



CORNY'S CORNER

Common Sense Is Uncommon

Corny Galdones, September 2005

Knowledge is power. Thirst for knowledge. Learn everything there is to learn about officiating. This solid base, however, is only the start toward excellence. What looks black and white on paper is riddled with gray areas when applied.

To officiate a match requires study and training. To do it well takes an eye and feel for the game. This means technical skill laced with common sense. Every match is different. Is it competitive or informal? Are the players skilled or novice? The questions and nuances vary from contest to contest. Adapt.

We referees provide structure and tone to a match. So be good cops on rules and procedures. Know when to enforce them and when to lighten up. We don't have to control everything. Be confident to stay out of the action, present when needed and calm under pressure. See that the competition is fair and safe using balanced judgment and a firm yet relaxed authority to keep our high profile low-key. Being bossy and full of ourselves just points us out and turns others off. Instead, be like chameleons. Blend in with finesse.

Remember, the sport is about the players and coaches. We merely provide a service. Like any business, the customers come first. What's best for them is good for us. Tend to their needs, which hopefully are their wants. The rules won't deal with every possibility. An unclear situation mustn't be forced to fit into an existing rule. No, don't break the rules. But they certainly can be bent to suit the situation. How? Think! Our biggest aid is our head, not the rule book.

A rules stickler dictates rather than facilitates. That's not us, is it? Going by the book word for word without reasoning wins no friends nor influences people. To waste our logical minds is to stagnate. Explore other options. If an alternative fulfills a rule's intent and spirit but not its exact terms, go with the flow. It's no big deal. Nothing is perfect in life. Exercise discretion to make a sage verdict of least damage overall. Pleased or not, is everyone okay? Let's play ball.

Some rules concern judgment. Oh, boy! Leeway. Understand what the coaches and players expect of the officiating. Adjust to gain an advantage. If a player chucks the ball on a second or third team contact, is it a violation? Yes. Should it be called? Yes and no. What?! Suppose it's a Special Olympics match. A hustling player executes proper technique but muffs. Show some heart. Did you "ooooo" or "oo"? This extreme example illustrates a point. Tweaking rules within their parameters to satisfy patrons is practical and prudent. The key is to be consistent for the entire match.

Rules smarts launches us whistleblowers. Court smarts is our goal. It's theory versus practice, knowledge versus savvy. Making the right decisions for the right reasons involves thinking things through. Rules are guidelines. Common sense takes precedence.