



CORNY'S CORNER

Mistakes Happen

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An official must be well prepared in terms of rules knowledge, technical skills, game experience, and match management. Despite all this, Murphy's Law of "Anything that can happen will happen," including mistakes, is an officiating fact of life.

Handling a mistake. If you make a perceived mistake in judgment or rules application, make every diplomatic and preventive effort not to penalize the affected team again with a sanction for venting frustrations or expressing disagreement with your call. Sometimes, you'll have no other recourse if the players or team bench are vocal and contentious. Allow only the team captain to approach and question you (or the bench coach to the second referee). Do not get caught up in the probable heat of the moment. Be non-confrontational and open-minded while keeping your authority and composure. Let the team captain have a say and be done with it. If necessary, get helpful clarification for the play from your work team either verbally or preferably through signals. If a consultation is needed, summon them to your stand and banish eavesdroppers. Make a swift, conclusive decision and convey it with confidence. Your decision might not be popular, but render what's fair and proper to right a wrong.

Judgment error. If you are viewed to have made an error in judging a play, doing a replay or reversing your call is permissible if your work team can provide sufficient justification for doing so. On the other hand, an unwarranted replay or call reversal leads to second guessing by the teams and loss in credibility. Minimize replays for judgment calls. Be decisive, such as for double net violations when usually one team contacts the net first by a split second. Stick with your judgment call unless proven otherwise, particularly when it deals with ball handling. Believe in your skills and abilities. Doubting yourself produces mistakes.

Rule misapplication. If you realize you have misapplied a rule, don't make it worse by staunchly defending your position. This could result in a protest being filed, which is a "no win" situation for you because at the minimum the match is delayed with administrative procedures. Acknowledge your mistake and dispense the fair and proper ruling. If any measure of respect is to be gained from your inadvertent predicament, it will be for admitting you are human and not afraid to correct your error.

Focus. Don't worry about the last play or dwell on your mistake. Initiate the necessary damage control quickly and properly, then forget about it. Be concerned and focused on the next play. If you don't, another mistake is likely to happen.

Review. After the match, discuss the troublesome match situations in private with your work crew and/or attendant colleague, but not with the participants ... that's unwise. Determine what you could have done differently to prevent or better handle these occurrences. These might have been unavoidable, but mistakes can be reduced in future matches when sticky situations are reviewed with regularity. Be honest with yourself. The first step in fixing a technical weakness is admitting there is one. Implement your findings to become a better official by being a quick study in not making the same mistakes again. Make every match a learning experience.

An official can and must limit human error. However, mistakes are inevitable and can be an acid test. It's how you react to these mishaps that will determine the kind of official you are. An outstanding official is distinguished not only by the few mistakes made, but by how well the mistakes that happen are managed with poise, speed, and resolve.