

Self-Evaluation

Having both the ability and willingness to self-evaluate are critical components of improving your officiating. Regardless of sport or level, you must be able to critique yourself and be critiqued by others to maximise your abilities.

Don't study the rules enough? Quick temper? Too technical? Once you identify the areas needing work, the process can begin.

Striving to improve includes more than a philosophy and having resources available; it's having a good attitude. While perfection is impossible, excellence is not. Excellence is what you get when you strive for perfection.

Bottom line: You must want to improve before you can improve.

Once you've figured out what you need to learn, it's much easier to start learning. Practice. When you're done, practice some more.

Studying the rules of the game consistently can lead to marked improvement. If the rules are your stumbling block, a common problem for newer officials, get after them and focus. The rules are one aspect of officiating that is strictly mechanical. If you put in the time, you can teach yourself the rules.

Also study the practical components of officiating. It's not enough to know where you should stand; you must know why you stand there. You won't find those answers within the pages of book – you need to spend time with experienced officials to learn what they do and why they do it.

If you're interested in improving as an official, you need to ask yourself the following 10 questions after every game or contest. Keep in mind that the purpose of the questions is to alert you to any undesirable tendencies in your work or situations that are particularly troublesome for you. As a result, any question answered "Yes" should be followed by the companion questions "Why?" and "In what situations?"

You can only answer the questions about yourself; others cannot answer them. For that reason, complete honesty is a must if these questions are to be of any value. Let's get started.

1. Did I mess up?

Making mistakes will always occur regardless of an official's experience and expertise. Officiating is simply not a perfectible craft. It is, however, inexcusable for an official to continue making the same kinds of mistakes throughout their career. The purpose of self-evaluation is to eliminate certain kinds of errors and to reduce their overall frequency.

2. Were there any times when it was fortunate that I didn't have to make a call?

In almost every contest there are situations (or potential ones) which could cause officials embarrassment if they were required to make a ruling. Fortunately, most lapses in concentration, improper positioning and other minor failures go unnoticed by others (coaches excepted). You should not, however, ignore those lapses. Sooner or later such shortcomings will catch up to you.

3. Did I do everything I could to ensure a just outcome?

In every sport there is a great deal of latitude available for officials in the sanctioning of play. As a result, this arbitrary power could strongly influence (if not determine) the outcome of a contest. The best you can hope to do is to choose a course of enforcement that will be just and bring about a

conclusion that reflects the relative performance of the participants. In other words, do not become a part of the competition.

4. Were my decisions consistent?

Want to drive coaches crazy and keep the spectators buzzing? Inconsistency will do it every time. In fact across all sports if you polled coaches you would find that officiating inconsistency is their largest concern. Inconsistent calls between officials, as well as relative inconsistency by a single official are problems.

5. Did I fail to maintain proper control at any time?

An important part of any official's job is to clearly communicate and follow through on your expectations around behaviour of participants, coaches and spectators. Arguments, spectator interference and other unexpected disruptions often endanger the likelihood of order and a proper conclusion to the game. Anyone can be surprised and confused by new experiences, but each situation should be used as a learning experience for future incidents.

6. When did I feel most vulnerable to outside influences?

All officials experience situations in which their confidence and independence waxes and wanes. That is a normal response to an activity that relies so heavily upon subjective judgment. It is important, however, for you to know when you are most vulnerable so that necessary steps can be taken to keep those influences in a proper perspective. By identifying when you are most susceptible to those outside influences, you can bear down with a little discipline and follow your own course.

7. Were there any situations where I avoided or usurped responsibility for a ruling at the expense of another official?

It is a human tendency to avoid potentially threatening situations while seeking those that are likely to be rewarding. You should be careful, however, of any action that might reflect badly upon another official. Whether you allowed your co-worker to take responsibility for a ruling you should have made or you stepped in and overruled your partner, you should be certain it is done in the interest of the game rather than for any personal motive.

8. Was there anything about my signals, gestures or style that evoked an unexpected or unwanted response?

An official is often unaware of how their work appears to others. As a result, their work may be seen as inappropriate or incompetent. For example, although you may want to appear relaxed during the course of your work, you may be perceived as appearing disinterested. Good officials, on each occasion, should know something about the character of their audiences and adjust their performances to produce the best possible results. Such insight takes time, experience and attentiveness to the changing character of audiences.

9. Did I uphold, defend or rationalise any improper rulings?

Many officials live by the old adage that to change a decision is to provoke criticism and undermine credibility. It should be kept in mind that the purpose for which an official is appointed is to "call em right." If you are unable to handle criticism or are too concerned with an untarnished image, you probably shouldn't get involved in such work. When a mistake is made, you should accept the responsibility rather than penalise the participants by insisting upon its correctness. In the long run, that type of inflexibility does more damage to your credibility than almost anything else. However, you

should never allow those mistakes to continue. If you are consistently accepting responsibility for the same blown call over and over again, you will end up losing credibility.

10. Was there a particular aspect of my performance that I could work on at the next game?

The perfect game has yet to be played. If you ever answer “No” to this question, you are either deceiving yourself or not interested in perfecting your craft. There are always areas in need of improvement. Officials who are satisfied with all past performances are either lazy, disinterested or simply haven’t had their weaknesses exploited (they will eventually). You should always work under the assumption that you are only as good as your next call and should make every effort to ensure a good one.

By understanding yourself and identifying your strengths and weaknesses as an official, you open the door for every improvement every game that you officiate. If you’re committed to improvement and have a desire to succeed in your work, memorise the 10 questions and commit to answering them in detail shortly after every game.