



# Post Play Express

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## THE GAME-SITE OBSERVATION AND EVALUATION PROCESS

By Bill Carr, Supervisor of Alberta

With the arrival of May, the vast majority of formal game observations and subsequent debriefings for the season are behind us. Spring is always very busy in the basketball world. During a recent conversation with one of my fellow AEs, it was suggested that, based on my many years of experience as an on-site game observer and evaluator, a Post Play Express article about the evaluation process from my perspective would have broad general appeal for our membership. So here it goes.

### THE PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATIONS

In some cases, evaluations are done primarily for the purpose of identifying and assessing officials and making a determination as to what level of games they should be assigned. These types of evaluations are often done during the preseason or in exhibition games and sometimes in formal camp settings. In fact, the purpose of some camps is for the identification of officials. Some local and provincial boards, as well as conferences, use these types of evaluations to assist in determining the make-up of an officiating panel. Each year, some officials may be removed from a panel while others are added. These decisions are primarily performance based, which generally means evaluations are required. Also, obtaining a higher accreditation (local, provincial or national via NOCP (certification) is a related purpose for this type of on-site game observation and evaluation.

Another purpose in performing evaluations is to mitigate the potential loss of referees. By over or under assigning officials, you run the risk of losing them. Placing an official in a game should be done with the purpose of providing him or her with the best opportunity to be successful. Having an official in a game that is well above his/her comfort level and ability only causes frustration for all, and the ensuing fallout may result in one less member in your board.

However, the primary purpose for conducting onsite game observations and post-game critiques is as an educational opportunity for the official. A brief review with the evaluator of what the official is doing well and where improvements may be in order can and should be an integral component of the official's learning and development process.

All evaluations should be complete, well-meaning and honest and given with the intent of assisting the official's growth and development. If a candidate is being evaluated to work games at a higher level, but demonstrates he/she cannot keep up with the play, that candidate must be told. That's the process.

## **OWN THE EVALUATION**

I believe it is the responsibility of all officials to continue to work to improve. Officials should seek out both formal and informal feedback on their performance from fellow officials, friends and yes - even family members. Ask your spouse, significant other, your son/daughter or your mother/father what they thought of how well you officiated a recent game that they attended. You might be surprised.

Also, seek out a mentor, someone with whom you connect and who can assist you in your own personal development. I used the phrase "someone with whom you connect" because, based on my experience, a good connection between an official and a mentor most often yields the desired results. Also, it's been my experience that organized or more formal mentorship programs of local or provincial boards, though well intentioned, can sometimes become a bit of a chore for both the official and the evaluator and consequently don't often yield the desired results. I don't believe forced mentorship works. In my opinion, there must be a "connection" for mentoring to be effective.

In recent years, the use of video clips has been introduced into some post-game evaluations. These can be extremely effective in illustrating to a crew where a mechanical breakdown may have occurred that contributed to a missed call where a call was needed. And video is a great tool to illustrate to a crew and to specific members of the crew things such as basic signals, posture, movement, floor positioning and position adjustments. Video technology comprises the "Show" of a "Show and Tell" which increases the effectiveness of the messaging an evaluator is able to provide to an official.

Last, when as an official you're in a post-game debriefing session with an on-site evaluator, regardless of the technology being used, keep a record of what's being discussed. Remember, the points being made are for the benefit of you - the official.

During my years as an evaluator, I've witnessed a wide range of responses from officials during the post-game debriefing session. Some will question the points being made. Some will argue & make excuses. Thankfully, there are far fewer of those. Others will make notes in a hard copy notebook and in recent years some will record key points made during the post-game debriefing on their phones.

One further point regarding your notes - simply making them should not be viewed as the end of the evaluation, but rather as the beginning of your next level of learning. Consider taking the notes you made from your previous game to your next assignment. Incorporate these into the pregame conference you have with your partners prior to your next game. I believe you will find that this cycle of receiving feedback, making

notes, absorbing the information, and then incorporating it into your next game will contribute to your growth. In short, try to take advantage of the feedback, but remember - it's how you use the information in your notes that matters.

**Own your evaluations!**

## **SOME LESSONS LEARNED**

I have been doing on-site game observations and evaluations now for well over 30 years and, over that time, I've made numerous mistakes. But through the process, I've also developed a few techniques that seem to have worked for me. Yes, evaluators need to continue to learn and improve as well. Staying current with the game is critical from rule changes, to mechanics' changes, to points of emphasis for various leagues and conferences to mention a few. Each evaluator has developed a style that works for him or her. I'm no different. Here's a brief snapshot of my approach to the on-site observation and evaluation process.

During the first part of a game, I'll be a bit more focused on mechanics and floor positioning, but I will try to record the time and players involved in specific plays, if I feel there is the potential for discussion. I also focus on POEs in the early going - shooters squaring up and committing a travelling violation, guard play, possible impeding of cutters, off-ball action in the post, bench decorum, etc. Again, I try and record times of play situations that I can pass on to the crew.

As the game progresses, I'm looking more at call consistency, tolerance for contact, and general crew dynamics. Are the calls of the crew being accepted or is there some level of frustration developing? Is the crew "on the same page?" Again, I try to note the time when tempo changes occur or players and coaches appear agitated.

In tight games and at the end of quarters, I become a bit of a clock and scorer's table watcher and focus a bit more on dead ball matters such as possible time-outs, possible substitutions, correct free throw shooters, etc. And then there's those darned "gotcha's" or "unusuals"! These can occur at any time in a game and it's where the crew must be at its best. Triggers can vary from a possible missed or incorrect out-of-bounds call, a possible missed foul, retaliatory action by a player (contact or verbal), players on the floor, an upset bench, a technical foul, an unsporting foul, a double foul to name a few. How the crew responds to these types of situations is often the difference maker in having the game end with a satisfactory outcome. Again, there are trigger points that can assist an evaluator.

I believe it's very important to have the crew engaged in the post-game evaluation process. There should be dialogue. This often, but not always, means asking them about their impressions of the game - what they liked and didn't like, what went well, what, if anything, they were uncertain about, specific calls, etc. I then match up their comments with my notes.

In recent years, I've found that in some post-game sessions, identifying a theme can be useful in engaging the crew. For example, "How did you feel about your teamwork tonight?" This may get into the specifics of possible missed rotations, dead ball efficiencies or inefficiencies, and calls made from outside an official's primary. These are a few examples of the types of discussions that sometimes follow. Then we're back to matching up the crew's comments with my notes.

I also believe that, at the conclusion of an evaluation, you must ask or have determined if the crew is comfortable with or onside with what was discussed. This approach in concluding the post-game critique has served me reasonably well over the years.

One last point: in a tournament setting, you have one of the best opportunities imaginable for methods improvement. You will or at least may have the same evaluator for 2, 3 or more games. Believe me, an evaluator will learn about you, with you. To this end, I encourage any official who has the opportunity to officiate in a tournament setting, to jump at it. It's an opportunity that you should not forego.

## **ZEBRAS WITH DIFFERENT STRIPES**

**By Martha Bradbury, Interpreter of Manitoba, CABO Secretary Treasurer**

As always, the biggest challenge I face when it comes time for me to submit my annual Post Play Express article is to decide on a topic of interest that we don't hear about over and over. This year I landed on a topic that is relevant to me, as well as many others in our sport and as well as in other sports. My hope is that you will read it with interest and consider officiating another sport. Officials are a unique group. Much of what we learn in one sport carries over to other sports.

Last year, quite by accident, I started to officiate another sport. I was asked to present to a group of women at a football clinic. After the presentation, at the urging of the organizer, I was convinced to stay after my presentation and complete the remainder of the clinic. That resulted in my becoming a Level 1 football official. Those of you that know me know that football is very important in our house. I am lucky to have the support of my husband and my son who referee both football and basketball. It makes for lots of interesting conversations.

After completing the clinic, I received my first assignment. I went out thinking that football is very different from basketball, but was pleasantly surprised to see how much of what I know from basketball can be applied to football. In general, there are commonalities amongst sports, including but not limited to:

- **Blowing your whistle**
- **Game management**
- **Areas of responsibility**
- **Signals**
- **Mechanics**
- **Seeing the infractions**
- **Making the tough call**

I reached out to others that I know, both in basketball and outside of basketball, that officiate multiple sports, to draw on and share their experiences. Their responses were thought provoking.

## **WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO MOVE INTO A SECOND SPORT?**

In general, most started officiating another sport because they had family members that played or family members that encouraged them to “give it a try.” They also hoped for the possibility of officiating with a family member. That was certainly a benefit for me in both of my chosen sports. As well, as in so many sports, the overall lack of officials was concerning so they helped fill a gap while bringing officiating experience. There is a general feeling that officiating another sport will make you stronger and help with your decision-making skills in your initial sport. For some, it provided an opportunity to officiate all year round, back in the days when basketball was a seasonal sport. Like many of us, they got involved for the overall love of the sports they were officiating. Finally, camaraderie is a big benefit of multi-sport officiating. Many of us have made lifelong friends and it’s great to add more through additional sports.

## **WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?**

Depending on the sport, some found that the addition of more officials (or in some cases, fewer officials) in their second sport could be a challenge and required adjustments. Focusing on a second sport resulted in less free time as there was now no off-season. Working to schedule games, while still allowing for some free time, meant ensuring the assignor understood that it was a secondary sport. Many found that learning new mechanics and positioning was a challenge. For some, “getting habits from one sport out of your head when transitioning to the other” was something at which they had to work. Learning the rules could be challenging, but some “turned it into a benefit as it made me review rules more than I probably normally would have if I was just “refing” one sport.” Depending on the second sport, the change in how penalties were applied (i.e. time vs yardage or turnover) was something new.

## **WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS?**

For many, the benefits far outweigh the challenges. “I have found I don’t become complacent and forget to do my proper mechanics and calling procedures.” There is a general feeling that “the great part is it has opened up yet another great group of people to get to know across Canada.” Already having a love of sport means that adding an additional sport allows officials to continue to enjoy something they already like doing, as well as seeing the joy that it brings the players. The skills we learn in one sport are invaluable in another. “Dealing with people is very transferable - so all the people skills I had already acquired... were immensely helpful.” As well, “having the ‘official background’ was huge, already having experience talking to and dealing with coaches and players, having experience with judgement and decision making.” Being able to apply what you learn in one sport to another sport reduces the officiating challenge significantly.

## **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS WHO ARE CONSIDERING OFFICIATING ANOTHER SPORT?**

We can all benefit from a little advice from those that are already officiating more than one sport. Be sure to manage your expectations. While many skills are transferable, it’s still new and you go in as a rookie official. Be sure to balance everything in your life. Many just say “go for it” if it’s something you’ve been considering. The feeling is that “officiating is like a bug. Once you get it, you’ve got it for life.” A good mantra that one official I

spoke to lives by and one that is true even if you officiate only one sport is: "Faith, family, something to do for a living...then officiating", which was taught to me as a valuable lesson by the Director of officials for the CFL.

#### **WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT OFFICIATING MORE THAN ONE SPORT?**

Many of those I polled feel that officiating more than one sport "changes things season to season" and helps to keep your interest. As well, it means "I can provide a level playing field for the athletes that gives me pride and satisfaction that I can then give back to the sports I love." For some, like myself, my husband and son, it provides the opportunity to officiate with a family member. Focusing on more than one sport provides the "ability to improve your overall skills and adds variety to your career." There is a general feeling that "If one wishes to excel in their vocation, participating in more than one sport provides ample opportunity to 'hone' those skills." One key to success in a new sport is to "be humble because you could be an excellent basketball referee, but you will have to accept that you will have to climb the ladder again in a different sport."

#### **DO YOU ONLY OFFICIATE SPORTS THAT YOU PLAYED?**

Most of the officials I spoke to feel that it definitely is a benefit to have played the sports they are now officiating. One official mentioned that he felt that coaching versus playing gave him a much better perspective of the games and helped make him a better official. For me personally, I played basketball but not football and, so far, I feel I am having some success in football. Don't let the fact that you haven't played a sport that you may have an interest in officiating stop you from taking on the challenge of a new sport.

#### **DO THE SEASONS OVERLAP? IF THEY DO, HOW DO YOU MANAGE OFFICIATING BOTH SPORTS?**

It seems that most sports run year-round now. Most of the officials I spoke to said there was an overlap in their sports. Some manage it by "trying to officiate only one sport at a time, especially at the end of the season. I find my focus becomes split if I try to do both at the same time, and I owe it to the players to be in my best mindset to officiate." Others find that the best way to balance multi-sports is by leaving different days open for each sport. Some set a hard stop for each sport to avoid the overlap. Some good advice, if you do want to officiate more than one sport, is: "Do not try to do everything! Especially if you have children!" Finally, set a priority for one sport and stop the second when your primary sport begins.

#### **DID YOU DECIDE TO SELECT THE OTHER SPORT BECAUSE YOU WERE ALREADY AN OFFICIAL IN ONE SPORT?**

For some, deciding to officiate another sport was done simply because one sport stopped and they loved officiating so much they wanted to do it year-round. The only way to do that was to choose another sport to officiate. Others said it was "a family tradition" to officiate another sport so they chose to take on the challenge as well. Still others agreed that it was only because they were already an official that they got into officiating a second sport. We all already have a passion for officiating so, moving into another sport would bring new challenges and allow us to expand our horizons.

All of this leads us to a simple fact...we are all officials and every game needs officials. If any of you are looking for a new challenge, I strongly encourage you to consider officiating another sport. It would benefit your passion for basketball and the ever-present issue of recruitment. If even a few of us spread out into other sports, we may have some success in convincing officials in those sports to come join us in basketball. So, why not give another sport a try? If you have a passion for another sport or simply want to experience something new, please consider sharing and expanding your officiating experience!

My sincere thanks to my fellow officials without whose thoughtful insights this article would have been very challenging to write.

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John McFarland – Basketball and Volleyball

Frankie Billingsley – Softball and Basketball

Mario Lessard – Basketball and Baseball

Kyle Mikulik – Basketball and Football.

Justin Bradbury – Basketball and Football

Rob Hand – Football and Softball

Dave Foxcroft – Football, Basketball and Lacrosse

Ken Lazaruk – Football and Hockey



*LET'S HEAR IT FOR TEAMWORK!*

*ENJOY YOUR SUMMER WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS!*

Post Play Express will be back in September.

