CORNY'S CORNER

Judging Ball Handling Is Easy As A-B-C

Corny Galdones, February 2007

It's a wonder we referees aren't paranoid for every ball contact is open to question. Well, a few of us may be for other reasons but that's personal. Worse, our clients are poles apart on a ball-handling standard. Loose? Tight? Each one has a preference. Goodness gracious! This isn't rocket science. Judging ball handling is simply four R's: Receive, Release, Result and Reaction.

Whenever a player receives a ball with both hands, it's a double hit because the hands aren't exactly in sync. Using a microscope brings nothing but trouble. If the second hand trails the first but the ball keeps moving and is handled cleanly with one joint contact by both hands, that's fine. Citing this otherwise earns a puzzled look or a response of "What?! Are you crazy?" *(Shhh. That's secret.)* Ignore the player's form and positioning. Focus in on the ball bouncing from one hand to the other, being bobbled or slipping out of the hands. If it does, by all means, blow that whistle on the second or third team contact for a double-hit violation.

The ball must be released instantly upon receipt, *i.e.*, can't stop. The leeway on how brief should be the same for every contact. Technically, every ball stops in order to rebound. Bah, physics. Did the ball pause? Was it caught, lifted or over-controlled? Did it roll along the hands or body? Was it in contact for a long time or long distance? Was it started in one direction then redirected? Was it palmed or tossed like a basketball? On a setter dump, directional block or power tip, was the hand unmoving (not already thrusting) then loaded up at the point of contact? If the hands stopped in mid-motion, would the ball have remained on the hands? Any answer of "yes" is a held-ball violation, regardless.

Players, coaches and fans tend to be influenced by the result — ugly, unexpected, sound, or most common, spin. Forgive them if they know not what we enforce. Nonetheless, until everyone is on the same page, these irrelevant factors are part of the game. Deal with it. Was the ball received and released properly or not? Be consistent. After release, the ball can rotate some and be legit. Spinning like a top may be okay, but that's a warning sign. Here again, consistency is key. Let's not look for calls. Allow the calls to come to us and call what has to be called. Uphold an even standard for the entire match that is comfortable to us, accepted by both teams and doesn't take the game away from the players. Adjust from match to match to meet these expectations. Is everyone satisfied? Great!

"Aawww," "Oh, my gosh!" and similar dissenting reactions must not sway us. Act like we know what we're doing. Remember, calls are all about angles. We shouldn't whistle anything we don't observe. Don't guess. Still, don't dismiss this valuable difference of opinion. Review the situation mentally. What did these critics see from their vantage point that we didn't see? Maybe they're right. Nail it in the future.

Learning the basics of ball handling is easy. Now go out and apply it. That's the hard part.