



CORNY'S CORNER

Stress Management

Corny Galdones, February 1998

Stress is an officiating occupational hazard. Volleyball officials are expected to be consistent during the entire match in making instantaneous decisions that are fair and proper. Unfortunately, we are not infallible and are subjected to stress. Coping with causes and incidents of stress is paramount to being a productive official.

Preventing stress. Avoidance of stress by stagnating is counterproductive. Challenge and improve yourself with tougher assignments. However, use discretion in pursuing an assignment above and beyond your capabilities. If you do, you will be burdened with an overwhelming task. You're definitely ready for the next level when the playing action seems to you to be in slow motion, all decisions are being made properly, and the match is under control throughout. Knowledge and skills deter stress. Know the rules and when it's necessary and appropriate to apply them. Attend matches and peruse technical publications to study the current playing and officiating techniques and strategies. Polish your officiating mechanics and abilities. Physical fitness and mental readiness are essentials in precluding stress. Be well-rested. Visualize possible match situations and your correct officiating responses. Allow time to arrive promptly and prepare fully for the match. Do your best thus averting careless mistakes. Haste and errors bring on stress. Being unfit, unprepared, hurried, or underachieving are stress factors within your control.

Dissipating anxiety. Uneasiness and tension on your part are normal for a trying match due to its quick pace, demands, and expectations. Personal measures must be taken to keep this anxiety in check, or your decision making and overall performance will be impaired. When feeling stressed or on the verge of losing your poise during the match, use the interval between plays to regain your composure. Don't feel pressured to rush, the play cannot start without you. Take your time without dawdling, relax. Chuckle at yourself and lighten up, it's not the end of the world. Bolster yourself with a pep talk. Breathe deeply down to your diaphragm and slowly exhale. Do it once or twice. Make eye contact with your partner for moral support and reassurance you're not alone. Tune out all movements, views, crowd noise, side conversations, thoughts, and other distractions that have no bearing on the next play. Concentrate on the court activities pertinent to your play calling. Thoroughly examine the defensive and offensive team alignments to buy more time, and more important, to better prepare yourself for the ensuing action. Start the play by whistling forcefully as though blowing your tensions away. Slow down your signals for added benefit.

Handling difficulties. Thinking and acting positive breeds confidence which in turn curbs stress. Worrying about failure or mistakes creates self-doubt and causes mistakes, thus inducing stress. Don't be concerned if you think you made a mistake. It might not be considered one from other perspectives. If a decision is perceived to be in error by others, don't take any dissent or criticism personally. It's your position as an official that's under scrutiny. Nobody is perfect. Every official makes mistakes, even the great ones. Granted, the great ones make fewer mistakes. What is important is how you react and recover from this adversity. Regardless of the emotions and adrenaline raging inside, maintain a calm, confident demeanor, or else you will lose credibility with the players and coaches. Smile. This sign of confidence has an overall soothing effect. Take charge. Sort out all the facts, collect your thoughts, then take a

logical, firm action and get on with the match. If necessary, issue a sanction to quell a misconduct which caused a strained match atmosphere. Don't prolong the situation or be indecisive. Otherwise, players and coaches will detect a vulnerability to further questioning, testing, or manipulation which could induce stress. Once the matter is over and done with, forget about it. Dwelling on the past is detrimental. Blank it out of your mind and focus on the game at hand. Regain your composure if needed before restarting the match.

Reviewing performance under fire. After the match, be sure to analyze your performance. Get a critique of your decisions, match management, and mechanics from your partner (and perhaps later from other knowledgeable colleagues). Discuss problematic situations and alternate solutions. Keep a match diary detailing prominent events and needed improvements. Periodically consult this diary to gauge your progress in preventing future stress.

Stress is inherent in any officiating assignment. Whether it is self-inflicted or precipitated by outside elements, stress must be wisely managed so your performance in officiating the match is not adversely impacted.