

TOA “Football Newsletter”

Week 9

Anyone Believe it is the Last Week of the Regular Season? I don’t know what the forecast is this weekend but we have had very good weather all season – let’s hope it continues for at least one more week.

Just because it is the last week does not mean that it is time to abandon all the good habits we have developed over the first eight! Each crew member should bring to the pre-game conference at least one thing that has helped him to become a better official this season – share those ideas and see how they might be applicable to other officials on the crew. Secondly, do not have a shorter pre-game conference. And, the worst thing you can do is to skip it all together.

As I mentioned, last Friday was the last game for our crew and we discussed a number of issues that have been important to us all season and went over a couple of new plays and how best to handle them. We all had a sense of “urgency” since it was the last game of Mike’s career and yet he never let us get side-tracked by that and our full concentration was on the game. Do not let thoughts of post-season assignments (or, the lack of such assignments) take your concentration away from the task at hand. The next play is the most important play – until there are no more “next plays!”

Post-Season Assignments: I know a lot of post-season assignments are difficult to figure out and sometimes stomach. The new feature of checking one’s history of recommendations is interesting and in my case reveals absolutely nothing concerning the neither “rhyme nor reason” involved in such assignments. And, I assume that many other officials are in that same position.

If we get caught up in the “glory” of getting assignments or the “disgrace” of not getting an assignment, we are in this avocation for all the wrong reasons. Concentrate on doing the best job possible on the games you do get and the rest will take care of itself (hopefully). As Fran Martin mentioned last week at a basketball Rules Meeting, people are still getting recommendations that are dead! And, I remember Paul Palmer mentioning that one basketball official had received enough recommendations to get a 6A State tournament – but none of the “votes” had come from schools where he had worked that season. That’s the way the system is – get over it – and have some fun doing the best job you can!

Comportment – or Looking the Part: From the moment you walk through the gates until you leave the stadium, people, including coaches and administrators, are noticing what and how you are behaving. Once you are at the site, there is no place for swearing, making unnecessary comments about the cheerleaders, etc. Once you are through the gate, you are at your place of business – and, remember that all walls have ears.

Having a friendly conversation in public with a coach or AD may seem harmless enough. Until, that is, you realize that your laughing at a joke or situation is being observed by the opposing team’s coach or administrator. I’ve heard it a thousand times before – “but

he's one of my good friends!!" Tell that to the administrator or coach from the other team who observed all the laughter and back-slapping!

I have been very fortunate to be able to call many of the administrators and coaches with whom I have worked over the years as "friends." But, I go overboard to make sure that while on school premises I try to act in a very professional manner. Maybe the principal of that school does not know me and would be offended by over-friendly behavior. And, even then there can still be problems: An AD whom I greatly respect, reported to his league peers one time that I should probably not be assigned to varsity basketball double-headers because I "had to go in the locker room between games to rest." Actually, one of my socks had managed to get folded under my arch and it was very painful – indeed I went into the locker room at half – to change my socks. How are you supposed to fight perceptions?

Be very careful to not let incorrect perceptions become "facts!"

Listen to What the Kids Tell You: Many times kids say things, I think especially to umpires, of a complaining nature, that are simply "excuses." Nonetheless, a good official will try to take note of what was said and "file it" in his memory. Last Friday, I received several complaints from team A that an interior offensive lineman for team B had his hands on their throats while blocking – obviously, I looked and looked and could not see the infraction. However, later in the first half, I saw what was going on: the lineman started his block with open hands to the shoulder pads of his opponent and one of his hands slipped up to the opponents throat – I made sure to warn the lineman in a manner that let the complaining defensive player know that I had seen the action and that it was to stop! No flags necessary!

A Great Basketball Analogy: Those of us who work basketball know that our mechanics are designed to keep the players "boxed in." In other words, officials are always in a position to watch all the players, all the time. The same concept is extremely appropriate for football – keep all the players in front of you. That means that H and L need to be wide – it means that when H and L "come in" to mark a forward progress spot, they must keep all the players "boxed in." Also, when H and L return to their positions, they should do so facing the field – do not turn away from the field (and the players). When a ball carrier goes out of bounds, turn to watch the action - that action is far more important than keeping your eyes on a spot – missing a spot by 12 inches is far less egregious than having a fight erupt out of bounds!

Thank You: Many thanks to the "powers that be" in the TOA for allowing me to continue sharing with you. I have been asked to also continue Basketball Newsletters and I will be happy to do so. Remember that our goal is to provide a **safe** and **fair** environment for our kids to participate in co-curricular activities! FS