

TRAINING RESOURCE

Eight Ways to Ruin Your Reputation

Professionalism and conduct reminders for officials. Original article by Tom Schreck.

Central idea

As an official, reputation is one of your most important assets. Assigners, partners, administrators, coaches, and fellow officials remember reliability, professionalism, and judgment.

1. Be high maintenance

The men and women who assign and evaluate officials have deadlines, constituents, and responsibilities of their own. Every time an official makes their job harder, the source of that frustration is remembered.

"Supervisors and assigners are looking for people who are low maintenance. Everyone wants someone they can trust, someone who will be on time and someone who will get the job done," Randy Wetzel, an NCAA Division I college umpire, says.

Making supervisors' lives easier strengthens your reputation. Get reports in on time, be punctual, return phone calls, and do what needs to be done even when it is inconvenient.

2. Talk too much

Opinions are best kept private, especially in public. Criticizing someone else's work is tacky and usually says more about the person talking than the person being discussed.

Officials, athletic directors, and coaches travel in tight circles. A comment that starts "between me and you" rarely stays that way.

Follow the old rule: if you cannot say something positive, especially about another official, do not say it.

3. Create problems off the field

Officials work in a visible profession. Free time is personal, but behavior away from assignments can still affect reputation.

"Like it or not we have great visibility," Wetzel says. "People know who you are and when you're out and about how you act will get back to the coaches, ADs and supervisors."

Social-media posts, arrests, or embarrassing public behavior can change how people see an official between the lines.

4. Fraternize

Assignments often include long hours and travel, but officials must avoid the appearance of bias.

"We teach that when you enter a gym, survey the area," says Steve Smith, a high school basketball and soccer referee from Colonie, N.Y. "Note where the coaches are sitting and find another spot. Be careful not to give the appearance of fraternizing."

High fives, fist bumps, and overly familiar interactions with coaches or athletic directors can be noticed and interpreted.

5. Look terrible

Uniform appearance communicates professionalism. That expectation extends before and after the game as well.

"We tell our guys when they walk into a venue to look professional and once you put stripes on you are in charge so it is important to not look like an unmade bed," Smith says.

Everything an official does communicates something. Make sure the message is professionalism.

6. Do not treat people right

Everyone an official interacts with matters: game administration, support staff, restaurant staff, and new officials learning the job.

Using "please," "thank you," and "excuse me" is simple, but their absence is remembered.

"If you're a jerk to people onsite, that'll get back to people," Rick Mansur, a Division I basketball referee from Marlboro, Mass., says.

7. Be all about the money

Every official eventually deals with imperfect mileage, lodging, pay, clinic expenses, or association dues.

Cherry-picking assignments or constantly complaining about dues can damage reputation more than the amount of money involved.

Professional officials understand the business side while still protecting the game and the association.

8. Be arrogant and unapproachable

The games are about the players, coaches, and institutions involved. Officials are there to manage the contest fairly, not to become the focus.

"More and more communication has become crucial and being standoffish is unacceptable," Mansur says.

Listen when appropriate, be professional, and build relationships without giving up authority.

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