



CORNY'S CORNER

Sell Your Call

Corny Galdones, June 2008

Why do certain referees get all the breaks? They seldom, if ever, receive any grief from players and coaches during a match. How do they manage to escape with rulings we catch flak for and seem to do no wrong in the eyes of others? What sets them apart from most of us who aren't as lucky? What's their secret?

The answer is easy, but it really isn't. These spared referees do a terrific job of selling themselves and money isn't involved. If you have the chance to attend a match being officiated by one of them, study that referee. You'll learn a lot.

Everything about their match is in order. This doesn't happen by accident. Instead of killing time in the pre-game, they take care of details no matter how minor. Is the referee stand proper? Is there room to move around as a second referee? Are the antennas aligned? Are equipment and spectators off the playing surface? Are the team benches out of the front zone? Are towels on hand? Is the court layout correct? The items they could check go on and on. They're prepared. Minor glitches don't become major issues for team gripes.

These operators aren't smooth, they're smoooooth. Far beyond going through the motions, their every action, every signal, every technique is precise and crisp. Tall or short, they hold themselves up high. Looking exceptional is typical, but there's more. They act it too. Their "no nonsense" air oozing with class and poise commands instant respect. Altogether, it's called presence. A lucky few grew up with this gift while the rest had to craft it. Regardless, they all have it. It's a trait worth developing.

These officials don't just make a call. They sell it. Nobody messes with them. In contrast, those meek or weak in their decision or body language are fair game to anyone not pleased with the call. It's all about presentation. Some referees are better at it than others, especially those we admire and envy, whose strong show of judgment is very secure and convincing. "I know what I'm doing. Relax." This silent but powerful message of these aces has a calming effect that heads off questions and differences of opinion. Plus they have a knack for talking themselves out of trouble instead of into it. Wouldn't it be nice to be in their shoes? It's not as hard to achieve as one may think. Get competent. Back it up with a manner that soothes and assures yet leaves no doubt of who's in control.

The confident grace of our stars gives them a big jump in gaining credibility from the start. Not only are they on top of what is and isn't a violation, they also have an excellent sense on what calls are expected and how much play can go on before a call must be made. Being true and steady on what isn't called and what has to be called lets their match flow. Doing so earns people's trust. Still, this desired status isn't granted overnight. It takes clean and regal performances over time. Then and only then, the prospects of almost every call going unchallenged will be favorable. Why not all calls? Well, no one has called a perfect match yet. If you ever do, retire on the spot for it's downhill from there.

Referees aren't all treated the same. Teams cut the most slack to officials who make everyone believe in them. It's basic. Get the calls right. Sell them. Sell ourselves.