



CORNY'S CORNER

Bench Control

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The second referee has primary responsibility for controlling the conduct of the team benches with assistance from the first referee. As the second referee, you are closest to the heart of the bench action and can make a big difference on whether there is order or disorder in the match.

Professionalism. Being an effective overseer of the bench starts with a professional attitude and demeanor. Each match is important to those involved. Look your best, do your best. Show everyone the same respect and courtesy you expect. Being in close quarters with the benches, you may be tempted to fraternize or chatter with the players and coaches. Don't. That creates an unwanted perception of being too friendly and lessens your authority to resolve any bench conflicts that arise.

Working relationship. Build a working rapport and trust with the teams. Proper mechanics, which have been discussed in detail in previous articles and manuals, project an image of competence. Earn the teams' confidence by making the correct calls under your jurisdiction. Work with the coaches, not against them. Let them coach. Avoid imposing restrictions on their jobs that cause unneeded friction. Be approachable. Answer all questions from the coaches amicably and with eye contact. Be able to predict when a coach will beckon for substitution or time out. Communicate with the coaches to prevent their team from being cited for player misconduct or procedural violations such as excessive substitutions or time outs, team delays, etc. Cultivate a positive relationship with quality service and performance that coaches count on and appreciate.

Secondary activities. Stay alert for any secondary court activity that could become an issue with the benches. Keep reserves standing at the end of the bench from intruding onto the court. Unsporting conduct such as trash talking often happens at the net at the end of a play, especially after an outstanding individual effort. While mimicking the first referee's signals for the play, keep an eye on the players at the net. If you see any adverse action, step in right away to caution the offending players. After a string of points by the opponents, players may try stalling tactics such as untying their shoelaces or wiping the floor of non-existent moisture. Monitor these activities and inform the first referee with a "team delay" signal if they are not legitimate. When you are notified by a bench that the serving team is screening, relay this circumstance to the first referee with an "illegal screen" signal.

Questioned decision. Sooner or later the bench, in particular the coach, will show disagreement in a decision by the officials. Do not be passive and force the first referee to handle this potentially harmful situation from across the court. Your mission is to keep the displeased coach calm and clarify any questioned decision. Deal with the coach only. Let the coach control the rest of the bench. First, realize the coach is merely looking after the team's best interests. Dissenting remarks or gestures made in passing by the coach can be dealt with a cautionary whistle or settling motion. If the coach approaches the sideline to address the first referee, blow your whistle if needed to get the coach's attention and intercept the coach as close to the bench or attack line as possible. Position yourself between the coach and the first referee, and face the coach. Be the sounding board for the coach's complaint or concern. To placate the

coach, think about what you will say and how you will say it, especially for the coach to accept an unfavorable decision. Most times the coach wants to know what the officials saw on the play and the reason for the call. Explain this vital information in a concise, cordial, and convincing manner. Know the rules. A wrong explanation could worsen matters. Also, if a rule is misapplied, the first referee must be informed verbally or if possible with the appropriate signal so a proper decision can be rendered. If it is a judgment call however, sell the call. Do not give any indication you disagree with the first referee's judgment call or final decision. Be careful of falling into the common trap of dividing the officiating team. Think "we." Above all, be proactive in serving and protecting the first referee.

Controversial call. Your toughest challenge will be to support a poor decision or judgment call by the first referee. There is no easy, set procedure for mollifying a coach upset with the controversial call. Your top priority is damage control by blunting the coach's wrath. Statements like, "*It's the first referee's call.*" or "*I can't help him when he does things like that.*" will not do. A good approach is a conciliatory but conclusive response such as, "*I understand coach, but the call stands.*" or words to that effect. A reinforcing statement such as, "*That call was consistent with previous ones made.*" could work. In a very obvious situation, sometimes collectively admitting, "*We missed it.*" is acceptable to a coach. (Use only once per match!) Confidently handling this dilemma with kid gloves and a united front comes with experience.

How other officials deal with a coach protesting a call. Officials from around the country were asked how they would deal with a coach who gets up to protest a call in a collegiate or USA Volleyball match. Their suggested responses could be grouped in three general categories although some answers cross categories. FIVB matches or high school matches may require different techniques so the following advice must be matched to the environment. In making choices between all these possibilities, it is best to consider how the phrase will sound to the coach. You are attempting to control the coach. You need to decide how to do that in the best manner possible.

1. Indicate to the coach that the play might have looked different from the official's angle.

Many officials use this tactic. An experienced coach will have heard it many times.

Therefore be careful not to overuse it. Here are suggested phrases to use:

- "Coach, I know how it looked from your perspective, but my partner had a different perspective and we have to go with that."
- "Coach his/her angle is a bit different."
- "From his/her angle, it looked OK."
- "You may be correct. He/she had a different angle and it probably looked cleaner from their vantage point."
- "Coach that was a tough angle. I probably did not get into position fast enough to help."

2. Give unequivocal support to the other referee. This can be done by indicating that the call was correct, or that you saw exactly the same thing. Care needs to be taken in using this tactic. If the coach agreed with the call in the first place, there wouldn't be a complaint. Usually, there is little value in trying to be confrontational on a judgment call. However, this may be the only technique to work with some coaches and should be used selectively as an official.

- "That's a judgment call coach and in his/her judgment, it was clean."
- "Coach, she had a very clean view of that call and did not see a lift/double."
- "Clearly my partner did not judge the contact to be a lift/double."
- "I saw it as a clean play."
- "It was a good call coach. Please sit down." "Thank you."
- "Your captain is the only spokesperson for your team. You need to sit down."

- "I've worked quite a few matches with my partner and I have yet to see him/her change a ball handling call, even if he/she might have missed it. Arguing probably will not help."
- "It was a lift/double."
- "It's a judgment call, coach; let's play now."
- "Coach, she/he had a good look and he/she is the only one of us who can call ball handling in that situation."
- "Coach, s/he is working hard up there. Please give him/her a chance to do his/her job."

3. **Agree with the coach that something MIGHT have been missed.** The key word is "might." You are agreeing that there was a possibility that the call was incorrect. You are not agreeing that it was incorrect. The best way to lose a partner is to criticize your partner to a coach. Accepting possible error works very well when you are the person who missed the call, or when you could have helped on the call but did not. Thus, the R1 can use this to his advantage when the captain questions a ball handling call by indicating that he saw X, but Y might have happened and he certainly will look for it. It is more problematical when the R2 is talking to the coach. It is possible that the R2 has a different way of calling the game than the R1 does. Thus, the R2 must be confident that she knows how the R1 usually calls a match if she is to use this tactic. It is NOT necessary for you to agree that something was missed to use this tactic.

- "We may have missed that one coach."
- "That one was my fault - I should have helped him/her."
- "When I see something, I'll try to make sure that he/she can better see my signal."
- "If it happened as you said it did, then we missed it. We'll keep a better eye on it next time."
- "We'll keep an eye out for those coach."
- "Coach, I should have helped on that one, it was my fault."
- "Thanks coach, I'll help out next time."
- "Coach, I do not think that "R1" got a good look at that play. That's the reason he/she may have missed it."
- "Coach, that one's long gone. Let's move on."

Settling a coach. Let the coach have a brief, civil say and be done with it. If the coach insists on pursuing the matter or continues to vent frustrations, halt this disruptive behavior. Stay composed so you can defuse the pressure situation and restore order. Be conscious of your body language. Avoid finger pointing, waving off the coach, or any aggressive or offensive posture. A smile helps. Be tolerant but firm, not brusque or confrontational. Warn, don't threaten, a coach who is close to getting a sanction. Never say "the next time ...". Threats and ultimatums just cause further tension. You will then have to follow through with a sanction or else lose credibility and control of the bench. Instead, use people skills such as diplomacy, sweet talk, humor, or similar means to persuade the coach to cease and desist. Keep in mind the other team will expect the same treatment and privileges. You must let the coach know that the discussion is over with a phrase like, "*We understand*" or "*Thank you, let's get back to the game.*" Turn away from the coach and return to your position. If the coach still complains, use a firm but nonaggressive tone to indicate that the conversation is over or call for a sanction.

Issuing a sanction. Gauge whether a sanction is warranted at this point. You will have a better feel for the coach's temperament and conduct than the first referee. If the coach is non-compliant, demonstrative, hostile, or casts aspersions on the officials' abilities, a sanction for discipline is required immediately. Make sure you and your officiating partner discuss before the match how sanctions are to be administered and how the issuance of one will be communicated to each other. It's acceptable for a second referee to issue an official verbal

warning to a bench player or a coach. The first referee must be notified through pre-agreed signals this action has taken place. For individual yellow card or higher sanction, the first referee does the issuance after being requested by the second referee.

Preventing a sanction late in a game. In a situation late in a game, you would prefer that sanctions not be given, especially if it could influence the match outcome. However, you should not tolerate disruptions by the bench at the end of a game or match any more than you would at the beginning. The officials were also asked how they handled these end of game/match situations. Here are some of their responses:

- "Coach, the R1 is going to call them as he sees them. It is a waste of time to do something that will not change his calls. You could hurt your team if a sanction is issued at this point."
- "Let it go and sit down so that we can move on."
- "Coach, please let the players decide the match and sit down so that we may continue."
- "Coach, you need to sit down; It is too close to the end of a well-played match to penalize your players. Please sit down. Thank you."
- "Coach, don't do anything that might penalize your players – they are playing hard and don't need anything else that would hurt their chances."
- "Coach, do you really want to push the issue at this point in the match?"
- "Coach, sit down."
- "I have heard your input; please return to the bench to avoid sanction."
- "Coach, you're doing a great job coaching your team, but you need to let it go and sit down so we can support both teams good play without being distracted."
- "Coach, you do not want this to end on a card. Your team is working hard. We can either work together or not. Your team will have a better opportunity to win if you are coaching them."
- "Coach, we're in a situation here where a card could really hurt your team. Please sit down."

After a sanction. Make sure the coach and bench are informed that a sanction has been issued by the first referee. That should curb the misconduct at hand. It also discourages the coach from acting up again knowing the team will be at risk of further penalty. Give the coach a chance to settle down after being sanctioned. If the sanction does not restore order, another one might be necessary but should be averted as much as possible. Tactfully reminding the coach that a sanction has already been issued will often do the trick.

Match control is the responsibility of not only the first referee but the second referee as well. How the second referee interacts with and controls the benches, mainly the coaches, is a major factor on whether there is harmony or discord during the match.