsportsmanlike Act:** There are three (or two) officials on the court and they should interact as a team when there is a dead ball unsporting act. There are also three areas (in priority order) to officiate ... (i) The Responder, (ii) The Initiator and (iii) The Information needed to assess penalties. When a player has fouled another player in some unusual way, it often elicits a response from the fouled player. It is the responsibility of the nearest official to get to the responder as soon as possible to prevent escalation and, for that matter, the response. Essentially the “good guy” in this specific instant case, whatever the referee can do to prevent the responder from incurring a penalty or committing a foul would add value to the game. As a matter of second priority, a second crew member should get to the initiator to prevent escalation. The third official is the information gatherer. He collects numbers, actions and, most important, the

sequence of events. It is this 3rd crew member who will lead the crew to the correct penalty assessment. Obviously in 2 person crews, we need to work harder to observe all three areas.

Tip for Officials: Before informing the scorer and media, crew members should first determine and agree where the ball will be put in play after the penalties are assessed. Doing so will prevent an error and that someone will “forget” in the heat of battle. Use active listening skills to confirm to each other the result.

8. **Basketball is Game of Free Movement:** There is an inherent tension and competition within a game of strength vs. finesse. The game is intended to have freedom of movement. Immediately penalize “strength fouls” ... re-routes, impeding progress, dislodging. Officiate to allow and promote freedom of movement.
9. **Technical Fouls:** There are three criteria to calling technical fouls in this memo. That is, the technical foul should
 - a. fit the circumstance (time of game, score, court location),
 - b. the technical foul should send a message (immediately and always discontinue the type of conduct that caused the foul to be called) and
 - c. the technical foul must be defensible. Officials are held to a “higher standard”. We are not allowed to use profanity or confront coaches or players.
10. **Two-Referee Plays:** There are several standard basketball plays that are best officiated by two (of three) officials:
 - a. Screening – the east/west movement of the “passing game” offense and the high screen hedge pick & roll are common examples of plays that require two officials to evaluate legality of screens and apply the rules principle (must allow player to be screened a normal step).
 - b. Contested 3 Point Shot – Shots taken near the top of the circle can be clearly seen and assistance provided by both the Trail and Center, if both officials work and use position adjustments to obtain an open look.
 - c. Intentional / Flagrant Fouls – These usually quick developing plays are often judged on a player breaking away and/or going to the basket. Usually, the former Trail, now Lead and the Center judge these plays. We consider it “best practice” for the two officials to “mirror” each other with the proper signal to emphasize the call and confirm the judgment of one or both officials.
 - d. Out of Bounds – It is certainly possible for the Lead official to be unaware of who last touched the ball as it goes out of bounds on the “far/weak” side. In such a circumstance, a strong call of assistance from the Center official is required.

C. FEEL FOR THE GAME

This section intends to present and discuss officiating techniques, concepts, and procedures that are not based on rules and mechanics. Rather, they are gained from experience and observation. As stated previously and emphasized even more for these thoughts, the statements are generalizations and not intended to be absolute, certain or apply in all circumstances.

1. **Feel for the Game #1 - Value of a Possession:** Within standard shooting percentages, in today's game the number of possessions will approximately equal the number of points scored by a team. Accordingly, when an official blows the whistle for a violation or penalty and possession changes it is approximately equivalent to scoring a point. Judge the plays as elephants vs. ants.
2. **Feel for the Game #2 - Know the Result When the Whistle is Blown:** With the framework of judging all play fairly, best officials know the result and consequence of their calls. Historically termed "advantage vs. disadvantage", does the play warrant the penalty that will be assessed the offender?
3. **Feel for the Game #3 - 38 Bullets:** Players, coaches, fans and game officials all likely agree that any individual game is "best" when there is "flow" to the game and "freedom of movement". Officiating crews might be well served to think of themselves as sheriffs in the Old West. With only 38 bullets (total foul count for both teams) the crew must keep order, determine that the game has been played fairly with freedom of movement and has provided a framework that the best team that night has won the game. Crews are encouraged to use whatever supplemental techniques can be applied to keep the game within the ammunition given to the sheriffs that night. Does that mean that all games can be played with 38 fouls or less? ABSOLUTELY NOT but it is a frame of reference that can be applied, in general, to a game played with "good flow".

Tip for Officials: With a firm and loud voice, say to a partner that you are "watching" A1 and B1 and that they too should be aware. Similarly, tell a partner that A3 has been warned or that you have "drawn the line" regarding conduct.