



CORNY'S CORNER

No Pole Hugging Allowed

Corny Galdones, April 2008

Anyone can serve as a second referee and has. Many a hopeless R2 partner who hugged the pole and held onto to the whistle all match long have tortured us. Little did they know that more is demanded from a second referee than just calling net and centerline violations. One must be on top of a load of other duties to do the job right.

The moments between plays can be hectic for a second referee. There are benches to scan and control, requests for substitutions, time outs and line up checks to fulfill, floor and scoring issues to tend and areas to police, all without delay. If a coach nears the sideline to question or argue a call across court with the first referee, jump right in as the R2 and intercept the coach. Explain, calm, charm and if all else fails, command, to sit the coach back down. Whatever you do, don't stand by quaking in your shoes and let the R1 suffer abuse. Get your behind out in front to take the heat and cool down the situation. Serving and protecting the R1 is not to be treated lightly as it often is. It's important, very important.

With much to do before the serve and little time to do it, sorting out the complex receive formations of today for overlaps can send an R2's head spinning. Unlike a fan, an official must be aware of how each position player plays. The setter, swing hitter, middle, opposite, libero and defensive specialist each has specific roles and assumes certain spots on the court depending on the offense or defense being run. Learning them simplifies detecting overlaps.

Overlaps come in two basic flavors. In the first type, a player's foot is past an adjacent player's foot at service contact. Whistling this is okay provided it's gross. If it's minor, give the team a chance to fix it first by warning its coach without the opponents noticing. Being picky of the rules brings grief more than anything else. The key is to build rapport and trust by figuring out when it's best to apply the rules. In the second type, the players are out of rotation. Nail this one. It's big. Everything revolves around the setter. Look there for a possible overlap. Don't stop. Go over the rest of the receive formation too.

After checking for overlaps, there usually is a lull before the serve is made. Don't waste this time waiting. Put it to good use. Study each team to gather info that will help on back row violations when play starts and on overlaps when the teams side out. Is the setter "live" or in the back row? Who's opposite the setter in the rotation? Who's next to the setter? What's the order of the front row players? Where's the cute blond? Every inside tidbit helps.

Throughout a rally, be quick as an R2 to move and park on the blockers' side before the attackers' second contact. Don't stare at the net and centerline until a potential violation arises there. Instead, view the action. Know exactly what's going on to be able to address queries from coaches and players when play ends. Watch for ball handling screened away from the R1, attacks or blocks by a back row player, plays over the top of the net and pancakes. To catch faults in these situations, the first referee needs an extra pair of eyes. They're yours, the R2.

Being a second referee isn't easy as most folks think. Only the good ones pass the test.