

Exercising Man Management

An interview with Paul Tamberino, who is retiring as a National Referee after serving as an International Assistant Referee and being named MLS Referee of the Year four years in a row. One of the highlights of Paul's career was officiating at the U 17 World Cup.

FP: We urge referees to exercise "man management" in working with the participants in a soccer game. How would you define man management and are there any guiding principles the referee can use in implementing man management?

PT: Sometimes referees say they are going to "deal" with a situation or a player. I don't like using the word "deal." When we use this word it seems as though we are accusing players of doing something wrong. I prefer a cooperative working relationship with the players. I believe this is what works for me. There are a few elements or principles that make a referee successful regarding man-management.

1. Approach the game knowing that you will BE FAIR. Although you may prefer one team over the other, either because of past bad experiences or favorable experiences, it is imperative that

you, as referee, maintain an attitude of fairness throughout the entire game. Players will see you as a fair referee, and you will become instantly credible.

2. LISTEN - This is imperative for referees. Too many referees turn a deaf ear to players. Some referees will approach the game, enter the field of play, and conduct the entire game as if they are the ultimate power. Some have been taught to have this attitude. Yes, the referee is in control of the game; however, some can abuse that power. One way to abuse that power is by NOT LISTENING to the players. An example of how not listening to players can become a



photo by Tony Quinn

problem in the game is the following: Some injustice will happen to a player in the game, and when the player protests to the referee, the referee produces a yellow card for dissent. Or worse, red. Be ready to always listen to players, they may have a legitimate gripe, something as a referee you may be able to learn from. Ask yourself this question before you punish for dissent or misconduct: "Is the player right?"

3. EVALUATE - Once the referee has made his/her decision, and the player protests, the referee should quickly evaluate that decision. Sometimes, the player's reaction can tell the referee something about his last decision. The referee must replay the last play over in his head and EVALUATE the play. When this is done and the referee is 100 percent sure that he is correct, then he must stand by that decision. But, if there is any doubt, then the referee must maintain an open mind for future decisions.

FP: Can you map out ahead of time how you will work with the participants in the game?

PT: Each game and team are different. You cannot look at past differences you may have had with a particular team or individual. Every day is a new day, and so is every game.

All players are due the respect of the referee. In turn, referees will gain the respect of the players.

FP: Is there a difference in how the referee interacts with players, coaches, assistants and trainers?

PT: During the game, the referee has constant contact with the players, this makes it somewhat easier to man-manage them. Players become emotional as the game is progressing, and it seems appropriate that players' emotions may be evident at various times throughout the game.

Coaches also get caught up in the emotions of the game, but because they are not involved in the actual dynamics of play on the field, it is harder for them to vent, and not really be noticed. Some referees will hear a coach screaming, and automatically take it too personal. They may think that the comments are made directly at them. And many times they are; however, sometimes coaches just want to be heard. The referee cannot take this personally. Coaches are very technical. Sometimes, they see things that we as referees do not see. We need to LISTEN to what they have to say as well. If the coach wants an explanation, the referee can handle this in a civil manner. Do not ignore the coach. This only leads to the coach becoming more frustrated, and this is how events can escalate. If the coach approaches the referee at half time, assess his body language. Your gut will tell you if he is there to dissent or if he would just like to talk about something he is unsure of. If his body language is very abrupt and it is very apparent he is approaching you to dissent it is more beneficial to walk away to avoid any confrontations.

FP: What single bit of advice to you have for up-and-coming referees?

PT: Treat the players as you would want to be treated. Arrogance and ignorance on the part of the referee have no place when officiating a soccer match.