Officiating: Past and Present

Jerry Grunska

The perfect game hasn't been worked yet.
But that's no reason to give up trying.
Jerry Markbreit, former NFL referee

This chapter addresses the following:

- A brief history of home-grown American sports and how officials' roles have changed over time
- The root of gender issues in sports and officiating, and legislation designed to eliminate discrimination
- Officiating shortages and methods of acquiring sufficient officials

THE EVOLUTION OF OFFICIATING

The progress of sports and their development into today's recognized games are easily traced. Although the evolution of officiating is sketchy, it is known that from the beginning, competitions required rules monitoring. Several uniquely American team sports started with a prominence in the East. As a result of modifications and adjustments that occurred over the years, some of them look much different now than they did at the start. Lacrosse, a genuinely American sport that Native Americans played before colonists arrived, took place without officials monitoring the rules. This chapter provides a look into the development of sports officiating and its progress through the American-born sports of basketball, football, and baseball.

BASKETBALL

Basketball is a game that was invented on demand. The way it started is both amusing and the source of rich lore.

In a sense, it is possible to attribute the impetus for basketball's birth to physical training clubs in Germany called *turnvereins*. These widely prevalent clubs relied on invigorating apparatus work and tumbling for bodybuilding: tossing Indian clubs and medicine balls; swinging from rings; swiveling on the pummels of the bulky, leather-encased horse; squirreling through parallel bars—what would be called gymnastics today. Exercises included military drills and marching. The purpose of this training was to prepare youth for combat.

In 1891, the six-year-old School for Christian Workers in Springfield, Massachusetts, had essentially adopted the German system, extending it to promote an ideal of strong

minds in strong bodies with a nonsectarian ethic of wholesomeness. This was the birth of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

When students at the Springfield institution, later called a college, were forced indoors in November after a balmy autumn in 1891, they balked at the shift to the old-school routine. Dr. Luther Gulick, dean of physical training, dismissed one instructor who couldn't cope with the malcontents. He then tried to take over the program himself but gave up when he couldn't get the students to cooperate either. In exasperation, he called on a second-year graduate student to solve the problem. Gulick ordered the young man, James Naismith, to try something completely different.

Naismith, a graduate of McGill University in Montreal, had coached football for six years and had just finished work at a Presbyterian Theological Seminary. According to historian Edward Steitz (1976), Naismith "felt that teaching young men through sport was a better way than preaching—especially if one could work through their love for athletics."

Naismith asked building superintendent Alfred "Pops" Stebbins to locate a pair of boxes and hang them from the gallery in the gym. Stebbins couldn't find boxes, so he nailed two half-bushel peach baskets 10 feet from the floor. The revolutionary thing about the baskets was that they provided a horizontal overhead target. As a result, players had to develop completely new skills for moving the ball on the floor (passing and dribbling), and they had to shoot at the baskets. The challenge became an instant sensation. Because the class had 18 members, there were 9 players on a side at first.

The players ran into a problem almost at once: People watching from the balcony could bat away shots or guide errant tosses into the basket. Also, at first, a helper had to lift the ball out of the basket after a score. That problem was solved when a cloth sleeve was attached to the baskets after holes had been sliced in the bottoms. Officials pulled a cord to help the ball slip through (metal hoops replaced the baskets in 1893). A year later, backboards were used to thwart unruly onlookers.

The first official basketball game began at 5:15 p.m. on March 11, 1892, in the Springfield gymnasium. It pitted the secretaries against the faculty, and the secretaries won, five baskets to one. Amos Alonzo Stagg, the future Grand Old Man of football, put in the lone field goal for the faculty. Naismith, doubtless the referee, thought Stagg's style was too rough.

The first female basketball game took place the same week. Stenographers and secretaries took on the faculty wives. Because the ladies wore bloomers, no male spectators were admitted. Inventor Naismith must have refereed the match, but history has not recorded the score. One of the stenos was a lass named Maud E. Sherman, and she became Naismith's wife.

Thanks to a conscientious chronicler named Edward S. Steitz, we know that two officials oversaw the action from the start of the sport because the respective duties were defined along with the original rules. The referee was responsible for the ball going in the goal, for the ball going out of bounds, and for player conduct in relation to the ball. The referee also timed the game, although we don't know the length of quarters or halves. The umpire, evidently a subordinate figure, was solely in charge of calling fouls. He probably was not allowed to have a whistle. Authorities were reluctant at the start—as they were in other sports as well—to give too much or even equal responsibility to all judges on the floor or field. (In all sports, historically, authorities feared giving so-called "extra" officials too much authority. Therefore, a head referee was designated, and the likelihood is that another official used hand signals to indicate decisions—not a whistle.)

Because referees were physical educators, they probably sported white duck trousers, the prevailing uniform at the time. The umpire doubtless wore the same, as well as a shirt and tie, perhaps even a black bow tie. (Early football referees sported white shirts and black bow ties, plus a drab gray tam on their heads.) Like the players, they wore knickers.

In 1904-1905, expectations for making all calls were divided equally between the two basketball officials, and scorekeepers and timers on the side of the court became adjuncts to games. We don't know how floor markings came about or when free throws were introduced, but we do know some things about player freedoms and restrictions because they were spelled out from the onset.

In some respects, basketball was derivative, adopting aspects of other sports. The original outline described how a player could move by bouncing the ball (the term *dribble* was carried over from soccer). It was a goal game, with goals at either end of a flat indoor surface. Players who fouled were sent to the sideline,

A Little League Case Study

Side-by-side suburbs Deerfield and Highland Park, north of Chicago, started Little League baseball programs some time ago, but they went separate ways in terms of style. Deerfield ordered complete uniforms, acquired all the equipment, signed up parents as coaches, and groomed the fields, but they forgot about securing umpires. Parents volunteered, and their performances were rather lame, even though a few courageous chaps donned masks and held Styrofoam chest protectors for behind-the-plate duty. One positive result was that spectators held their tongues at missed calls, offering friendly jibes instead of harsh catcalls. Before long, an enthusiastic man named Dick Cavanaugh took an umpiring course and started a training program for willing parents. Cavanaugh was so inspired that he applied to work games for the Chicago Cubs when Major League umpires went on strike.

By contrast, Highland Park recreation directors adopted a no-parents policy, no uniforms either. Youngsters were their own coaches, and one man, jovial and knowledgeable Chuck Shramm, stood behind the diminutive pitchers calling balls and strikes at every game, advising fielders where to throw the ball and helping runners tag up on fly balls. For the participants it was a very cheerful experience, devoid of tension.

The results of these cases of makeshift and make-do arrangements, measured later in the way baseball was performed at the high school level, were pretty even. Highland Park did send one player, Jim Panther, to the major leagues, and he pitched briefly for the Atlanta Braves and the Chicago White Sox.

temporarily disqualified, and their team had to play short-handed until a goal was scored. This is similar to the penalty box in hockey. The dribbler, allowed to dribble only *once* with two hands, could not be tripped or struck legally, although he could bull his way on a path anywhere on the court with impunity, elbowing and shouldering opponents out of the way, as in rugby. The dribbler wasn't originally allowed to shoot for the basket, however. He had to pass the ball to a teammate for that opportunity.

Basketball players used soccer balls to begin with. A larger inflated sphere with leather covering and stitches (like football laces) was introduced in the early 1900s.

If a player was running when he received a pass, he was allowed to take several steps to control momentum. The referee determined how many steps he could take.

The popularity of basketball spread so fast that it was being played in California by the end of 1892. Also, students from the Christian Workers' school quickly took the game abroad, where it was played in Turkey, India, Japan, France, Persia, and Greece.

Clearly, basketball took some time to be perfected. Elements were adjusted to give it the appearance it has today. Opening the bottom of the goal was an early adjustment that facilitated game play. Another was discarding the requirement of a center jump after every goal. Very few officials—even today—have been able to master the toss for a jump ball; invariably, it is hoisted either too high or not high enough. The toss should rise to the maximum height of the players' jump. The after-goal jump was abolished in 1937. Now, the team scored upon inbounds the ball from under its own goal after an opponent's score.

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) issued a formal basketball rule guide in 1937, in conjunction with the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Previous to that, players used the guidelines created in 1915 by a rules committee formed by the YMCA and other interested groups, which refined Naismith's original stipulations. One Naismith prescription that was abandoned was the awarding of a goal to a team that did not commit a violation while its opponent piled up three transgressions.

A six-foot-wide key in front of the basket was introduced in 1932. This is a lane in front of the basket that is topped by a semicircle, resembling a keyhole. This area was restricted; players could be in it for only three seconds at a time. This kept extra-large players from camping under the basket so they could score easily. The key was widened to 12 feet in 1975.

Handling Official Scarcity

In the Chicago suburbs, football officials have traditionally been scarce at the high school underclass levels because schools field so many teams. The varsity and sophomore teams play doubleheaders on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons, but they also field JV squads for midweek games and freshman teams for Saturday mornings. There are over 120 high schools in the greater Chicago area. Many schools have A and B freshman teams, and some even have C-level players. It is very easy to predict the cycle. When the NFL's Chicago Bears have a good year, the following autumn will see a surge in football participation at the freshman level. Therefore, officiating associations have developed training programs for two-person officiating to cover the huge array of weekly contests.

A fascinating offshoot of such dedication is that a few C-level players, not in full development at age 14, become solid contributors to their high school teams later on. Here is one memorable example: A C-level player at Proviso East High School in Melrose Park, Illinois, went on to be awarded Linebacker of the Mid-Century when he played for the Green Bay Packers. His name was Ray Nitschke.

In 1932, a rule was adopted to avoid close guarding of offensive players. If a defender guarded a player with the ball, either while dribbling or stationary, for more than five seconds, a referee called a jump ball. Today, instead of having a jump ball, the ball is awarded to the other team for a throw-in.

In the 1950s, floor officials adopted the diagonal system of floor coverage. In this system, the lead official moves under the offensive basket, and the trail official hovers near the half-court time line on the opposite side of the court.

Colleges introduced three-person officiating crews in 1969, and the NBA adopted the practice in 1975. This is one case in which colleges developed a policy before the professionals. Many other practices, in all sports, have been handed down from the highest level to the amateur ranks.

In today's game, a possession clock forces teams to shoot within a certain time frame (professional and college only). Also, goals scored from a considerable distance from the basket are awarded three points. These two elements alone have changed the way basketball games are played, with skillful three-point shooters able to turn games around in a short interval, from a half-circle arc beyond the top of the key.

Officiating duties have increased in basketball, along with the pressure to make accurate calls. The observations of Professor Steitz are as valid today as they were a generation ago: "The game of basketball is one of the most difficult sports to officiate. . . .The complex maneuvers, the rapid rate at which it is played, the near hysteria that prevails, and the proximity of spectators to . . . the action are just a few of the factors" (Steitz, 1976, p. 36).

In essence, Dr. Steitz understated the issues. The game has indeed changed radically over the years, and officiating has been hard-pressed to keep up. Other major sports have not changed as significantly, although the officiating has undergone some critical adjustments.

FOOTBALL

An outgrowth of the English sport of rugby, football was first played in the United States at the college level. Rutgers beat the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton) 6 to 4 on November 6, 1869, in the first recognized game.

"The first game resembling present-day football was played in 1874, when a team from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, visited Harvard University. The Canadians wanted to play . . . rugby . . . running and tackling" (*World Book Encyclopedia*, 2010, p. 367). Harvard wanted to play a new version that featured mostly kicking, like soccer (they agreed on a round ball). The schools played two games, one McGill's style and one Harvard's. Running with the ball and the customary rugby scrum became more popular than trying to kick a ball over a crossbar, and the "most influential figure in modernizing football was Walter Camp, who had played for Yale Univer-

sity from 1876 to 1882." Camp was responsible for setting up such standard practices as the scrimmage line; the center snap; the measuring chains; the four-downs-for-a-first-down system; and scoring designations for touchdowns, conversions, field goals, and safeties.

Like basketball, football spread quickly, and soon high schools and town teams began to establish rivalries throughout the nation along with colleges. As far we know, just a pair of officials administered the games in the beginning.

The early football contests were extremely violent. Many games were more like organized fights than athletic contests. Players wore no pads and no helmets at first. A few wore stocking caps, which offered little protection. By 1900, many players had been severely injured, and a few had died, causing much alarm across the nation. The situation grew into a crisis, and President Theodore Roosevelt gathered college presidents together in 1905 to address changes in the rules for player safety. Safety issues have been primary in football ever since.

First came stipulations about protective gear, and next came restrictions on the types of blocking players could use. Blocking below the waist was permitted, but upright blocking required closed hands (fists) to the blocker's chest (only shoulders with pads could deliver a blow), and contact had to be in front of an opponent. Fists extending more than 45 degrees constituted an illegal use of the hands. The flying wedge was also forbidden, a tactic whereby players locked arms and formed a human buttress to secure the advance of a ball carrier. In the beginning, blockers were restricted in the use of hands, but about 35 years ago NFL players began pushing moves with open hands when executing pass blocking. The rules were then rewritten to allow pushing, which is what is in place today. Today, blocking is actually pushing—at all levels, high schools and colleges included.

For a long time, professional football was considered a renegade activity, frowned on culturally and disparaged by sportswriters as impure because it violated accepted standards of amateurism—meaning that players were being paid to play. Some sportswriters implied that only outlaws or, at best, men of questionable character were eager participants. College players performed in professional leagues under assumed names on Sundays so as not to jeopardize their amateur standing. Professional football (using three referees) became a formal entity in 1920 when a group of businessmen calling themselves the American Professional Football Association gathered in an auto dealer's garage in Canton, Ohio. They renamed it the National Football League in 1922, and they planted teams in medium-sized towns such as Canton; and Pottstown, Pennsylvania; Decatur, Illinois; and Racine and Green Bay in Wisconsin.

In the early days of football, professional and college teams used three officials in a game. Colleges had their officials line up down the middle of the field: a referee, an umpire, and a back judge. Covering the sidelines could not have been easy, and it's possible that they received help from the chain crew. In the 1930s, the professional game added a fourth official, and the colleges followed suit, reluctantly. This added person was obliged to kneel on the sidelines while the ball was alive. In that isolated spot these officials likely did not make many calls (maybe offsides on jumpy linemen).

All officials before World War II had limited roles. Only the referee, for instance, could signal a touchdown or field goal. He could look to the other officials for help, but the most they could do was give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, with a hand held near the belt buckle, as though sending a signal surreptitiously. Auxiliary officials had to signal a touchdown by pointing the index finger and offering an almost imperceptible nod of the head.

In the 1930s and 1940s, substitutions were limited at all levels. A player who left the game could not return until the next quarter. Officials had to keep track of players coming and going on a clipboard. Consequently, players had to play both offense and defense. Many

Officiating Transparency

Mike Pereira, former NFL vice president of officiating, offered this view of the zoom-lens spotlight: "Officials have gotten to the point that they realize they are in a transparent business. They know when they are right or wrong. . . . [They] have gotten to . . . where they understand criticism and that the criticism can lead to a better understanding of the job" (*Referee*, September, 2010, p. 34)

resisted the wide open free substitution in the 1950s, because it was a point of pride to be considered a 60-minute man.

Free substitution, though, had the salutary effect of turning players into specialists. Today, highly skilled players make the game exciting with their superb talents of passing, catching, and running.

Five-person officiating crews came about in the 1960s to help handle the increased emphasis on the forward pass. Early in the century, college teams eschewed the forward pass, even though Teddy Roosevelt's commission codified the legitimacy of a back's heaving the nearly round ball to either an end or another back. In a captivating scenario, Notre Dame quarterback Gus Dorais threw passes to his end Knute Rockne in a 35-13 upset of a favored Army team in 1913. By the 1920s, passing attacks were common in football. But the idea of putting more officials on the field to increase the scope of coverage was slow to take hold.

In the 1930s and 1940s, in addition to having to operate under restricted movements, football officials were equipped with small handheld horns, which they blew when declaring a foul. Radio announcers said, "There was a horn on that play," and then the penalty was addressed. In the 1950s, small red and white flags about the size of handkerchiefs were used to designate fouls. The color was changed to solid gold in the 1960s with the advent of television (gold was easier to spot on color TV). Beanbags were an added implement in the 1970s. Prior to that, officials marked spots on the field by dropping their caps, such as when a member of the kicking team touched a kick beyond the line of scrimmage. But caps were dirtied in inclement weather, and beanbags were substituted.

After they were introduced, beanbags posed unexpected problems. At first they were filled with real beans, which tended to sprout when the bags got wet. Next, the NFL tried buckshot in the bags, but these set off alarms when officials tried to go through airport security. They finally settled for simply packing the small bags with fabric and attaching a flap so that the devices could be tucked in the belt and plucked out swiftly when needed.

In the 1970s, the professional game became too sophisticated for five officials to handle adequately, and it moved to seven people, which colleges quickly copied. The idea was to have each eligible receiver guarded by a particular official, because rules stipulated restrictions on how defenses could attack pass receivers running downfield. The turn of the 21st century saw many teams open up the game by deploying receivers all across the field, putting more pressure on officials.

In the 1930s and 1940s, before the Super Bowl era, one NFL referee worked all the big games and handled the final championship games for more than a dozen years in a row. Ron Gibbs, a widely respected banking executive from Springfield, Illinois, traveled to all his games by train, just as the teams did.

Such a string of lofty assignments would not be possible today, given the practice of merit in selecting play-off and Super Bowl officials. The NFL has a referee's organization (not exactly a union), which evaluates officials. Video technology allows for much more elaborate and precise game assessments. In fact (and this is true for bowl game selections of major college conferences as well), intense, comprehensive video analyses permit evaluators to grade officials on every play in each game.

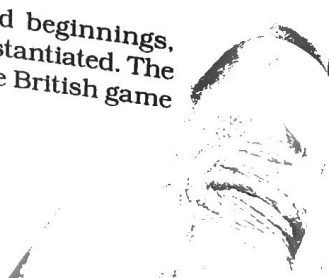
One element of football that has remained the same for officials is the necessity to inspect player equipment before and during the game. Face masks are standard now, and knee and hip pads (to protect the kidneys) are also mandated. Some players try to lighten the load by slipping pads out of the sleeves in the shells that cover their legs, which is illegal. By rule, safety is a prime concern of officials.

Health professionals and fans—plus professional and college athletic administrators—recognize that playing football has wrecked many performers' lives. After their playing days have ended, many experience ongoing debilitating leg and back injuries and, most seriously, head trauma as a result of battering.

Officials can't do much about the pile driving that takes place in the modern game other than guarding against action in which deliberate blows are inflicted, called spearing. The game is indeed violent, and the only way officials can serve as protectors is to apply the rules of contact as they are expressly defined.

BASEBALL

Baseball had a trio of recorded beginnings, only two of which have been substantiated. The sport is clearly an offshoot of the British game



of rounders, played since the 1600s overseas and in the 1700s in the American colonies. Its main feature was that runners were put out by soaking or plugging. That is, fielders threw the ball at them (almost like dodgeball). When the game changed (most likely in the 1830s or 1840s in New York City) to having runners put out by being tagged or forced out by touching a base, America's pastime was born.

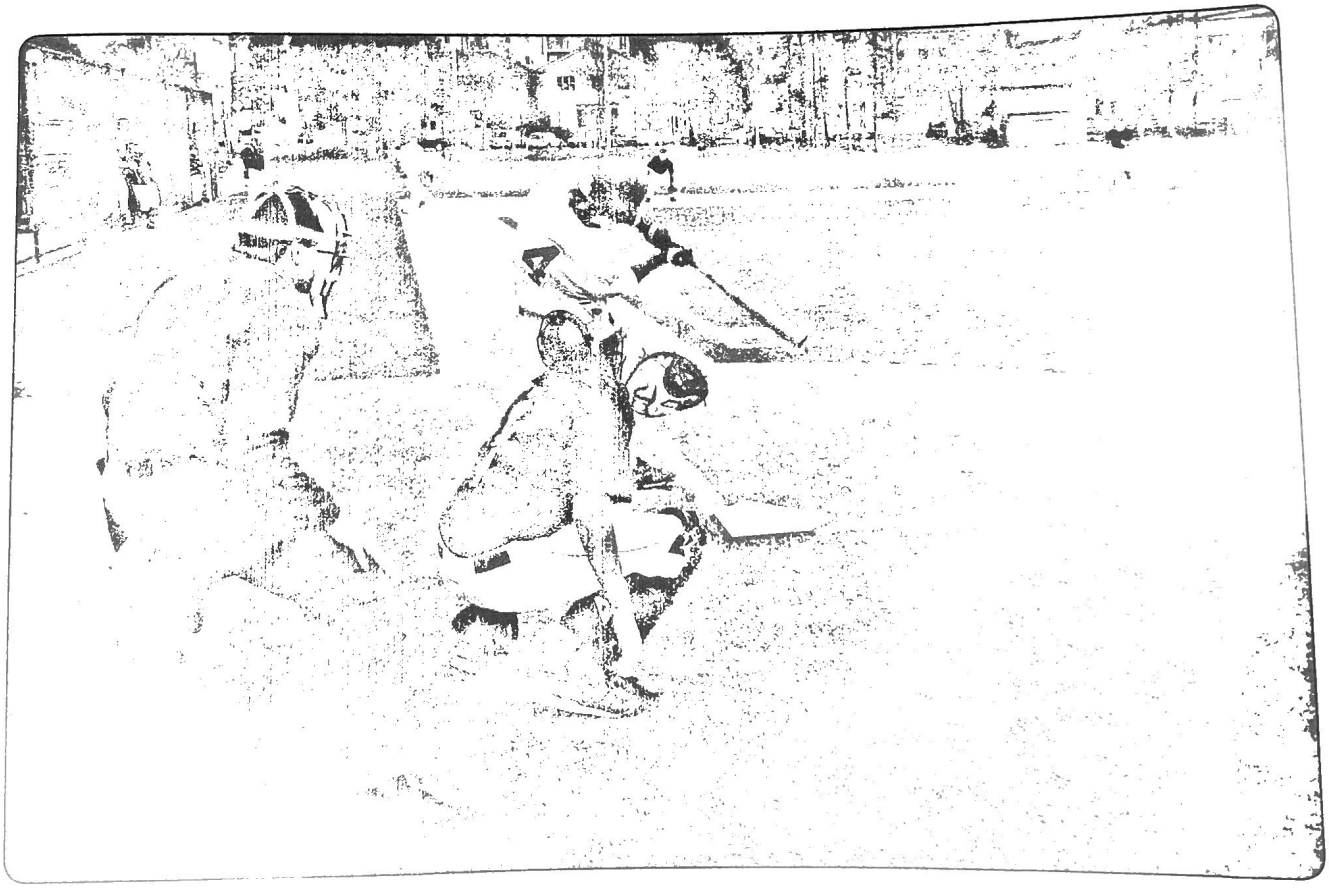
The second version of baseball's birth is that it was invented in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839 by Abner Doubleday, who became a Civil War general and died in 1893. It is a myth, however, that he originated the game.

Someone reported that Doubleday laid out a diamond and specified how the game was to be performed, but research has proven this claim to be specious. Doubleday is just an amorphous figure in the origin of baseball. Alexander Cartwright was known as, "a New York City sportsman, and called *the father of organized baseball* because he started a club called the Knickerbockers in 1845 whose sole purpose was playing Base Ball" (World Book, "B," op. cit. p. 134). He wrote out a set of rules, to which supplements were added in 1848 and 1854.

Some of Cartwright's rules have since been changed. For instance, he decreed that the first team to score 21 runs won the game; pitchers had to throw underhanded 45 feet from home plate; a batter was out if a fielder caught a lofted ball on the first bounce (changed in 1864); and a strike was called only when a batter swung and missed. Early baseball did not have walks, and called strikes were introduced in 1868.

By 1900, both major leagues were formed, although since that time, many teams have changed cities, and teams have been added. Most of the rules were the same at the turn of the 20th century as they are today.

Compared to basketball, which has undergone many significant changes since its inception, and football, in which officiating changes have been relatively modest, baseball has remained a relatively staid sport. Rather than evolving, baseball officiating (umpiring) has been adapting. Baseball was a "punch-and-slice" game in its early stages until Babe



Curtis Woodcock

Umpires have to learn to work heel-to-toe in the slot, a proper positioning that allows the viewing of an entire pitch.

Ruth broke it open with a huge accumulation of home runs (using lively, tightly wound balls) in the 1920s. Today it is a combination of long-ball and short-ball at the professional and collegiate levels, but power distances in batting are not so prevalent at the teenage levels (although metal bats at all levels make long hits possible).

Major league games had just one umpire in the 1880s and 1890s, and in the early part of the last century they moved to a two-man system. A third umpire was added in the 1930s and 1940s, and four umpires per game has been the standard for decades, with two more along the foul lines beyond first and third bases in all-star contests, end-of-season play-offs, and the World Series. At other levels the number of umps on a given game varies. High schools usually use just two umpires, one behind the plate and one on the bases. At very low levels, in educational settings anyway, games are often handled by just one umpire for economic reasons.

Like the football referee, the baseball umpire's major role is to ensure the safety of all players. Even though major injuries are rare in this sport, current rules are spelled out to lower the risk of injury. At all levels, down to Little League, all personnel on the field are required to wear helmets. Because thrown or batted balls can be lethal, pitchers are monitored closely for perceived viciousness. Even softball, the so-called diminutive version of baseball, is not played with a ball that has give to it, which was once the case with 12-, 14-, and 16-inch pillow-type spheres. Nowadays, softballs are of solid kapok-cork-polyurethane composition and have a tight leather covering.

In 1887 a Chicagoan named George W. Hancock inaugurated an indoor game of softball. This sport, after moving outdoors, has also undergone numerous manifestations. First, the ball was a 12-inch round lump of truly resilient stuffing, and then versions of the game employed 14- and 16-inch heavier samples. The game was often played by men (sometimes without gloves) in small parks. But fast-pitch softball caught on quickly, and by 1933, the American Softball Association was formed to standardize playing conditions. By 1952, the game was being played in 125 countries.

Softball is mentioned here because at present 90 percent of the games throughout the United States are seven-inning slow-pitch affairs, often played with an hour-and-a-half time limit. Hundreds of communities support men's, women's, and co-ed recreational leagues. Fast-pitch softball (with balls that have a hard inner core, as mentioned) is also a popular women's sport, sponsored by many schools and colleges. Few colleges presently administering athletic programs are without women's softball teams. Consequently, many umpires are needed, and they are largely trained by local organizations.

Slow-pitch softball games are often worked by a single umpire, without a mask, who is supposed to move out from behind the plate to cover plays at the bases when the ball is alive. One must know the rules, of course, but it is relatively easy to learn slow-pitch umpiring.

An Umpire's Biography

Bill Klem was the longest-tenured umpire in the major leagues, working from 1905 until 1940. He declared, "In my heart, I never missed a call," but he would have been hard put to support this contention if he worked under the pinpoint video screening of today's games. Klem also umpired a record 18 World Series, which would be impossible in the rotation system of modern times.

OTHER SPORTS

Other sports that have risen rapidly in popularity and require expert officiating are soccer and lacrosse. At times lacrosse can be very rough because players are permitted to hit one another below the waist with their sticks. The women's game, also played on a wide scale, has rules against striking opponents. Both soccer and lacrosse are very old.

A form of soccer was played in ancient China in 400 BC. In 1848, U.S. schools drew up rules for both women's and men's versions. Because of its international popularity, its rules have been standardized for some time, as has its officiating practices. Countries throughout the world play the same game. The first World Cup (men) was played in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1930. The first Women's World Cup was played in China in 1991. In 2000, soccer was the fastest-growing sport in U.S. high schools.

At the upper levels, soccer is officiated by a referee and two assistants; the assistants' role is primarily to call offsides. At youngster levels, below high school ages, usually one person officiates. Teenagers often serve as referees for very young children, from ages six or seven and up.

The movement of lacrosse, from the East Coast and into the Midwest and beyond, is little short of a phenomenon. Many high schools and colleges now sponsor teams. Like soccer, lacrosse is a professional sport in the United States, and qualified officials are in high demand. The sport can be claimed as 100 percent American because it originated with the Iroquois.

GENDER ISSUES: YOU GO, GIRL

U.S. society boasts female firefighters and police officers, as well as long haul truck drivers and school bus drivers. Women serve as city mayors, state governors, college presidents, members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and cabinet appointees.

But it wasn't always this way.

True, "There has never been a time when girls and women were wholly excluded from sports" (Guttman, 1991), but until recently, their engagement has been limited and minimal. Dates and numbers tell a significant story. Although women competed in the Olympics in 1900, they were limited to certain events in track plus swimming races and tennis. At that time, women were definitely considered second-class citizens. Consider that, in 1869, black men were allowed to vote, but women weren't, regardless of race. In 1848, a cluster of 300 women gathered in Seneca Falls, New York for the first women's rights convention. After many speeches, demonstrations, and marches on Washington, D.C., the 19th amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1920 (amid the protestations of numerous short-sighted elected officials and societal naysayers) giving women the right to vote. A few people went on record asserting that the demise of Western Civilization was sure to follow.

Many behaviorists from the first half of the 20th century claimed that the female constitution could not function under the pressure of competitive team sports. Others asserted that playing sports beyond puberty endangered girls' future reproductive capabilities.

Breaking Barriers

Sarah Thomas of Walnut Grove, Mississippi, was a line judge at the Little Caesar's Pizza Bowl at Ford Field, Detroit, on December 26, 2009. She was selected out of Conference USA, where she worked a full schedule as an on-field football official in the 2009 season.

Today, in addition to the burgeoning of women's sports and the subsequent involvement of thousands of women in officiating, some women have even broken the barrier of officiating men's sports. A few women have umpired minor league baseball games, although none have reached the major leagues. Each state doubtless has a few females officiating high school football, and in 2009, the first female referee worked a college bowl game. The NBA

Unlike past sporting events, female officials are an integral part of today's athletics.

has a single female referee, Violet Palmer of California, who has been a widely admired performer for more than a half dozen seasons.

When colleges first began forming women's basketball teams in the late 1970s, the refereeing was done mostly by men. Then, in the 1980s, when national college championships were instituted for women in basketball, cross country running, field hockey, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, track and field, and volleyball, the approximate ratio was two male officials for every female. Today that ratio is reversed: it is now two women to every man.

Title IX's Legacy

In 1971, John Erlander, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois, declared, "[Title IX] will plant the seed of destruction for our system of higher education (Guttman p. iv)."

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

The Title IX law

Every time a girl plays Little League, every time a father assumes his daughter is as likely to go to college as his son, every time no one looks twice at a female cop or balks at a female surgeon, it's a moment in history, radical and ordinary, both at the same time.

Columnist Anna Quindlen, 2002

Hoop Dreams, 1904. Ten Montana and Idaho Indian girls from the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School headed to St. Louis for the World's Fair, where they earned the moniker Champions of the World, beating the Missouri All-Stars in a best-of-three basketball series.

Wild West Magazine, October 2010, p. 8.

At Coolidge High School in Washington, D.C., Natalie Randolph is making history—as one of the nation's only female football coaches [head coach].

Parade, August 22, 2010, p. 6.

The way this all came about—"no shots were fired, but a revolution followed" (Blumenthal, 2005)—can be traced to a single legislative edict. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights act in 1964, and President Richard Nixon signed an extension of that act in 1972. The 1972 legislation included a clause with a Roman numeral, Title IX, which stipulated that no one should be subjected to gender discrimination under any educational program that received federal financial assistance. In other words, if colleges received funds from the government, they had to equalize much of their funding for many of the activities they ordinarily supported. The huge disparities had to cease. If there was a baseball team at a school, for instance, and a women's group petitioned for a school-backed softball team, with scholarships included, the school had to ante up a sum larger than 1 percent of the baseball budget, which was the case at many institutions. Schools could not sidestep the issue by dropping a so-called minor (non-revenue-generating) sport in exchange for adding a women's sport. A school couldn't abandon men's tennis to build a women's field hockey squad, for example. It had to be tennis for tennis and field hockey as an add-on.

The NCAA, a bastion of entrenched male athletics, sued to stop the stipulations of Title IX in 1976. It lost the case.

A 17-year-old high school student named Donna DeVarona was on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 1964 because she had won two Olympic gold medals and recorded an international record in the individual swimming medley. Her career was over. There was nowhere for her to go for competition after high school.

In 1971, there were 20,000 boys' basketball teams in the United States and 5,000 girls' squads (usually playing a truncated version of the real thing, with split court restrictions). Girls' participation in sports tripled from 1971 to 1973, from 300,000 to 900,000. Today, three million girls play organized sports.

Here are some more impressive facts. In 1982, more women than men earned bachelor's degrees for the first time. Title IX used the term *activities*, not just sports. In 2004, Harvard admitted more female undergraduates than male undergraduates.

In 1970, Billie Jean King received $600 for winning the Italian tennis championship; the male winner got $3,500. She boycotted the

next championship tourney. In 1973, the U.S. Open awarded $25,000 to both the male and female winners.

There is no question that Title IX ensured the emancipation of women in U.S. society, breaking the so-called glass ceilings in all walks of life, not just sports. In 2002, Patsy Mink, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, said, "We must teach each generation that there was a time when Title IX did not exist." Representative Edith Green, Oregon, a crusader for women's rights during her entire several-decades-long political career, added, "The trouble with every generation is that they haven't read the minutes of the last meeting" ("Women's Sports," p. 217).

SHORTAGE OF OFFICIALS

A phone survey of eight states reveals a picture that is both reassuring and somewhat troubling. On the positive side, high school varsity sports are comfortably covered with adequate to superior officiating. There are surprises here for several reasons, including the fact that some states are experiencing a growth in the number of schools. In a five-year span, from 2005 to 2010, Colorado has gone from 310 to 340 schools with the addition of charter schools and private schools, some church sponsored, which have added sports to their programs. "Fresh officials are not really trying hard to enter the field," CHSAA Officials Liaison Tom Robinson said. "In many instances officials who do boys' sports also work the girls," he added. The crossovers include basketball, soccer, and lacrosse. In other words, instead of new officials entering the fields, veteran officials are taking on new sports.

States sampled	Officiating director
Colorado	Tom Robinson
Georgia	Dr. Ralph Swearngin
North Carolina	Mark Dreibelbis
North Dakota	Matt Fetsch
New Mexico	Dana Sanchez
Oklahoma	Mike Whaley
Oregon	Jack Folliard
Utah	Mike Petty

Officials' supervisor Mark Dreibelbis of North Carolina reported that registration of new officials has remained high despite the fact that the state has been adding about five schools a year. "Several seasons ago we had 365 schools, and now we have 390." The one sport that is a little short of experienced officials is lacrosse, which is in its second year. "For a few years it was a club sport, and now the schools have taken it over. The problem is that few adults have actually played the sport. For us it is an embryonic program." Colorado also reported a slight shortage of lacrosse officials.

The worry about widespread shortages of sports officials is more an anticipation than a reality. It's been assumed in some quarters that a down economy would stimulate unemployed people to seek officiating opportunities as a source of part-time income. For the most part that has only happened in small degrees and only in large cities. "What has happened," one state clerical person said, "Is that a few retired officials have decided to register once more." But that could be a limited trend; it certainly isn't a flood of desperate individuals.

"We always have enough varsity officials," said Colorado's Robinson. "It's at the underclass level that we're hurting. We don't have enough younger officials signing up for training."

North Dakota's Matt Fetsch was the lone representative to admit having trouble finding sufficient numbers to cover games. Hockey has been an entrenched sport in this state immediately south of Canada, and the need to attract new officials in that sport is evident. "Every year the available pool of officials seems to go down," he said. He also said that some schools are scheduling football games on Thursdays instead of Friday nights, to make sure they can secure officials. "This despite the fact that there is a strong movement toward school consolidation in our state. Districts with two schools—because of enrollment shrinkage—are combining into one," Fetsch added.

Several states besides North Dakota reported huge gains in popularity as reasons for slight shortages in soccer. Schools that haven't traditionally fielded the sport are adding it in large numbers in Georgia, Utah, Oregon, and Oklahoma. "We're a little thin in volleyball too," said Oklahoma's Mike Whaley. "But the problem is most pronounced in rural areas." In the West, distances are often stretched out between small towns. Sometimes schools are obliged to use locals (teachers or citizen volunteers who may not even be registered) to handle underclass high school and middle school games.

"It's an economic factor," said Mike Petty of Utah. "Soccer is a low cost investment. Just a ball, a field, and a pair of goals are all schools need for soccer, and the facilities are already there. Kiddie programs have risen all over and that naturally has led to an increase in high school involvement." Few adults have played soccer under the auspices of public schools (the same is true of lacrosse and wrestling), which means that recruiting referees has to be an active affair. The implication here is that former athletes may be the best candidates for continuing in their sports as officials.

"It helps to live in a college town," said North Dakota's Matt Fetsch. He has advertised for new officials on radio and television, but the best route has been to contact college physical education instructors and ask them to make persuasive announcements in their classes. He didn't say it, but college students are also candidates for working subvarsity contests in sports. "We work through high schools to locate former athletes and extend invitations to officiate," said Utah's Petty.

Jack Folliard of Oregon said that he has relied on the 100 local associations to bring in and train new officials. "We have used a DVD on the appeal of officiating and put it on our state website, plus sent it to TV outlets and newspapers. That has helped pull in fresh faces," he added. Folliard also reported that a small cadre of Portland officials set up a kiosk in a shopping mall. "Fellows with uniforms passing out brochures. A lot of people seemed intrigued, but of course there's no way to assess the possible quality in passersby," he concluded. "Then too we got 10 people signed up as prospects when they responded to our Internet come-on, craigslist," Folliard laughed.

Dana Sanchez of New Mexico said that she too sent a recruiting DVD to recreation centers and colleges. The state has had a small explosion (13 percent) in registrations, but they are still short of officials in the eastern part of the state (where there are few large cities) in softball and baseball. "We're also slender statewide in wrestling officials," she said. But Sanchez tried something special in Albuquerque. First, she executed what she called a media blitz through television and newspapers, accompanied by an offer of free training. "We doubled our numbers in baseball and softball," she said, very pleased.

Dr. Ralph Swearngin of Georgia may have had the best answer of all. "We've increased our registrations dramatically," he said. To achieve this, he has been persistent in his recruiting campaign. "After every Friday night sports events, a 60-station television network reports scores of all statewide games (football and basketball). We have a DVD promo that we supply the stations, featuring basketball sportscaster Dick Vitale. We also run it during commercial breaks on live coverage during state championship games," Swearngin explained. He believes that such an approach has definitely offset a dreary economy.

Finding the Right Instructor

Dennis Markusson, an attorney in the Denver suburb of Evergreen, has taught a beginners football officiating class during a high school district's evening school program for several years. He conducts eight sessions in July and August—one night a week—then holds an on-field clinic when high school teams start autumn preseason scrimmages. The district has six high schools, and their night school bulletins promoting classes are sent to thousands of recipients.

Markusson also plants an announcement in a sports column in *The Denver Post* daily paper. He has a well-known sports radio talk show host, Irv Brown, recite several promos (his show is during the late afternoon commuter drive time). Dennis posts more announcements on bulletin boards at recreational centers, local exercise facilities, and YMCAs. He also has placed his notices in sporting good stores and on supermarkets' flea market and garage sale registers.

Markusson gets anywhere from a dozen candidates to 40 prospective officials every year. Other instructors in metropolitan areas in many states have operated similarly through community colleges, trying to obtain rookies in baseball, softball, and basketball. In many cases, success depends on the strength of the instructor's reputation. But these techniques are probably limited to large cities. Small rural communities are not likely to raise substantial numbers of potential officiating candidates.

SUMMARY

With the rise of modern sports, we've seen the beginnings of sports officiating and its progress. From the early years to the present, officiating has seen tremendous changes in its evolution. Today's officials look much different from their predecessors—especially considering their responsibilities, mechanics, and appearance—but their development is far from over. From changing demands in games to an increasing need for transparency, officials will have to continue adapting their skills and practices to be successful.

An important change to officiating is occurring today with the inclusion of females to the profession. Until recently, female engagement in sports officiating has been limited and minimal. Because of legislation and changing perspectives, women are becoming an integral part of officiating. Their continued inclusion will only help the officiating world continue its growth.

Finally, a shortage of properly trained officials is perhaps the most pressing issue facing amateur officials. Most school districts report always having enough varsity officials; however, the problem lies in not having sufficient numbers to cover underclass events. In addition, the increasing popularity of some sports—such as soccer or lacrosse—has led to some shortages at all levels. Regardless, it's important that substantial efforts are made to actively recruit and train young people interested in officiating.

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Officiating as a Lifetime Career

Jerry Grunska

This chapter addresses the following:

- How to get started as an official
- How study and experience can lead to expertise
- Ways to acquire and improve officiating skills
- Ways to derive continued satisfaction

STARTING AS AN OFFICIAL

Starting out to officiate sports involves making connections with organizations that train and assign officials, and in the case of scholastic sports, places that register officials and supply instructional materials. For high school officiating, that means contacting the state office that oversees officiating. Usually the first step is to pay a registration fee and then successfully pass a test after studying the rule book of the sport in which you wish to participate. School athletic administrators can provide the contact information of the state office; YMCAs, local town headquarters, fitness centers, and workers in recreational facilities may also provide information about sports teams and leagues. Many youth leagues under high school age are sponsored by clubs or groups in charge of handling the sport. State organizations as well as local and regional entities are mostly interested in promoting rules and policies for various sports at the high school level.

The purpose of sports officiating is customarily thought of as helping opponents play a game, monitoring the action, and enforcing the rules. Some sporting events are team sports, whereas others are individual events. Individual sports include tennis, gymnastics, wrestling, and golf, as well as many other sporting activities that do not require officials. Some individual sports such as swimming, wrestling, golf, and track can be transformed into team competitions by comparing the collective scores of performers; in such competitions, judges may simply be volunteers offering to help run the meets. Starters in track need to have training, but track administrators who use stopwatches and measure such things as distances or jumping heights require only basic instruction before a meet begins. Someone who conducts the high jump in track, for instance, need only be aware of what a foot fault is or how many aborted approaches to the bar are permitted before disqualification. Judges of gymnastics events and aquatic diving, as well as figure skating, however, must have sophisticated knowledge of the activity to make legitimate assessments.

Soccer has risen to extreme popularity among youth because fundamental skills can be learned at an early age, and little equipment is necessary for playing the game—just a ball, a playing surface, and goals. Other sports

have also drawn much interest within one generation, including ice hockey, field hockey, volleyball, and lacrosse.

Volleyball and ice hockey have been around a long time but have risen in popularity as they have become more available. Ice hockey requires a special rink to be played in a temperate climate, and many such facilities have sprung up all over the country. Volleyball had been a recreational sport in clubs, on beaches, and in YMCAs for some time. With the national impetus for girls' sports, volleyball has enjoyed a rapid rise in popularity as a school-sponsored sport.

Sports that have increased in popularity have often migrated from the East Coast: field hockey, rugby, and lacrosse have proliferated to the point at which many schools and colleges are now sponsoring them. The three basic American sports, though—football, baseball, and basketball—still draw the most people to officiating, because television brings them regularly and almost continually into our homes. These sports have millions of dedicated followers because their seasons are lengthy and individual performers frequently become cultural headliners. And let's not forget softball. Every community dot on the map has slow-pitch softball competitions: men's, women's, and co-ed. Thousands of umpires are needed across the nation.

With the exception of baseball and softball, most widely popular sports are goal activities in which two teams on a rectangular surface (or in a pool, in the case of water polo) strive to score by propelling an object into a goal or across a line. All of these sports have large followings of participants, spectators, and faithful followers. Hence, they appeal to people who want to officiate.

An element that periodically comes into play and demands an official's attention is conflict between players. Except for baseball and softball, each field sport, as well as basketball, features regular physical contact between opponents. In fact, they are often referred to as contact sports. Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi purportedly said, "Football is not a contact sport. Dancing is a contact sport. Football is a *collision* sport!" When player flare-ups occur, officials are obliged to deal with them, sorting out which acts are punishable and which are merely incidental. Officials must also be alert for unseemly talk between

The official standing on the left watches on as players are locked in a scrum for the ball.

exhibit a fine-tuned alertness.

Equipment

The uniform you wear and the accessories you have are often determined by the level at which you work. For instance, if you'll be handling junior high or pee-wee football games, you may be free to limit yourself to a striped shirt and a whistle, with a red bandana tucked in a pocket serving as a flag. Footwear can be ordinary gym shoes, and you can wear jeans or shorts and a hat with a John Deere logo. No one expects you to have a standard uniform. On the other hand, if you intend to serve high schools as an official, the organization that trains and hires you will identify the proper apparel and tools. Rule books do not always specify the nature of officials' uniforms: Baseball does, but football does not. Therefore, you must learn the expectations and requirements of those with whom and for whom you will be working.

In many instances, tradition is a governing factor, and when tradition changes, officials are obliged to follow along and purchase up-to-date supplies. In football, for example, striped socks have varied over the years. Recently, a new item has emerged: black trousers with a white strip; these were introduced by the NFL and have been widely adopted by high school officials. The people you work with will let you know their apparel expectations.

Of all sports, baseball and softball plate umpires require the most equipment. Because of pitching speed, baseball and fast-pitch softball umpires need proper buffering gear, from footwear with reinforced toe plates to shin guards, genital cups, firm chest protectors, and full face masks with attached throat shields, plus a jacket to wear in inclement weather. To be fully outfitted to call swift pitching (even in Little League), you may have to spend several hundred dollars. (Some leagues furnish this equipment to umpires.)

Slow-pitch softball umpires need only an indicator—a handheld ball-and-strike device. Thumbing the wheel on the indicator keeps track of balls, strikes, and outs. Most organized leagues, though, ask umpires to wear a specific stylized shirt and trousers (or shorts), and perhaps even a distinctive cap.

Officials who handle fast-moving team sports such as soccer and lacrosse may need only shorts and a whistle, but they can also don specialized garb depending on the level at which they are working. An eager teenager doing a children's soccer game, for example, may need only a whistle. A swim judge may be expected to bring only a whistle, or may be required to show up in white duck trousers with a stopwatch and a starter's pistol.

Officials who have to run will want footwear to fit the court or field conditions: nonskid soles, black shoes for basketball officials, black shoes with rubber cleats for field games. Many field games require officials to wear striped shirts (a style with a long tradition), and they may also have to carry items in addition to whistles, such as yellow and red cards, notepads and pencils, and stopwatches in the case of soccer referees.

Football officials probably have the most specialized equipment of all—white knickers; unique striped socks; penalty flags; beanbags; a clip for the chains; whistles; and cards for keeping score, for denoting which team kicks off, for recording time-outs, and for identifying special penalties such as player ejections. Football officials also usually carry a timing device in case of scoreboard failure (or a lack of one). The total outlay for a football officiating kit may be several hundred dollars or more.

Advice for New Officials

Perhaps the most important advice for new entrants into the officiating ranks, regarding game action, is not to make decisions in haste. "Hustle, but don't hurry" is one of the favorite maxims. "See the whole play" is another. Often, the action unfolds so quickly that you may have trouble following the entire sequence. Sorting out sequences in your mind is one skill you must work on diligently to master your role. Also, be sure to make calls with proper timing. Action should carry through before you make the call. Making calls too quickly will result in errors. Being too close to the action is sometimes detrimental also, and securing a clear angle can be impossible if you are too close because of your over eagerness.

The following suggestions are important if you are just starting out as an official:

- Read the rules.
- Keep the terms *borderline* and *spirit of the rules* in mind when exercising judgment.
- Watch other officials perform.

- Seek out mentoring by asking questions of fellow officials.
- Learn the game from the players' standpoint; discover how strategy operates.
- Master the mechanics
- Ignore spectators.
- Listen to coaches' questions and objections.
- Develop a soft, diplomatic system for dealing with conflict.
- Subdue any explosive or retaliatory tendencies you may have in your personality.
- Carry yourself with dignity and assurance.
- Avoid arrogance and self-righteousness; never be supercilious.
- Always be willing to learn.

Nearly every official who has risen in the profession is grateful for someone who supplied help at a critical time. Some local associations arrange to have veterans work with newcomers in formal mentoring programs, though such programs may not be well organized or operating when you need them. You can benefit considerably by seeking the advice of experienced officials on an informal, personal basis. Casual conversations with officials who are widely respected may prove even more beneficial than a formal program. Most highly regarded officials are flattered to be asked their opinions about tactics. They may also furnish advice on how to move up the ladder to prominent games and college opportunities.

Quest for Games

If you are just starting out as an official, you may simply notify a school or recreation center that you want to work games under that organization's auspices. If you are in a training program, the people administering it are likely to be in a position to assign games. If an outside administrator is in charge of game assignments, which is the case in many scholastic leagues, obtain that person's contact information and inquire about the opportunity. A short note describing your age and experience, availability, contact information, and a resume may be all that is necessary to get started. Assigners are often the best contacts for additional information about training, too.

An Official's Checklist

Following are actions every official should take before working a game:

1. Contact people in charge of the contest before leaving home, preferably several days in advance. They want to know you'll be there on time, and this gesture can be considered common courtesy. Some organizations and leagues insist on prior notice from officials because game sites and times may be switched for reasons such as field light malfunctions.

2. Be sure to secure directions to the school or game site. Because sites may not be adjacent to the school that furnished the contract, you should contact the organization you are working for to confirm the location of the game site.

3. Once at the site, either indoors or a playing field, complete a site check to be sure that no dangerous conditions exist, such as equipment from previous games littering the site. Occasionally, a gym may have objects such as volleyball standards carelessly positioned too close to the floor. A field may actually be unplayable because of severe weather.

If you are not in a formal program, consider an informal mentoring arrangement. You might ask an experienced official to observe and comment on a game that you work. If you are eager to pick up new ideas, you can also benefit by observing a veteran in action and discussing philosophy afterward. An ideal situation is to work a game or two with a veteran so you can observe that person and practice more sophisticated on-field or on-court approaches. These opportunities often occur in preseason scrimmages, when experienced officials are mixed with those who are learning.

When you are ready to work, acquiring a full slate of games may not be possible because there are so many variables. One factor is need. Are schools or recreation organizations experiencing a shortage of officials? If so, opportunities may be plentiful. Another factor

is time. Are you contacting people for game assignments after they have already been made? Your chances of landing assignments are best if you pursue them three to six months before a season starts. A third factor is your location. Are there multiple schools and sports clubs nearby that need a lot of officials? If so, your chances of getting started with ample game assignments are good. But if you live in a small community with only a team or two engaged in your sport, opportunities will be limited. Therefore, you may have to enlarge your search. If you're willing to travel 15 or 20 miles to work games, make contacts in outlying locales. Even if you're hired, however, games may be scheduled sporadically, offering just a few openings per season.

Clinic Opportunities

Learning to become an official can best take place in a training program, and the availability of such programs varies widely according to geographical location. If you live in a metropolitan area, chances are there will be one or more associations dedicated to orienting newcomers and supporting veteran officials in popular sports. But if you live in a rural or outlying area where communities are small and connecting routes long, there may be no organization available for educating prospective officials. Consequently, you may have to gather start-up information from a book or from conversing with someone who already works the sport. Usually, officials obtain game assignments through officiating associations, but games may also be obtained by contacting schools directly.

Even small towns, though, often have a few introductory classes to provide new officials for youth sports with basic information. They may even have supervisors that watch officials perform and issue game assignments.

Many seminars, camps, and clinics are available for officials on a yearly basis; some are arranged by state associations, and some are set up by colleges, leagues, college commissioners, and private individuals. A few certified camps are conducted each winter by Major League Baseball umpires before their season starts. *Certified* means that organized professional baseball leagues depend on these camps to supply them with candidates for Minor League umpiring (which has a high rate of yearly turnover). Directories of camps are published regularly in *Referee* magazine (P.O. Box 161, Franksville, Wisconsin 53126, 262-632-8855, or at www.referee.com). Also, state offices send out notices to officials about sport camps, either via mailed brochures or Internet sites.

Officials for football, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, and volleyball are ordinarily served by overnight camps on college campuses. These clinics, some of which are a weeklong, often include the opportunity to work games, because they are combined with athletic participation by high school students. If scrimmages and games are part of the experience, videotaping of officials at work is also usually offered, as are personal evaluations by college officials and college commissioners.

Such camps have another value: an opportunity to network with people who can advance your career. The college officiating directors conduct some camps. They use camps to scout prospective officials for their leagues. Often, officials from the college conference are the camp instructors, and they also evaluate prospects if a college commissioner is not present. This is a rich opportunity for learning a great deal about how to officiate at a level higher than you may be working at present. Keep in mind that some of the best information may come your way during off-hours, when officials gather in dormitories or at meals.

Some state organizations sponsor overnight camps, and most of them conduct their clinics on weekends before the sport season begins. Again, these clinics offer the opportunities to meet officials at a higher level because generally the state associations rely on college officials to impart their advice and philosophies to aspiring officials. State or regional clinics may invite professional officials to deliver presentations, providing valuable information about how officiating takes place at the highest levels of sport. An important dimension of professional officiating is dealing with pressure and handling vast public exposure. Professional officials also have advice to offer about how to relate to players and coaches. Once more, these camps and clinics offer the opportunity to learn from one another in an informal atmosphere. Sharing experiences may be the most noteworthy part of such gatherings.

Discussions with other officials also are helpful in solidifying the rules in your mind. This is a major function of some officiating associations; many associations make it a point to address every rule during the course of a season. Rule books are accompanied by case books, which are published by the National Federation of State High School Associations. These publications portray game situations in which rules have to be applied in special ways. These texts can help you master the intricacies of a sport. When officials get together, they often pose game-situation problems to one another, much as the case books do, to reinforce their grasp of fine points.

Studying the Rules

Each sport has comprehensive rules governing player behavior and describing how games can proceed. These rules vary somewhat in terms of limits and adjustments according to the levels and skills of performers. Young athletes at grade school levels are likely to have different regulations for play than high school and college athletes have, and they, in turn, have rules that differ from those for professional athletes.

In addition to rules, you will also need to be familiar with the special vocabulary of the sport you officiate. Definitive terms govern each sport, and you are obliged to memorize these to administer a contest fairly.

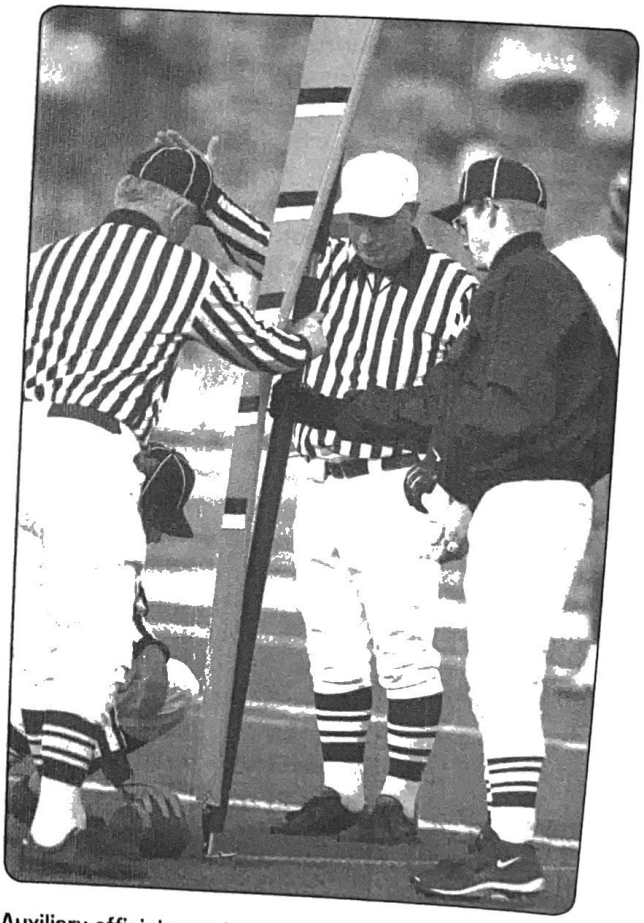
An exciting aspect of officiating is that you can feel part of the action while policing it, as long as you understand the rules and strategies of the sport. It helps to have played the game, but that is not a necessity. You can learn a game's framework by watching it, internalizing its movement, and absorbing the rules.

Consider the case of umpiring slow-pitch softball. You may surmise at first that all you need to know are the differences between a ball and a strike, safe and out, and fair and foul. Knowing the rules will help you differentiate between a ball and a strike; there may even be a mat behind home plate to indicate a strike (i.e., a ball hitting it indicates that the pitch was in the batter's strike zone). However, there are other intricacies to take into account. A pitch can be too high, for instance, and an illegal pitch could also have a trajectory that is too low. Moreover, you will also have to know whether a runner can bowl over a catcher in trying to score. Likewise, you must know the requirements for a legal catch, and the rights and prohibitions runners and fielders have regarding interfering with each other. A study of the rules will reveal the game's complexities, which you must master before you can be considered an expert. Polish takes a lot of buffing, and working many games may be required to reach a high point of mental skill.

Officiating is often a fun athletic endeavor. But a lot of study and extended experience are required to be a superior performer.

Applying the Rules

Learning the rules and staying abreast of changes are vital to your growth as an official. Some officials pride themselves on being experts at rule interpretation, whereas others coast along on perfunctory knowledge. Beyond learning the rules, you must take the impor-



Auxiliary officials, such as a chain crew, can serve vital roles during sporting events.

tant next step: applying the rules in a reasonable way. Rules can be applied to the letter or in a spirit that upholds the primary purposes of the game. All officiating manuals urge that officials apply the spirit of the rules in making judgments. Experience and consultation with other officials will help you understand how to apply the rules in keeping with the spirit of the game. This is the basis for a healthy sport philosophy.

Superior officials study the rules continually. Many set aside a time of day to read a segment of the rule book. It is almost impossible to pore over page after page of rules and retain what you have read; studying only a small section of the rule book at a time is a better use of your time.

Improving Skills

As in many other fields, you can work toward a certain goal in officiating (e.g., obtaining a satisfactory high school varsity schedule) and then take your skills for granted and not seek to improve. Many officials become self-satisfied once they reach a certain level of expertise. They often don't take constructive criticism well, nor do they seek evaluation from experts. In fact, they may not acknowledge that anyone could critique their work fairly, and they close their minds to the prospect of altering their habits. Faulty habits sometimes hold officials back at one level, preventing them from improving and advancing.

The gratification of a full schedule is one factor that may stifle improvement, but other factors operate as well. Once you reach a certain level, you will seldom get a critical review from an objective person who can identify your strengths and weaknesses. Also, you will seldom have opportunities to witness techniques that are more advanced than your own. You may be too busy working games to be on the lookout for ways to get better.

The first requisite for improvement is to acknowledge that you are not a polished expert, that some ingrained habits and personal tendencies may be detrimental to your officiating, and that you could benefit from advice for readjusting your techniques. Superior officials know that there is always more to be learned. The key ingredient to becoming better is to admit your fallibility and seek ways to expand your knowledge.

Self-Assessment

In addition to seeking advice from respected veterans, you can also engage in a deliberate self-assessment after each contest. A danger for many officials, as mentioned earlier, is to become self-satisfied, which means not questioning your own judgment and not evaluating the way you dealt with difficult situations. A reasonable way to start a self-assessment is to identify which calls seemed to be controversial and how you reacted to objections. Write this in a journal. Another area for introspection is the way you deal with coaches and players. If your explanations were unsatisfactory, recall what was said, and mentally develop an alternate way of responding that is more appropriate. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I resolve conflicts satisfactorily?
- Did I anticipate team strategies accurately and in a timely way?
- Was my judgment on given plays emphatic and correct?
- Did I overlook anything, either elements of play or player behavior?
- Was I influenced by crowd reaction or by verbal attacks from participants?
- Did I hustle at appropriate times?
- Was my game coverage consistently sharp?
- Did I communicate effectively with my partners?

Another form of review is asking for an honest response from partners or crewmates. Ask those with whom you work whether any of your habits seem to have negative outcomes—for example: "Is my strike zone consistent? Am I moving into position to make calls correctly? Have I been too loose in calls or too tight? Am I letting the players play the game? Am I intruding too much on play? Am I calling undue attention to myself?" These are all legitimate issues that are correctable if you concentrate on improving.

Another way to observe yourself at work is to ask coaches or game administrators for videos of games you have officiated. Nowadays, teams record many of their games and sometimes even their practice scrimmages. Officials often take blank DVDs along and ask game

administrators to record the game and return the DVD, which most schools are willing to do. There is perhaps no better way to see how you really look in a game than to view a video of yourself in action.

ADVANCING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

If you want to rise in the profession, seek opportunities for exposure beyond your normal operating circles. For instance, if you aspire to work at the college level, it is important to be seen working college scrimmages or off-season practice sessions. Working at various levels provides a broader perspective of how games should be handled. Sometimes this chance to work at more advanced levels may occur at camps or clinics, as previously discussed, but you generally must seek out these opportunities by inquiring when such practices take place and by asking to be involved. To rise above your current level, let it be known that you are entertaining such ambitions. The advanced leagues will not send someone to scout you unless you tell them that you are interested.

"The cream rises to the top" is a saying that can readily be applied to sports officials. If a person shows exceptional promise, someone above usually notices. However, just as it is rare for a teenage athlete to become a standout college performer, so do officials experience difficulty advancing. The reasons for this are that opportunities are few and the competition for them is keen. However, college officials retire, which often makes room for aspiring high school officials to advance. Attending camps, as noted earlier, is one way to open the door to advancement.

At advanced levels, games are played with more intensity, the athletes move more swiftly, they are more skilled, and emotional levels frequently are higher. Therefore, you must gear your reactions to the increased speed and skill of the athletes and adjust your personal responses to deal effectively with college athletes and coaches. A lot of experience is necessary for acquiring the judgment skills required to handle college sports. Some officials try to move too quickly, and their advancement is stymied when their abilities don't match their desires.

To officiate at a higher level, you must first know the protocols for entering the collegiate ranks in your geographic region. These protocols vary, but usually you must submit a formal application to the commissioner of officials in your sport. A resume of past experience is usually required, as are recommendations from prominent officials who have either worked directly with you or seen you in action. You may need recommendations from coaches, too.

A fact of life is that sometimes advancement depends more on who you know than what you know. Officials who work the conference or college coaches with whom you are acquainted may aid your entry into collegiate ranks. Most college commissioners, however, rely on their own staff and current officials to recommend those who are ready to make the step to a higher level.

College officiating places extreme demands on an official's time. Officials are required to attend off-season sessions for rules review, training in special tactics, testing, and fitness checks. College games are likely to be far from where you live, requiring you to set aside more time than you would for a high school commitment. You may be required to be at a game site a day in advance, and long hours in an car or a plane may be necessary to reach an out-of-state destination.

Although college officials may enjoy a higher status than high school officials, they often report an added strain on their family lives and marriages. Strong ambition may be a requisite for high-level officiating. High-level officials must be driven to excel, and such a drive sometimes poses problems in primary jobs and family relationships. Upper-level officials admit that an increased paycheck means increased expectations for excellence and less tolerance for error. You can be sure of being evaluated more critically in college than at the high school level. Stress may replace enjoyment for those who do not relish added pressure.

Following are some factors that can inhibit advancement:

- *Overconfidence.* Being overly self-satisfied may hinder your progress. People who select upper-level officials prefer those who are not know-it-alls.
- *Slow reactions.* At higher levels, instant decisiveness is of utmost importance. A

desultory or overly casual style of officiating will work against your being considered for high levels.

- *Stubbornness.* You must show a willingness to learn and improve; you cannot be defensive when critiqued.
- *Antagonism.* If you consider coaches as adversaries and treat them in a supercilious way, you are not likely to advance very far. In contrast, talent as a diplomat is likely to earn you quicker advancement than exceptional game techniques. The same goes for how you treat crew members. You have to be a team player to rise.
- *Not staying current.* Currency has so many dimensions. *Referee* magazine, a monthly publication, has regular articles on rules interpretations, new rules, and special officiating techniques in major sports such as baseball and softball, football, basketball, and soccer. It also has feature articles and news stories about officiating issues and personnel. States themselves conduct annual sessions about rule updates and policies, and they provide follow-up information about particular events and selected topics. Local and regional associations are dedicated to the process of keeping officials apprised of new practices. Therefore, you can gain knowledge from many sources.

Staying Fit

As indicated, field sports—and basketball, too—demand a lot of running, not continual, but urgently, in short bursts. You must know territorial responsibilities as well, so you can mesh with your fellow officials. Abrupt action on the field or court will stimulate you to sprint: a pass interception or long kick return in football, a breakaway surge in field hockey or lacrosse, or a steal and fast break in basketball. You must also sense when to cruise, moving intently at a controlled pace. Then there are critical times when merely shuffling to secure a desired angle on play is preferable. A solid mantra for success in officiating is to continually strive to obtain an advantageous angle.

Four of the most popular outdoor sports—football, soccer, field hockey, and lacrosse—require officials to run a great deal. To be an effective official in those sports, you must be prepared to run hard (albeit intermittently) for a full game. This is true also with the vigorous indoor sport, basketball.

Volleyball officials simply stand on an elevated device (stepladder), blow a whistle, and wave their arms. They don't need to concern themselves with conditioning. The same goes for judges in track, swimming, and gymnastics. Baseball and softball umpires must run to cover territory and bases, but those bursts are sporadic. They need to run, but not very much. Umpires on the bases do a lot of standing and taking in the scene.

On the other hand, football officials have to run more, but again, only in spurts, and basketball and soccer officials must run the most of all. It has been calculated that a basketball official may run as many as two or three miles in a college game, with only intermittent stretches of stationary observation.

If the sport you are officiating requires that you run, you should make an effort to be fit (i.e., be able to run on a sustained basis). If you are hobbled in some way, you will likely come up short in serving effectively as a game administrator in a fluid sport in which athletes are exerting a lot of effort and expending much energy. It is a good idea to have a thorough annual physical exam.

There is an irony about officiating basketball: Officials must have a lot of experience to work at high school and college levels successfully; yet they are expected to keep up with young people who are at the peak of their physical prowess, including being able to run at top speed for a full game. This is a large expectation for men who are over 30 years of age. To learn more about staying in shape, refer to Part III, Getting Fit to Officiate.

Some officials use the preseason to train for officiating in which running is required. They may run several miles a week (e.g., a mile a day, every other day, to allow for recuperating), whereas others rely on interval conditioning a few times each week (e.g., running 75- or 100-yard dashes and walking back to the starting point).

Retaining the Enjoyment

The issue of enjoyment can be a delicate matter. Officiating can offer a strong ego boost. When you walk on the field or court,

you receive instant respect. People defer to your point of view, because you are automatically in charge. This appeals to many people who take up officiating. You will also have a large measure of control in the game itself. Ego satisfaction is a significant dimension of the role.

Some officials look at every game as a chance to exert their influence. Rather than adopt this attitude, resolve to use your power fairly. People in attendance who are not playing the game are there to see their youngsters and friends in action and to enjoy the game. Therefore, you should not feel that spectators have shown up to see you in action.

If your primary motive is to administer a game with absolute impartiality, you will find that players frequently welcome you with friendly behavior, usually unstated but easily understood by their demeanor. They will offer you automatic acceptance.

These elements contribute to the excitement of officiating. You can be part of a contest and experience its drama. If you observe carefully, you'll notice that participants are often thrilled to take part. Observing this can add to your own vicarious pleasure. You should always be aware that young people, no matter what their age, have devoted long hours trying to be good at playing the game. A game is an opportunity to exhibit the skills they have acquired. This recognition of the players is another element of the contest that you can savor.

Games can be uplifting for everyone present, including those who monitor the action. You can be enthusiastic and still administer a game correctly.

Perhaps the only danger with officiating is overdoing it. No doubt, officiating requires a substantial commitment, often in the evenings and on weekends. You will enter a new world in which camaraderie is a satisfying ingredient, but you must also guard against excessive indulgence. Officiating can offer an emotional high just like any other physical and mental engagement. The secret is to space your assignments so you can build a wholesome life in the times between games.

SUMMARY

Beginning as an official starts like many other professions. Individuals must register, obtain instructional materials and equipment, train, and network to succeed. Before officials may step out onto a field or court, they usually must register with an organization and obtain a license that confirms their qualifications. This is particularly true at the prep level. It's important that officials have the proper equipment for the corresponding athletic events, and this is usually determined by the level worked. Studying the rules and learning to apply them is a crucial skill for all officials. Having an intimate knowledge of a sport's rules and vocabulary is necessary to become an elite official.

The quest for games is most likely the biggest struggle for young officials. Proper networking is a necessity for any official seeking games. It may be as simple as notifying a school or recreation center that you are interested in working games. Learning to become an official can best take place in a training program, and the availability of such programs varies widely according to geographical location. If an outside administrator is in charge of game assignments, which is the case in many scholastic leagues, it's crucial to obtain that person's contact information and inquire about an opportunity. Assigners are often the best resource for training, too. Many times, they will have clinics where young officials can go to learn and potentially work for assignments.

It's evident that officials must strive to keep improving their skills on the field. Whether this means refusing to become self-satisfied, seeking constructive criticism, or attending clinics, it's critical that officials always try to get better. Along those lines, it's important to self-evaluate performances at the end of every contest. Striving to improve abilities is the only way to insure that you keep moving forward and advance to the next level.

Most importantly, it's necessary that officials retain their enjoyment of officiating and continue having fun throughout their careers.