

# The 25 Most Important Things To Know About Officiating

*Taken from January 2001 Referee Magazine, published by NASO – the National Association of Sports Officials, and used with their permission.*

## **1 For All But A Few Of Us, Officiating Is An Avocation, Not Our Profession.**

Recognizing that will help keep your life in better balance. It takes time, hard work, and study to become a successful official. But an official must not put officiating ahead of what's really important: family and work. Devote more time and energy to your family and job than you do to officiating.

## **2 Ninety Percent Of Officiating Is Being A People Person.**

Know how to handle people. Remember that listening is an important skill. If you're asked a question, answer it. Treat everyone at the event with the same respect you demand from them.

## **3 Officiating Is Seldom Fair.**

Regardless of how much talent you possess and how hard you work, you won't always work the big events or move up the officiating ladder. Officiating is one avocation in which sometimes it is less a matter of what you know than who you know. There is no use obsessing about things you can't control. No matter what level you work, you will often be criticized even though you are 100 percent correct. That isn't fair, but it's another facet of the job you must accept.

## **4 Keep Rider Safety Number One.**

The rules not only empower but also require officials to penalize rough riding. Even if a potentially dangerous situation is not specifically covered in the rules, an official is obligated to make whatever correction is necessary to ensure rider safety. That entails everything from the weather to the course to conduct of participants. In this overly litigious age, erring on the side of safety is not only the morally correct course but the one that will help keep the official out of court as well.

## **5 Don't Make Excuses.**

Even if you have the best possible excuse for making a mistake, the error won't be corrected because you have an alibi. Instead of wasting time and mental energy coming up with an excuse, your first course should be doing whatever the rules allow you to do to rectify the situation. Next you should learn from the mistakes so you won't make it - or have to come up with another excuse - again.

## **6 You Have An Obligation To Hold Yourself To A Higher-Than-Normal Ethical Standard.**

How you comport yourself away from the races is as important as how you act during events. Poor decisions or bad behavior in everyday life can eradicate all of the good will and good impressions you earn when you're officiating. Remember that integrity is defined by how you act when you think nobody is watching.

## **7 Expect Criticism And Learn How To Handle It.**

Most comments from spectators, riders and coaches should go in one ear and out the other. Granted, that's easier said than done. But turning a deaf ear to such criticism is crucial to maintaining focus and

keeping a positive attitude. Constructive criticism from chief officials, assignors and veteran officials should be sought. If you solicit comments after working with a respected veteran, be prepared for what you might get. It's possible you'll find out you're not as good as you think you are.

## **8 Officiating Builds Skills For A Lifetime.**

The qualities that make a great official are also the qualities that make a person a good employee, spouse, parent and friend. Teamwork, loyalty, sacrifice, study, decision-making, fair mindedness, accountability and honesty are just a few of the positive skills and qualities that can be learned, developed and implemented through officiating.

## **9 Never Let Your Signals Convey Your Emotions.**

Too many officials view fouls or rules infractions as personal affronts. Instead of acting dispassionately, they allow their body language or voice to convey that displeasure. Your facial expression and voice should not suggest you're happy or unhappy to be enforcing a penalty.

## **10 Understand The Intent Of The Rules - Not Just The Rule.**

Knowing why a rule is needed will help you enforce it. In some cases, the intent is obvious (e.g. rider safety). In other instances, a rule is intended to ensure that neither team or athlete is placed at an unfair disadvantage. For example, the 5k maximum for criterium courses puts limits on free laps and effects of leaders riding with those off the back.

## **11 If You're Going To Blow The Whistle, Blow It Hard.**

In almost every situation in virtually every sport, the rules dictate that an official's whistle causes play to cease. Since that is the case, you might as well blow it hard. The concept holds true for non-whistle sports-make sure everyone knows it when you call time. A strong blast of the whistle conveys the message that you're sure play should be stopped. A weak toot casts doubt about your confidence and judgment.

## **12 Understand That You Will Make Mistakes.**

Sometimes they are dreadful mistakes, but we must accept them as an environmental hazard in an avocation that calls for us to make a multitude of split-second decisions under very stressful conditions. To expect perfection is too heavy a burden for any person to carry and ultimately will take the joy out of officiating for even the best official.

## **13 Don't Criticize Other Officials.**

Under no circumstances should an official point out a peer's inadequacies or offer a negative opinion about another official to a coach or rider. Let your work and the work of others speak for itself. If an official you've worked with or observed asks for a critique, be honest but supportive. If your opinion is not sought, don't offer it.

## **14 Be Professional.**

No matter the level, dress the part; act the part. In officiating, a book is judged by its cover. Soiled, aged, discolored, ill-fitting and wrinkled uniforms and accessories cast a negative impression before a race is started. Your appearance before and after the event is also important. No, you don't have to wear a tuxedo en route to a venue, but it is a good idea to dress a bit better than most people expect.

## **15 Know Your Role.**

You are part of a bigger package-don't showboat. When you need to sell a call, it's OK to give an emphatic signal. But actions designed to draw attention away from racers and onto officials are unprofessional and unacceptable. Use the standard mechanics and signals for the level of event you are working.

## **16 Be Prepared.**

Plan for the unexpected. Don't anticipate the call, anticipate the race moves. That sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. If you can "feel" what's coming and adjust your position or your visual focus to the right area, you'll see what's happening better and you'll have improved your opportunity to make the correct call if needed. Good umpires know when to expect a squeeze play. Top basketball referees recognize the times a team is going to apply full-court pressure or change its defense. Football officials know when to expect a deep pass or a quarterback sneak. In soccer, you know when a team will play kick-and-run and when teams will attack the defense methodically. In cycling you can feel that the right people are getting together for a move up a hill or around a corner into the wind. This allows you to move caravan cars to make room for the maneuver and to position motors to support and to observe. All of those things help you to anticipate the action, not the call.

## **17 Continuing Study Is A Requirement.**

How many times have you had to correct a partner who applies an outdated rule? Or been corrected yourself? Good officials read the rulebook often. The more often you read it, the more ingrained the rules will be in your mind. That's especially important if you deal with UCI and USCF events. Or if you work both cycling and some other sport. Attending clinics allows you to keep up with changes in philosophies and mechanics.

## **18 Body Language Will Do You In Quicker Than A Lack Of Knowledge.**

Sometimes it's less a matter of what you say than how you say it. In officiating, body language often speaks louder than words. Even a correct call will cast doubt in the minds of participants if you don't appear decisive. During low-activity periods of races, don't stand with your arms folded or shoulder slumped, which gives the impression you're bored or would rather be anywhere else.

## **19 Pour No Gasoline.**

Coaches, racers and watchers will say plenty during most races. Much is designed to do no more than vent frustration. Understanding which comments or questions merit a response is a key to success in officiating. Yelling in kind can turn a small brush fire into a four-alarm conflagration. More often than not, the "right" response will not be verbal. You might nod your head slightly, smile momentarily, glance at whoever said something, hold eye contact for a moment or two, shake your head, or hold up a stop sign. Each alternative communication has a particular meaning; learn to use them wisely.

## **20 You Don't Care Who Wins.**

One of the many sports myths accepted as fact is that the officials are predisposed to favor the locals. But an official should never use calls to favor any racer for any reason. Impartiality is the foundation on which the officiating house is built. Officials must be blind to factors that have nothing to do with the race, including who wins or loses.

## **21 You Must Have A Reverence For The Rules.**

Before you can understand the spirit behind the rules you must have an appreciation for them. That doesn't necessarily mean knowing them verbatim. More important is understanding how vital it is to properly apply the rules. The avocation suffers when officials ignore or misapply the rules.

## **22 Always Have A Pre Race Meeting.**

Just as athletes must warm up before competing, officials must prepare themselves for the job ahead. Even if you work with the same partner or crew day after day, a pre race meeting provides valuable reminders about how certain situations will be handled. Involving every crew member or varying the routine helps prevent monotony.

## **23 Don't Carry Over Feelings To The Next Race.**

It is crucial to treat each race as a new experience. If you work a race involving a rider or coach you've had to penalize or eject, your demeanor and actions must convey the feeling that you've forgotten about it - even if they haven't. Even the appearance of punishing a coach or rider for something that happened in the past will taint your reputation and perhaps ruin your career.

## **24 Remember Where You Came From.**

If you've achieved your goal, it's easy to forget what helped you reach that pinnacle. Few officials make it on their own. More than likely there was a mentor, an assignor or a local association that gave you the boost you needed. You can repay that kindness by helping another budding official. You may impress some people by bragging about your success, but more than likely you will come across as a pompous blowhard.

## **25 You Referee Who You Are.**

Your officiating personality is driven by your everyday personality. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But remember that extremes are often detrimental in officiating. For example, if your job involves supervising people, remember that you can't treat fellow officials, riders and coaches the same as you do your employees. If you're in sales, you may have to tone down your personality at races.