

THE KEYS TO MAKING GOOD JUDGMENTS

Summary points from Referee Leadership Guide:

Each play, we must make correct and consistent decisions. Judgment, the ability to evaluate and discern, along with consistency, can be improved through our efforts to understand, critique and correct ourselves.

While attending a motorcycle safety class, it became apparent the main themes included rules knowledge, experience, concentration, anticipation and attitude. Those elements combined affect judgment and split-second decision making aimed at avoiding an accident. Those same road-safety factors, along with solid mechanics, also apply to officiating.

Mechanics, position and coverage – being in the right place to see the action – result in great rulings without guessing. Watch an experienced official make a difficult ruling. You will likely see great mechanics.

Conditioning is a good first step toward good mechanics. We cannot get to the right place when we are physically tired. Utilize film study, clinics and the coaching of experienced officials. Be early to the game site. Participate in your crew's pregame conference.

Understanding the spirit of the rule allows you to make accurate decisions. Is the rule designed to prevent a team from gaining an unfair advantage, to ensure player safety or maintain game control? Consideration of the rule's purpose must be part of decision making. Know the rulebook so you know the game, not to be picky and technical. There are occasions when there is a technical violation but no advantage is gained and passing on the ruling is the correct judgment. Knowing what is a quality foul leads to advancement.

Mastering rules and mechanics is a function of study we do prior to the season, similar to training our bodies. We are more likely to retain information if it is studied over a longer period of time. Study in short bursts, and allow your mind to visualize the rule and actions which are infractions. Read a variety of materials on your sport. A quick read of the rulebook, cramming in the rules, will show up in the season. Once on the field/court/mat, officials must concentrate on viewing actions of players. Rules and mechanics need to be automatic.

Experience means working the game, seeing plays and knowing what a foul looks like. Mental images are formed from watching and observing game action with a mentor, or as part of a clinic or association meeting. Concentration is the ability to focus attention on a single event. A lapse in concentration allows outside thoughts to interrupt the mind's evaluation process and hinders the ability to make a ruling. Simply put, if distracted, the mind can miss data it needs to make correct decisions.

Develop a rhythm. Establish a routine you perform at specific times of the game. It will help prevent lapses in concentration no matter the game/match score or intensity. At the start of a play, be in position to see the formation, positions and movement in your coverage area. Run through whatever pre-play checklist your contest demands: Player count, down, ball-strike count, clock status, start position, etc. Focus your mind on your area for the upcoming play/action. Developing a routine helps

you to focus on duties and makes it easier to move mentally from one aspect of the game/match to the next.

Anticipation of the play (not the ruling) is the ability to see a play develop and know what potential foul or violations could occur. Player actions in congested areas have the greatest impact on the play and will give the greatest advantage. Having an expectation of what may occur ensures you are ready to rule. Your mind is prepared to recognize action that occurs and rule on what occurred. Cover your area...the remaining crew members will cover the rest of the court of field.

Create in your mind images of each face to the contest. Run through various play situations in relation to your position. Visualization exercises your mind's reflexes and sharpens decision making. Ask yourself questions before making a ruling. Remember, if you THINK it was a foul or a violation, it was not. Let it scream at you before you rule on it. Do not be in a hurry to make a mistake. Be slow and positive.

Do not let your emotions affect and disrupt your decision-making process. Allow for a personal time of adjustment from the day's trials and frustrations before starting the contest. Your personal/crew pregame not only involves the game ahead, but should also calm your mind. Engage in small talk and steer your mind from the day's distractions. Put it all together and you will have a safe and fun ride. Whether you are operating a motorcycle or officiating a contest.