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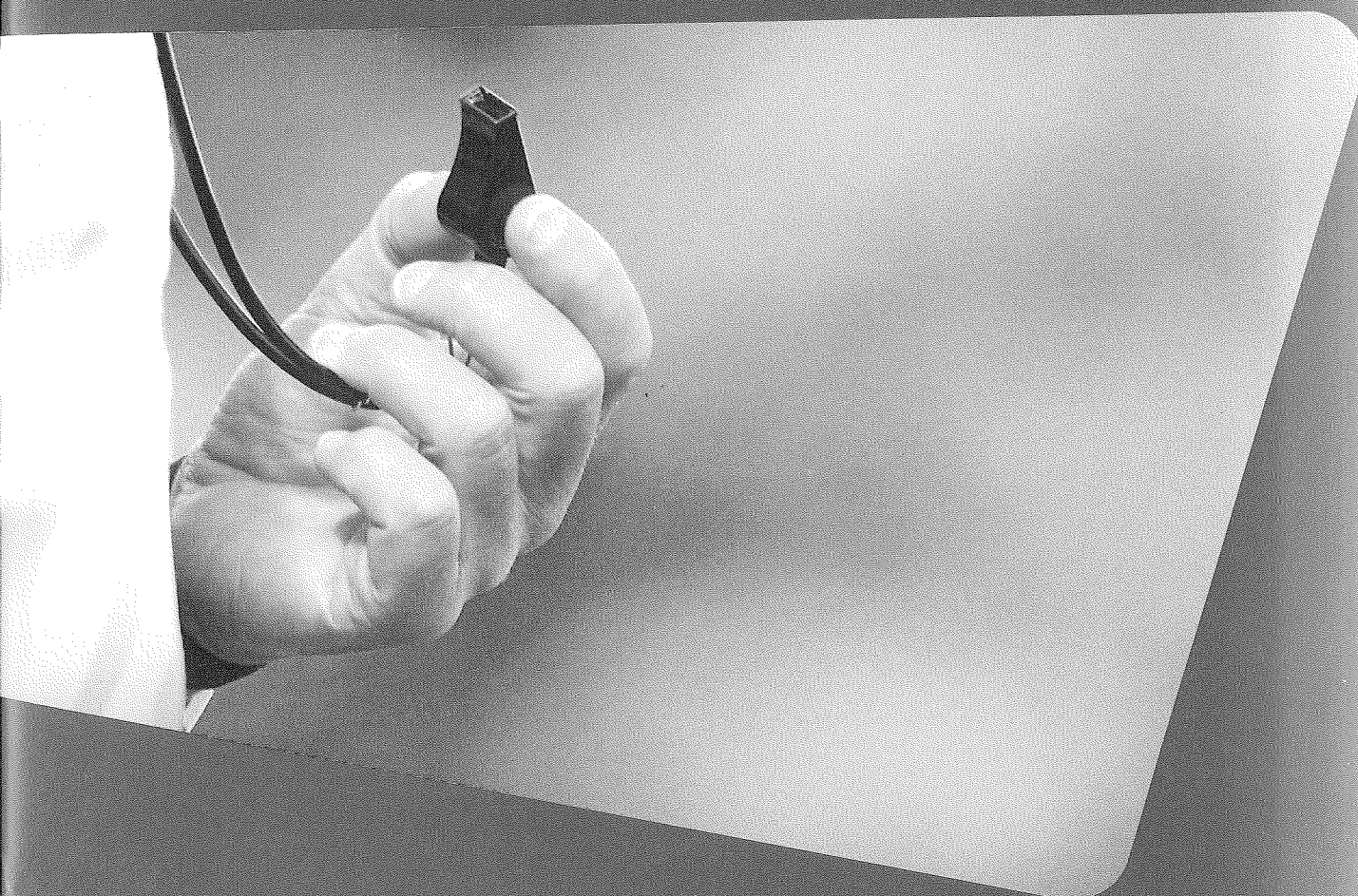


THE

Game

Becoming a More Effective Official

A Resource for Sports Officials



THE SPORTS OFFICIALS PROGRAMME

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Sport & Recreation New Zealand

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BECOMING A MORE EFFECTIVE OFFICIAL

Sport needs officials - at all levels. Good officiating helps to produce a healthy positive sports environment. There are great opportunities for officials who are dedicated and keen to learn.

Players, coaches and officials are all important in sport. But while successful players and coaches are praised, good officials go largely unnoticed. That's because they are working to run the game within the rules with as little interference as possible.

The key to being an effective official is to regularly review your own performance. To take a look at what you are doing, analyse it, then to work out ways of improving. This resource aims to give you practical skills to evaluate and then improve your performance.

This resource is divided into three parts:

A. Key Officiating Areas

- Decision Making
- Concentration
- Communication
- Control and Organisation

B. How to review your performance

C. Performance review worksheets



New Zealand Hockey Federation

KEY OFFICIATING AREAS

Good sports officiating doesn't just happen. It takes time, dedication and practise. The best officials blend technical knowledge with experience and personal skills. They prepare well, they know and understand the rules and make decisions quickly, accurately and consistently.

Top officials are also effective communicators - they know how to get their message across to players, coaches and others involved in the game.

Research shows that the main characteristics shared by top officials are:

- Consistency
- Decisiveness
- Communication skills
- Calmness
- Honesty
- Judgement
- Confidence
- People skills
- Enjoyment/motivation

Your Personal Style

Sports officials are individuals. We all have different personality traits and different ways of doing things. But all officials aim to make sound decisions, communicate clearly, stay calm and run the game or event so that it is safe, fair and fun for all.

While you can't change your genetic make-up, you can control some things about the way you look. You are in charge of your grooming, manner of speaking, gestures and posture. You can hustle - instead of shuffle. You can get out of a slouch. And you can be smartly and appropriately dressed for your role.

You need to be aware of what is expected from **you** in **your** sport. It is important to strike a balance between stamping your own mark on the game and not taking it over. This is even more important in high-profile sports that attract extensive media coverage.

PART A

*Officials are
a vital part
of the game
or event -
but they
are not the
centre of it.*

In this resource we look at these key areas:

1. Decision Making

Officials must be able to apply the rules/laws consistently and accurately for everyone while maintaining the spirit of the game or event.

2. Concentration

Officials must be able to focus on the relevant action throughout a game or event. Being able to concentrate well is a key to effective decision-making.

3. Communication

Communication is about using people skills in relating to players, coaches, administrators and other officials to develop a positive sporting environment and to make the game fun and fair for all.

4. Control/Organisation

Officials need basic skills to be able to control/organise a game or event while making sure it is played positively and fairly. Managing your own time effectively is an important part of this.

Decision Making

Top officials make decisions quickly, confidently and consistently. They are accurate, although even the best officials sometimes make mistakes.

Be Consistent – Inconsistency is probably the quality that sports officials are most often criticised for. Coaches and players expect the rules to apply equally to both teams. Good judgement and standard rule interpretation are the keys to being consistent.

Be Decisive – Making your decisions quickly and firmly will give you more control of the game and earn you the respect of players and coaches. Hesitation and indecision can lead to unnecessary controversy.

Making Sound Decisions

Important decisions must be made in every sporting contest. The decisions require a deep understanding of the sport, both technical knowledge of the rules and a feel for the spirit of the game.

The keys to making sound decisions are:

- Know the rules.
- Know the language of the sport.
- Know and use signals properly.
- Understand the rhythm of the game.
- Be in the best position for making calls.
- Concentrate. Focus on the key elements.
- Stay calm.
- Work appropriately with fellow officials.

How Well Do You Make Decisions?

Review your *decision making* by asking these questions:

- Am I impartial?
- Do I make decisions quickly?
- Are my decisions accurate?
- Do I anticipate decisions?
- Are my decisions consistent between teams and for individuals?
- Are my decisions consistent between games or events?
- Does my decision-making maintain the spirit of the game/event?
- Am I in a position to make an accurate decision?
- Am I physically and mentally fit for my game or event?
- Do I explain my decisions to players when needed (or to coaches, other officials)?
- Do I admit that I have made a wrong decision?
- Do I concentrate at all times?
- Do I recover concentration when interrupted?
- Can I forget my mistakes and move on?

Concentration

Concentration is vital for sports officials. You must be able to focus on the relevant cues in the sporting environment and maintain high levels of concentration for the duration of the game or event. This may range from a 50-metre swimming race to a five-day cricket test.

Achieving and maintaining high concentration levels can be difficult. Officials often have to perform amidst many potential distractions. The main reasons that the mind begins to lose focus are:

- **Thinking about past events**

Dwelling on previous controversial calls can wreck your concentration. You will not be able to keep up with the current action while you are trying to make up for the past. So when you make a mistake, acknowledge it (to others when appropriate), forget it, and refocus on what is happening now.

- **Thinking about the future**

Stressing about 'what might happen' can make you nervous and cause you to lose focus. While it is good to prepare for different situations, most of this should be done before the game begins. Once the game is underway, focus on the action.

- **Thinking about too many things**

The potential distractions to an official are endless. Trying to think about them all will wreck your concentration. Learn to focus only on the things that are relevant to the current action.

Tips for Better Concentration

- Use trigger words to focus yourself, eg 'focus', 'relax', 'chill', 'low-key', 'position'.
- Focus on the present.
- Think without criticism.

Think about what you are doing but don't evaluate yourself or your calls. Save that until after the game.

- Establish routines.

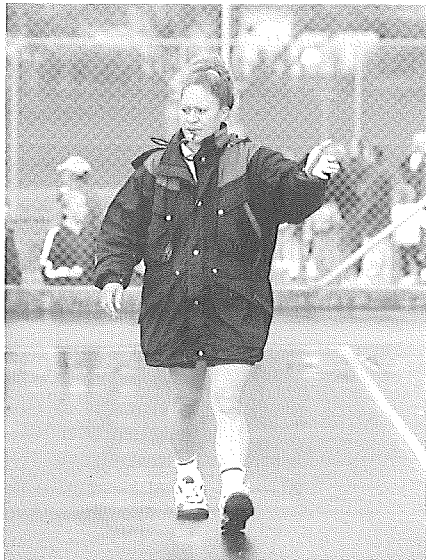
Use the same routine before games and develop a routine you can use when you are in stressful situations.

How Well Do You Concentrate?

Review your ability to **concentrate** by asking the following questions.

- Do I have difficulty putting mistakes out of my mind?
- Am I good at quickly assessing what is happening in the game?
- Is it easy for me to block irrelevant thoughts while officiating?
- Am I good at blocking spectator noise?
- Do I get confused when many things happen quickly?
- Do I get distracted by my own thoughts?
- Am I good at identifying what I need to focus on during a game?
- Do I focus on the moment and not the past or future?
- Can I maintain my concentration even during hassles with coaches and players?
- Can I block out my personal life when officiating?
- Can I keep concentrating even when I get anxious?
- Can I keep concentrating when I think my fellow official is doing a poor job?
- Do I concentrate for the entire event?
- Do I struggle to re-focus after a break in the action?

Concentration is also covered in the resource guide *Fitness and Injury Prevention* (Part B. Mental Fitness).



Netball New Zealand – Bronwyn Warren

Communication

Top officials clearly and consistently send the right messages. So it's important to think about the messages you are sending and to keep working on your ability to send these messages.

Officials communicate through words (verbal) and actions (non-verbal). You send messages with your posture, your gestures and movements, and the tone of your voice.

Officials usually send more messages with their actions than they do with their voice.

Experts estimate that of all communication:

<i>55 percent is through</i>	<i>body language</i>
<i>38 percent is through</i>	<i>the tone of our voice</i>
<i>7 percent is through</i>	<i>what we actually say</i>

Body Language

Body language is a powerful tool for an official. It includes your physical appearance, posture, touching behaviour, gestures, and facial expressions.

Voice Tone

Tone is not about what you say - but how you say it. Be aware of your feelings during a game and learn to control the pitch of your voice to fit the environment or situation.

The tone of voice you use sends a specific message. A loud voice conveys confidence, enthusiasm and assertiveness; a soft voice may convey understanding and trustworthiness. Learning to use your voice to suit the situation is a valuable skill.

Assess your voice tone by asking yourself these questions:

- Does my voice convey firmness and strength?
- Do I speak quickly or slowly?
- Can I project in a loud voice?
- Can I control the pitch of my voice?

Tape one of your performances as an official and listen to your voice. Use the tape to work out how to alter your voice to communicate more effectively during a game or event.

How Well Do You Communicate?

Review your **communication skills** by asking these questions:

- How do I communicate without speaking? Do I know how the following aspects of my behaviour influence my ability to communicate?
 - verbal (voice tone/speed/volume)
 - body language
 - use of space
 - signals (hand/body)
 - listening skills
 - aids (whistles/flags)
- How does my non-verbal communication relate to what I say?
- Am I flexible in the way I communicate? Can I adapt my communication to suit the situation by:
 - going into detail, simplifying?
 - speaking loudly, softly?
 - lightly, seriously?
 - hustling players, quietly encouraging them?
 - getting closely involved, staying back?
- Can I communicate easily with players? Am I approachable? Can players communicate easily with me?
- Do I try to gauge how players are responding to my officiating?
- Am I courteous to players and coaches?
- Do I treat players as people? Treat them with respect?
- Do I work to create a positive social climate? How?
- Do I communicate with players before and after a training session, game or event?
- How do I communicate my decisions with spectators, judges, coaches or television audience (if appropriate) during a game or event?

Communicating with the Media

Officials must strive to build a working relationship with the media. Tips for dealing with the media are included in ***Calling the Game***'s resource guide on People Management.

Control and Organisation

Every official needs to have appropriate control of the game or event. You need to understand the rules relating to your sport and to be aware of your options in difficult situations.

Confident officials remain in control when things go wrong or the unexpected occurs. Every official has a game or situation that he/she would rather forget but a confident official will not let those times undermine their skill or belief in their ability.

How Well Do You Control and Organise Games and Events?

Review your **control** by asking these questions:

- Did I enjoy the game?
- Did the players enjoy the game?
- Did I accept responsibility for all actions taken?
- How do I plan training sessions, games or events?
- Do my training sessions, games or events run smoothly?
- How do I gain the players' attention?
- Did I place the safety and welfare of the players above all else?
- How do I control the game? Am I loud and bossy or low-key and quietly assertive?
- How do the players react to my control style?
- Do I have the respect of players?
- Do I have adequate technical knowledge for this level?
- Am I distracted easily? Why and by what?
- Am I a positive role model in behaviour and personal appearance?
- Do I know the procedure if an injury occurs?
- Do I know the procedure in a conflict situation?

Managing Your Time

Life is busy. Being an official is not just a matter of turning up once a week to blow a whistle. You will have to find the time for a range of officiating requirements among your other commitments. And it's not easy!

Officials must consider and plan for several different types of time commitment. Use this checklist to help you plan your use of time:

1. Time for games and training sessions

How long is your game or training? How often? Which day/s?

2. Time for travel

Do you travel to and from games? To and from training?

3. Time for game preparation

Do you have to change into uniform? Strap for injury prevention?

Do you have to inspect the field, pitch or court before the game?

Do you need to consult with other officials?

How much time do you need to warm up? Prepare mentally?

4. Time for study

Do you have to study the rules? Attend rules clinics? Watch match or training videos?

5. Time for personal training and practise

How long does your fitness take? How much do you need to practise your skills?

6. Time for meetings/mentoring

Are you expected to attend meetings?

Do you meet with your mentor? Are you a mentor to another official?

Improving Time Management Skills

You can always improve the way you manage your time. Take a look at the following points. They will help you organise your officiating tasks without being overwhelmed by them.

- Plan your tasks. Write them down.
- Set down your goals on paper. Review them regularly. Break down your goals for the season into monthly, then weekly, then daily tasks. This will make them more manageable.
- Prioritise. Order your tasks from the most to the least important.
- Establish a routine for your officiating; try to stick to it.
- Keep to deadlines. Reward yourself for achieving goals.
- Delegate whenever possible, and thank others for their efforts.
- Don't let others waste your time; don't waste their time either!
- When tasks become overwhelming, reassess them and set new goals.
- Take a break. When you are not officiating, don't think about it. Give your body - and mind - a rest.

Hints For Officials

1. Decision Making

- Be enthusiastic
- Be confident, stay calm
- Treat all players/teams consistently
- Keep fit so you can keep up with the game
- Review your performance after each game
- Forget about critical spectators/fans

2. Concentration

- Concentrate for the whole game
- Have techniques to get your concentration back when it has been broken
- Use any 'down-time' effectively
- Know when you are losing concentration
- Have techniques to start and finish the game - switch on and off

3. Communication

- Speak in a firm but friendly manner
- Be prepared to explain your rulings
- Make clear and decisive calls
- Admit when you have made an error - beware of doing this so often that you lose credibility
- Use your voice to warn before you use your whistle
- Don't shout and don't threaten players or coaches
- Establish a rapport with colleagues

4. Control/Organisation

- Be on time for the game
- Be dressed appropriately
- Know the rules
- Emphasise the spirit of the game
- Thank the players/coaches/other relevant people
- Concentrate. Shut out distractions. Focus on the job at hand.

HOW TO REVIEW YOUR PERFORMANCE

Even the best sports officials can get better - but it takes time and effort. Reviewing your own performance is an essential step in improving your officiating skills. But it needs a systematic approach. Here are three methods most used by officials to structure their review:

1. Logbook

Keep a written record of your performance.

2. Mentor/s

Speak to another official, coach or senior player about your performance.

3. Video Review

Video record and review your performance.

Keeping a Logbook

Writing something down makes it more real and gives you a basis for your analysis.

Use a logbook to record and evaluate every aspect of your performance. Performance review worksheets are provided at the end of this resource.

Use them to start your logbook. Your log may include some of the following:

- New rule interpretations you learned.
- New mechanics or techniques used by other officials.
- Your weaknesses in this game (rules, mechanics, judgement, relationships).
- How you resolved any conflicts.
- Your assessment of your decision-making.
- What you did well in this game.
- Whether you were influenced by players, coaches or spectators
- Areas identified for improvement.
- Questions to ask at the next officials' meeting.
- Specific goals for improving.

HINTS for Keeping a Logbook

Write your log as soon as possible after the game

Do it while everything is fresh in your mind.

Keep it clear and simple

Use diagrams to illustrate your notes if necessary.

Describe before judging

Write down your actions first - judge them later. Be clear.

Identify what you do well

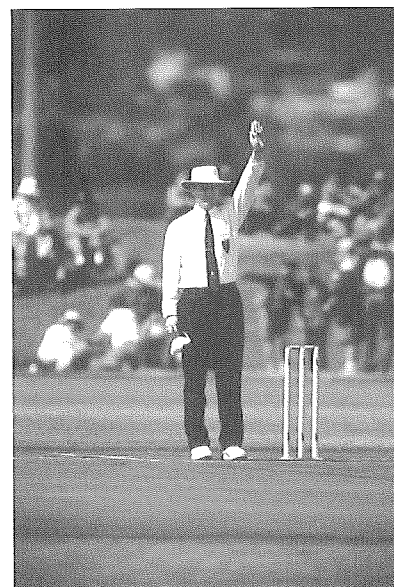
This is as important as knowing what you need to improve.

Brainstorm

If you can see the problem but no solution, try listing a whole lot of ideas and see if this helps.

Keep trying

Strategies can go wrong, improvement can be slow. Don't be afraid to keep working on the same area.



Australian Sports Commission

Analysing Your Own Performance

When assessing your own performance you need to break it down into individual actions. This is an example of how to break down a simple penalty for analysis.

Self Review

Soccer Example

Action

Awarding a penalty for offside play

Reflect

Player questioned decision.

- Was it a clear signal?
- Was it a correct decision?
- Did I seek input from other officials in making the decision, ie offside usually called by the linespeople?

Things to Improve

Need to position my arm higher
Hold signal longer
Use voice to explain

Planning Improvement

Practise awarding a penalty sequence on own

Action

Use higher arm action in game/hold signal/use voice to explain

Follow-up

Seek an independent review of my signal, ie video/mentor