NFHS PLAY. PERFORM COMPETE. TOGETHER

Triple Threat

Embrace the Three-Person Learning Curve

If you are in the journey of your officiating career where you are transitioning from the two-person to the three-person system, congratulations! You are ready to take the next step toward becoming an even better play caller.

Before we get into some advantages, differences and mindsets, one note of caution: It takes quite a few games to get comfortable transitioning from two-person to three-person officiating. Don't be surprised if it takes 10-15 games before the light bulb starts coming on.

After getting the hang of the three-person system, you'll wonder how you ever survived two-person and you'll realize just how many plays you were not officiating and begin wondering how often you guessed.



ROB MESSINA

Utah officials, from left, Brent Jorgensen, Newton; James Tracy, West Haven; and Deborah Thomas, Roy, share a light moment during a game. Being part of a three-official crew provides many advantages compared to working the two-official system.

Advantages

One advantage is three-person reduces the number of players to officiate at any given time. When the three-person system is followed, no official should ever have to referee more than two matchups at a time. Officiating only two matchups (two offensive players and two defenders) will raise your correct call and correct no-call percentages.

Another advantage is the ability to see plays from beginning to end. In two-person, there are several times a game when you turn to pick up a play and see contact, but are unable to see the beginning of the action. This leads to guessing. Three-person will eliminate the guessing because officials will be able to see plays from beginning to end. We all know that officiating the defense is the key to correctly adjudicating a play. While only responsible for one or two matchups, officials have time to judge the legality of the defender before any contact occurs.

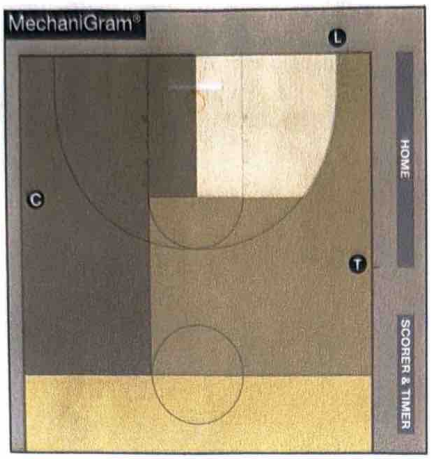
Also, court coverage is improved. Obviously, dividing the court by three officials rather than two gets us closer to some plays, especially in transition, but it is the improved angles and open looks that make the big difference. The three-person system enables officials to obtain and maintain views between the offensive player and the defender. As we continue to improve three-person skills, we'll begin to recognize more and more plays where the official closest to

the play does not have the best look. My favorite play to describe this concept is when a post player has the ball right in front of the lead. The post player then spins to the middle of the key. When this happens, the lead official is still the closest to the play, but the post defender is directly in between the offensive player and the lead official, resulting in a closed look. The trail official might have a decent look at the play, but it's usually the center official (farthest from the play) who has the open look between the post player and defender.

Off-ball coverage is greatly improved in the three-person system. When executed properly, the lead official and the trail official are on the strong side of the court. This frees up the center official to watch off-ball action on the weak side of the court. When the center official cleans up illegal activity away from the primary action, the game is less physical and has better flow. Freedom of movement is enhanced when bumps, chucks and holds are disallowed.

Things to Remember

With three officials in a crew, the number of potential double whistles goes up if officials are following the ball. Ball-watchers will get exposed in three-person by creating unnecessary double whistles and by that "deer in the headlights" look when a big crash happens in their primary coverage area and they have no idea what happened. Officials need to learn to have slow whistles and recognize which official has the primary responsibility on each play to cut down on unnecessary multiple whistles. When beginning three-person, concentrate on only putting whistles on plays involving matchups in your primary area. After getting comfortable in three-person, there may be rare occasions when you look outside of designated coverage areas briefly, but don't worry about that at the beginning.



There are several resources available for learning three-person officiating mechanics, including the NFHS Basketball Officials Manual, which uses MechaniGrams to illustrate various scenarios, such as basic frontcourt coverage areas.

It will take a little while to get the rhythm of switches after a foul is called. If a foul is called by one of your partners and you aren't sure where you are supposed to go, just stop. Let your partners move to their spots and then fill in the unoccupied spot. Other than your two partners, nobody in the gym will even realize that you didn't know.

Don't get mentally paralyzed by all the new things and forget to officiate. When the Washington Officials Association first adopted three-person back in 2004-05, we had a few trainwreck plays that didn't have a whistle on them. Mentally, officials were thinking, "Do you have that play? Do I have that play?" The result was that nobody had it. Be ready to put a late whistle on obvious plays. Take a deep breath and don't forget to at least get your out-of-bounds calls if you feel like you are overwhelmed.

Speeding Up Your Mastery

We highly recommend picking up a copy of the NFHS Basketball Officials Manual. We all have our own learning styles and some learn better by "doing" than "reading," but this book is fabulous. It has great diagrams to improve your understanding of all kinds of plays, rotations and switches.

Attending a three-person learning camp is another way to improve the velocity of your improvement and understanding. We emphasize "learning" in the previous sentence because we are not talking about a college tryout camp. Find a camp that is set up to teach. Those camps are usually far less expensive and provide more grace and patience to those learning three-person.

Good luck in your journey to three-person. If you apply yourself and give yourself some patience, you'll soon see the benefits and advantages of three-person and wonder how you ever survived the two-person system. ■

Keep Calm and Ref On

All officials do it, even if they don't admit it: As their schedule takes shape before the season, they look at the teams, the sites, the dates and anticipate the stakes that may dictate the tenor of a game. Are they rivals? Will the teams be vying for a league title? Perhaps one (or both) will be looking to gain some momentum for a late-season playoff push?

Any of those variables can add some extra juice to a game. If, however, the excitement surrounding the game turns it into what resembles an out-of-control, three-ring circus, it's our job as officials to be beacons of calm and composure and restore order.

We've all been there … a heretofore well-played game somehow goes sideways without warning. As a crew, we want nothing more than to get things back on track. To lower the temperature in the gym, lean on your crewmates, get back to basics and run the game at your pace. When faced with chaos, consider these tips to improve your game.

Before the Tip

There is a difference between being prepared for trouble and "looking for" trouble. But going into any game knowing "Murphy's Law is always in effect" is a good mindset with which to start. In other words, understand on any given night, anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

Teams scout each other. Some coaches keep a book on how officials call games. There's nothing wrong with doing your own homework and

researching previous meetings between the teams. Talk to fellow officials who may have been assigned to those games and comb through recaps from any news outlets that may have covered them. Take time to watch game films that are archived on the internet. This will help identify any issues that may cause tensions to boil over. Communication among crew members can start well before arriving at the gym. Share anything you read, anything you watch or anything you hear in the days leading up to the game or during your pregame meeting in the locker room.

When you arrive on the floor, do your best to get a feel for the atmosphere by observing the players (especially any interactions near midcourt during warmups), the coaches and the crowd. Communicate with team captains and coaches during the pregame conference that any unsporting conduct will not be tolerated. It's helpful to use "we" statements versus "you" statements. This sets the expectation the officials and both teams are going to work together on this night. It also avoids any interpretation of singling out players or teams.

"We are going to have a great game tonight."

"We know this is an important game for both teams."

"This game deserves our best effort, and we are going treat it that way."

"We are going to work hard tonight. And we know you are going to play hard."



As the temperature rises during a game, it's important for the officials to lead by example and keep emotions under control in the heat of battle. Ronald Carter, Los Angeles.

During the Game

We control the pace of the game. Don't underestimate how a few extra seconds during dead balls can help a crew run the game at the proper tempo. Communication among crew members — both verbal and non-verbal — and consistency can present a completely unified front.

In chaotic moments, our first instinct is often to overcorrect with a whistle on any possible occasion, fearing we may miss something. It's a proven fact call accuracy goes down as we start whistling plays outside our primary coverage areas, so resist the urge to "reach" and stick with the basics of trusting your partners, calling the obvious and refereeing the defense.

Dead balls are not the time to relax. If pressure is mounting, the most important times officials' antennae should be up are: timeouts (especially when one team must pass the other team's bench to get to its huddle), halftime, delays in play, and as teams are lining up for free throw attempts — if teams attempt to huddle in the lane before free throws, be aware of an opposing player that may be lurking to eavesdrop or any other unsporting actions.

An in-game meeting with the captains and coaches can be an effective tool in several ways. First and foremost, it is our chance to remind everyone to just play basketball and no further funny business will be tolerated. Secondly, it's a visible way of transferring pressure of proper behavior to the teams. Everyone in the gym will see your crew is attempting to take control and it's now up to the teams to adjust. If they don't, and any technical fouls are called, nobody can say they were not warned.

Be a Referee, Not an Umpire

Lead by example, especially if you're the senior member of the crew or the game's crew chief. It may not be the way we like to call a game, but if it is careening off course, it may be necessary to step up and straighten things out.

Be your crew's morale booster. Discuss the game during timeouts and

Copyright © 2025 jointly by the National Federation of State High School Associations and Referee Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved. Not to be reproduced in any medium without written permission of Referee Enterprises, Inc., 2017 Lathrop Ave, Racine, Wis. 53405. Telephone: 262-632-8855. Fax: 262-632-5460. E-mail: referee@referee.com. Produced by Scott Tittrington, *Referee* Associate Editor. Graphics by Matt Bowen, *Referee* Publication Design Manager. Edited by Monica Maxwell, NFHS Director of Sports. Contact the NFHS at P.O. Box 690, Indianapolis, Ind. 46206, 317-972-6900 or nfhs.org

HESTON QUAN

offer supportive comments to instill confidence. Flush out any tough plays and learn from them. There is a time and a place for discussing plays or disagreements around questionable calls. On the floor during timeouts is not it. Wait until after the game when you're in the locker room.

When in Doubt ... Don't

When a game gets away from your crew, what you should not do is equally important as what you should do. Some important "don'ts" to consider:

Don't leave the players on the honor system. If the game has descended into chaos, trusting the players to "just play the game" has long since passed. All officials should have eyes on all 10 players at all times (dead balls, live balls, when players get tangled up on the floor or during held balls, players trailing in transition, etc.).

Don't compound mistakes. Move past any incorrect calls that may not fit how the game is being called. Doubling down on a mistake will often make things worse.

Don't guess. As was mentioned previously, trust your partners. You will have talked during your pregame about dual-coverage areas, double whistles and plays that block out the primary official. Now is the time to put all those words into action and be the best team on the floor.

Games that get away from us are inevitable. It's OK to acknowledge to each other that it's a tough night, but it doesn't have to brand us as officials that can't control a game. In fact, navigating the rough waters of an out-of-control game can be your time to shine and highlight your ability as a crew that can be trusted to run the game under any circumstances. As officials, it's up to us to embrace that opportunity. ■

See the Game Before It Begins

Teams in almost all sports, from grade school to the very highest levels, do "walk-throughs" of their offensive sets without any defensive players to stress proper execution and fundamentals. Running through their offense without any defenders imprints good habits and precision into their brains.

Officials should do the same thing. Fortunately, teams warming up before a game present the perfect opportunity for us to practice the fundamentals of officiating from both the center and trail positions. Think of it as a "referee walkthrough."

Many teams run a three-on-two drill during pregame warmups, starting above the top of the key. This presents a great time to practice the skill of officiating the defense. Break that habit of watching the offensive player you picked up while watching basketball games as a spectator and instead, focus on the defender. On drives that originate in your primary coverage area, identify the primary defender and also obtain some peripheral awareness of any help defender. Assess the primary defender to determine if that player met all of the requirements of the rules pertaining to legal guarding



During the pregame is a perfect time for officials, from left, John Woods, Prosper, Texas; Larry Harris, McKinney, Texas; and Tricia Losavio, Allen, Texas, to begin observing specific player actions that will prepare them for what's to come once the game starts.

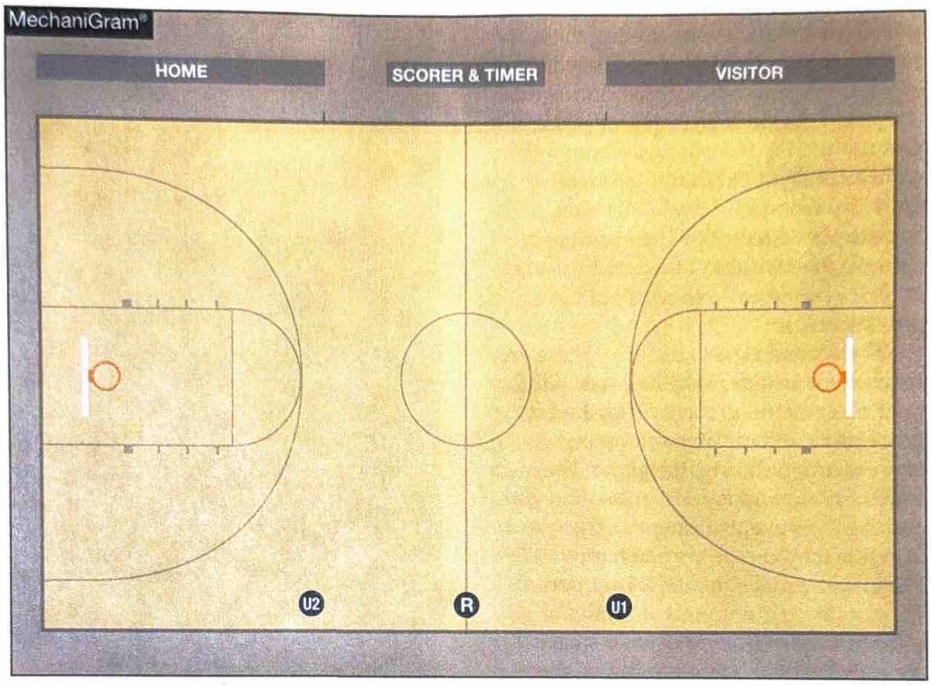
KEITH JOHNSTON

position. It is so much easier to do this during pregame and it will help you ingrain that habit and take it with you into real game situations.

During this drill, note when an offensive player gets past a primary defender, a "help defender" will arrive to the play. Even though this will normally be the lead official's primary defender, remind yourself you might need to have a late cadence whistle on a help defender if the primary official freezes and doesn't have a whistle. I can't think of many situations that take a game from smooth to uncomfortable faster than a big crash without a whistle.

If you have a habit of taking a step toward the division line (away from the basket) to obtain or maintain an open look on drives or rebounds, use this pregame time to practice stepping down toward the endline to experiment with the different look it gives you. Many center officials step toward halfcourt as the ball is dribbled away from them, leading to "chasing plays" and not being able to see that magic opening between a defensive and offensive player. When you practice stepping down to maintain your open look, you will become a better play caller and you will start to see how moving opposite of the offensive player (rather than following the ballhandler) gives you a much better look.

Another common drill teams work on before the game is practicing outside shooting with some rebounders passing balls back out to the perimeter players. During this time, you can practice obtaining and maintaining an open look by getting underneath shooters and locating the shooters' feet to determine if each shot is a two-pointer or three-pointer. If you are really lucky, the team you are observing will run a defender at the shooter and this will remind you to stay with that defender until the play is completely over before you turn to help your partners with rebounding action.



Shown are the proper pregame floor positions for officials working a three-person game. The two umpires should use this time to observe the teams warming up on their respective ends of the floor.

On perimeter shots in your primary area, practice the habit of taking a step toward the basket after the shot is released. If you have picked up that nasty habit of bailing out too quickly on rebounds, this is a great time to nip that in the bud.

If a team runs a drill where competitive rebounding is taking place, practice identifying the disadvantaged player and watching that player's actions to judge if they are legal or illegal. Just like officiating the defense is key to correctly adjudicating contact plays, identifying the disadvantaged player on rebounding plays is critical to making the correct play calls on battles after missed shots.

If you are the assigned R on a three-person crew, ask the U1 or U2 to switch places with you for a few minutes during warmups so you can locate your center and trail positions and have some walkthrough practice too.

Using the pregame "referee walk-through" will help you get out of that "fan view" and get back into the "official view" with good officiating fundamentals that will help you start each game with the necessary focus. You just practiced 80 percent of the officiating fundamentals that will get harped into you at any camp you go to and it didn't cost you a dime. If you do this for even three or four minutes during each warmup period, you will become a better official. ■

Integral Integrity

If it weren't for the emotions and drama in basketball, a reasonable game fee might be about 20 bucks. We could do it just for the fun of it.

According to many officials, though, it's the things we have to put up with that place a premium on what we're willing to work for. Fans will be fans. There's little we can do about them that isn't better handled by the constabulary. Players are penalized when they cross the line; their actions have an immediate effect on the line score, their ongoing participation and their coach's blood pressure. The coaches, meanwhile, lead a charmed existence, subject to certain rules of tolerance that don't appear in any rulebook. At least, that's the way some officials treat them.

Coaches come in three basic types. First are the straight shooters. They're the

ones who will focus on winning the game and instructing their players. They'll speak to you occasionally for clarification and rarely produce an outburst when disappointed in our rulings. These folks seem to understand that if we were mutually wonderful, we'd all be on ESPN on Saturday afternoon. They seldom bleat because they wouldn't tolerate the same in their classroom … they might have a pet unicorn, too.

The second type is the lifer. These are coaches for whom basketball seems to be their all-consuming focus. They invest great effort in their preparation before, and execution during, the game. Their state of mind and level of animation ebbs and flows as events transpire. The result is, while they can be very unhappy with a decision you just made, it isn't personal. They state their opinions — sometimes vociferously — but are usually smart enough to avoid embarrassing you or saying the magic words that will get them in trouble.

Finally, there are the sweethearts; the ones who view referees as merely another cobblestone on their road to the Final Four. Every interaction with the officials, among their many targets, is calculated to gain advantage, with a side of intimidation. How they do it varies. Some are statisticians applying the null hypothesis. They helpfully remind you all the numbers on the scoreboard should be about equal for both teams. Others are the whistleblowers — quick to remind you of how dimly the state office views blind buffoons like you. Still others like to turn your relationship into a pantomime of stares, smirks or disgust calculated to turn the crowd against you in a way that is unquotable. The end game for all of them is egging you into a half-dozen needed points they can't gain by skill alone.

Remarkably, way too many officials cave to the sweethearts — the ones who can ruin our nights. Why? There are many reasons, it seems. Some of us played for a coach just like that and figure it's the norm. Others have a phobia the coach really can influence their future assignments. There are also officials who



It's perfectly acceptable for a coach to ask Jaime Oseguera, Montebello, Calif., a question about why he made a particular ruling during a game. If the conversation shifts to questioning the integrity of the official, however, then punitive measures need to be employed.

are bred to avoid conflict and choose not to notice the person cartwheeling in front of them. And, yes, some of us just don't care: The world out there is like this, they claim. Why should a basketball game be any different?

What can be done? Scratch that: What should be done? That's an easy one. You should apply the rules as written and deal with the people who are ruining the game. A sad notion in the 2020s seems to be that a problem you face is best dealt with if you can make it someone else's. They used to call that passing the buck. We're not talking about the first two coaches described above. They're working for the same purposes as you; it's reasonable to cut them a little slack if they have an issue with a judgment you've made. If they do happen to cross the line, T'ing them up comes across as an act of mutual agreement. You know they had it coming, they know they had it coming, and life goes on. But let's focus



PlayPic



When a coach questions the foul count, at a minimum, the proper response is to ask whether the coach is challenging your integrity. In many instances, assessing a technical foul for unsporting behavior is also in order.

on the Lotharios who are bringing the game into disrepute. What are their motivations?

The statisticians are the ones who remind you it's six fouls to one against their team. They aren't proving they can read; they're trying to suggest you're treating their team unequally. They're implying you don't understand the unwritten code that fouls should be even. That being the case, they're suggesting you should even things up, regardless of the gang tackles you might already have witnessed. Worse would be the insinuation you're somehow biased or even prejudiced against their team or in favor of their opponent. The whistleblowers are the people who will try to intimidate you by suggesting you can either submit to them now or wish you had, later. They're trying to shame you into their own redemption. Finally, the coaches who try to humiliate you want to get rulings out of you that will make it all stop. In all three cases, they are challenging integrity: the integrity of the game, the integrity of the rules, but — most importantly — yours. This can never be allowed to happen. If it ever becomes apparent your integrity has gone in the porcelain, you'll never get it back in the game.

We owe it to ourselves, the sport, other officials and all the other coaches who behave themselves to never get in this spot. But here's the thing: You don't deal with it by lying in wait and seizing the moment for the heroic technical or disqualification just when Coach hits the high note. By then, it's already gone too long; you seem like you've dithered and are now trying to clean up your own mess. Instead, you must proactively address the bad behavior when you first begin to see it. How you deal with it is up to you; many pro and college officials say it depends on your own personality.

It's no fun writing about how to deal with some of the problem-children-in-suits we occasionally come across. The fact of the matter is, however, that we make the avocation look bad by failing to deal with them appropriately. We make it worse for us, worse for our fellow officials, worse for the game … and worse for them. Put yourself in the position of those coaches, who teach a roomful of students, interact with protective parents and go to the grocery store for a gallon of milk. If they get away with their antics on the court, why shouldn't anyone they encounter expect to treat them the same way? Sure, some think they're a rockstar, but others see them as a symbol of what pisses them off about the rest of their daily lives. Who knows? Perhaps by dealing firmly with these people, you're giving one person sitting up there a breath of fresh air.

When the officials deal effectively with the coaches, it protects the integrity of the game. Be proactive when they question you but take care of business when they challenge you. It benefits everyone. ■

You've Got the Look

It's well known among the basketball crowd that, "You can't teach tall." You can train players to dribble, shoot, pass and guard, but unless your team casts some long shadows in the paint, winning will be a tougher prospect.

Does the same truism apply to officials? You don't have to be 6-foot-5 to be a great basketball official. If you are, however, coaches and teams seem to be a little more patient with you making an impression. There's some "fitting the mold" that applies here. Perception is your first calling card; people form opinions on what they expect to see in officials.

When you look at your own game, there is much to be said for mastering the visual cues that make you more successful. Those are the little things that help the contestants believe you're committed, confident and in charge. They plant the seed in their minds that, when anything weird happens, "Well, (s)he must know what (s)he's doing …" That benefits everyone. So, let's go through a list of some of the more salient things to work on.

Grooming

Look the part. Wear a clean uniform and coordinate with your partners so you all match. Neaten your coif, brush your teeth, manage your facial hair — boy, that's lost on some people. You don't need to look like Ken/Barbie, but you can dress like them, and it helps.

Stature

This begins from the moment you walk out for the warmup. If you're supposed to observe the players for dunking or illegal equipment, do that. Find a comfortable stance, balanced on both feet, with hands and arms somewhere "businesslike." Hands behind the back or arms comfortably folded works; hands-in-pockets, looking around or kibitzing with friends is a bad look.

During the pregame

When meeting and greeting anyone, make eye contact, have a pleasant expression and provide a solid handshake or fist bump: Seem interested, even if you threw the bum out in your last meeting. Thank the table people for their help and get everyone thinking you're there to work together. There's a lot to gain by setting a good mood before anything has gone wrong.

Move with a purpose

You don't have to run around like a squirrel on the interstate, but don't get caught dogging it either. When play stops, move briskly to your next position. Your goal is for all three of you to be in position, waiting for the players to restart play. When the teams are moving at the comfortable pace you set, good things happen; you tend to keep them too busy playing basketball to give you as much of a hassle.

Stature 2

Keep your head up and eyes on the players as you move around the court; don't let transitions be your opportunity to look at your feet until you arrive at new lead. During timeouts, remember what we covered about observing the pregame; the same applies. When observing play,

present yourself as alert, but not tense; you do that with quiet head and arm movements, and by standing still without rocking. When you do have to change angles or transition across the lane, move punctually and deliberately. Act like you're applying your experience to get ready for what might happen next. The longer you've been refereeing, you are.

Whistling

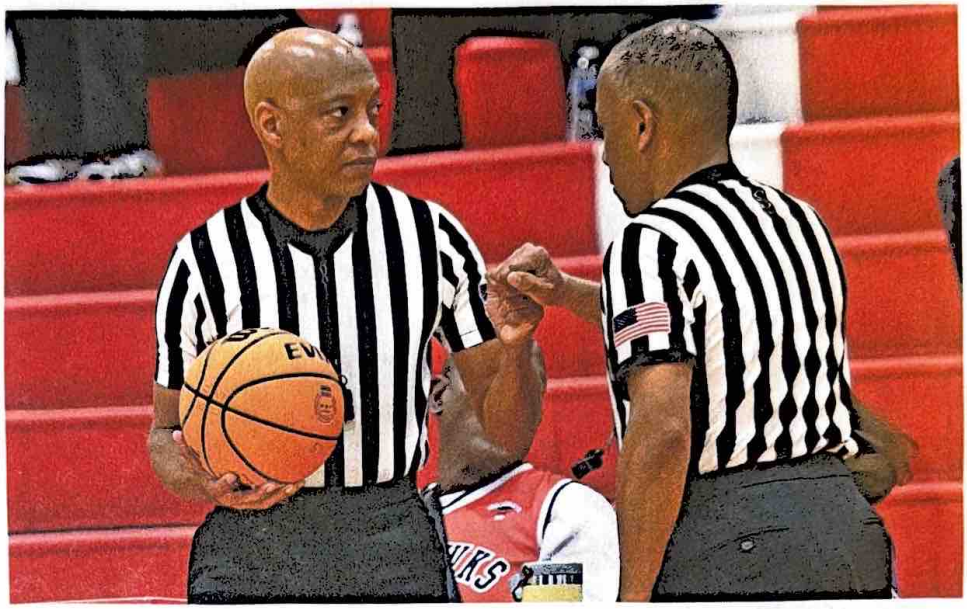
Let your whistle express your opinion about what made you blow it. Blowing your brains out every time a ball goes out of bounds is both annoying and suspicious. Offering a little toot on that block/charge with two seconds left in a tie game doesn't scream confidence. Learn when to be a little louder or longer (or the opposite) in situations; done properly, it helps more people understand who's boss for the evening, and how little help you need.

Signaling

To some extent, your signals can have a touch of your personality in them. I might chop my wrist a little more firmly than others, but I won't make signals that look so odd they draw attention. Fitting into the mold by being prompt, firm and dispassionate will win the day.

Conversing

You probably said during the captains meeting they and their coaches would be welcome to ask questions as time/situation permitted. So, let them ask questions and, when they do, show respect. Keep a neutral expression, relaxed body language, and present as engaged. If there comes a point to curtail the conversation, be firm and impersonal about it. When you're in these tete-a-tetes, most observers can't hear what's being said but they will guess by how they see you acting; be beyond reproach.



Having the right look during the pregame, including good grooming, a properly fitting uniform and solid posture while waiting for the opening tip, will serve Bill Brooks, left, Torrance, Calif., and Mark Harvey, Harbor City, Calif., well as they try to make the right impression on the game participants.

Following the tips listed above are qualifiers; they don't make you a great official but are behaviors exhibited by those who are. You aren't a great official just because you look like one of the folks on the cover of this magazine. Looking like that simply buys you the opportunity to be judged fairly on your knowledge, judgment and performance.

Stand up to the challenge and make believers of them all. ■

Three Holes in Three-Person

The NFHS Basketball Officials Manual states the three-official system is designed to provide better coverage with more emphasis on primary areas of responsibility. Executed properly, the concept eliminates over or under officiating, positions officials as a deterrent to fouling, and provides the crew with better angles and distance than they would have with two people. The mechanics committee believes the combination promotes better basketball.

Even with all the built-in benefits of the three-person officiating system, there are still holes. Just like individual officials themselves, no system is ever perfect. Here are some potential holes for three-person crews and how you might fill them.

Division line trap on C side. In a normal halfcourt set, the ideal starting position for the trail official is at the 28-foot mark, but he or she is responsible for the division line. The center official is best positioned at the free-throw line extended, but is responsible for the sideline on his or her side of the court all the way up to the division line.

A trouble spot presents itself when an offensive player, especially the ballhandler, is defended or trapped near the intersection of the division line and the center's sideline. While the lead official is usually responsible for initiating a rotation in the frontcourt, the center should take initiative in this situation to get where he or she needs to be to rule on illegal contact and violations involving the sideline or division line (see MechaniGram on the previous page). The lead and trail officials need to be aware of center movements and adjust accordingly.

Elbow jump shot on lead/trail side. Frontcourt primary coverage areas (PCA) leave distance and angle

troubles for action, especially contested jump shots, at or near the strongside elbow. The PCA between the lead and trail is divided at the free-throw line extended from the middle of the lane out to the three-point line. A quick catch-and-shoot or a dribble-drive pull-up jump shot near the elbow can often leave the trail looking through the shooter's back and the lead looking through the defender's back.

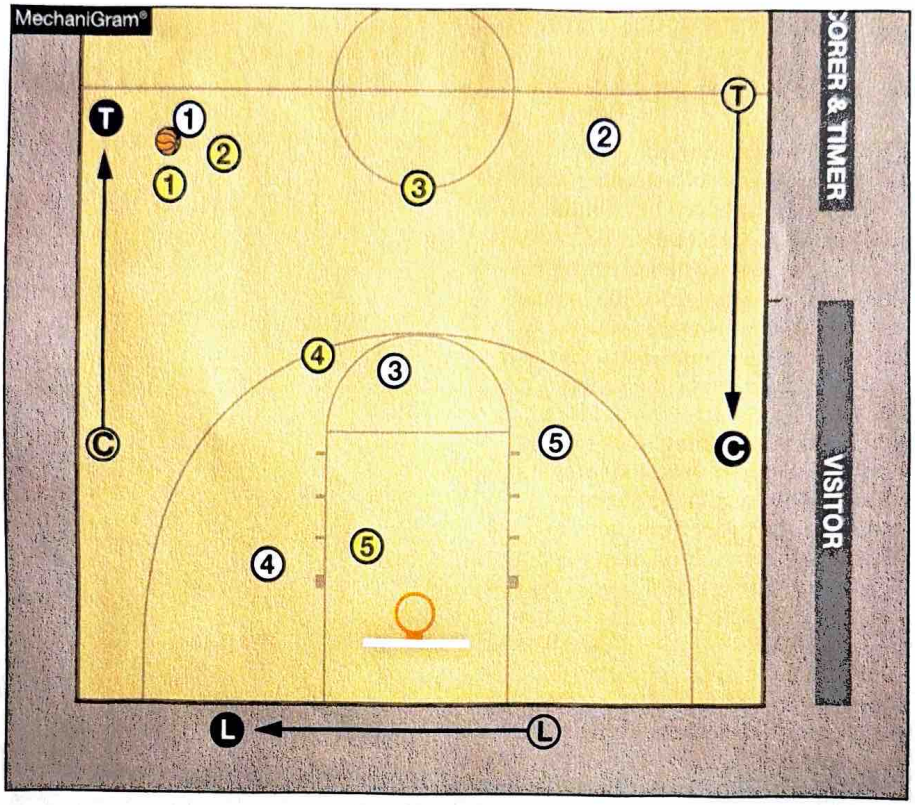
If the trail is unable to move down the sideline to see between the players, and the center does not have a competitive matchup on his or her side of the court, the center can extend coverage across the lane and might have the best angle of the crew to see contact on the shooter's arm.

While our advice is not to have the center official make a habit of extended coverage across the floor, it might just be that on occasion the lead and trail officials get stacked and the center has the farthest, but most open, look on the contact. If you are going to extend coverage outside your PCA, make sure the contact is obviously illegal before putting a whistle on it.

Endline drive in front of lead. All basketball officials have had that feeling of angst when a strongside drive gets on top of them in the lead position. The closer two opponents are to the official in these situations, the tougher it is to maintain a vantage point to rule on fouls and violations with certainty. As peripheral vision decreases, so too does the ability of the official to see both the feet of a ballhandler potentially threatening the endline and the legality of the contact between the opponents.

If you feel the action approaching as the lead, consider taking a step farther from the endline to maintain any part of the angle you can. As the trail, if you see your partner in the lead getting closed down with an endline drive, consider taking a step toward the endline (or wherever you need to get a vantage point on the contact between opponents) and be ready to rule on contact between opponents.

Except in the rarest of instances, the lead is left alone in ruling out-of-bounds violations involving the endline, so the trail can be of great assistance in ruling contact between opponents, especially on the torso or arms. ■





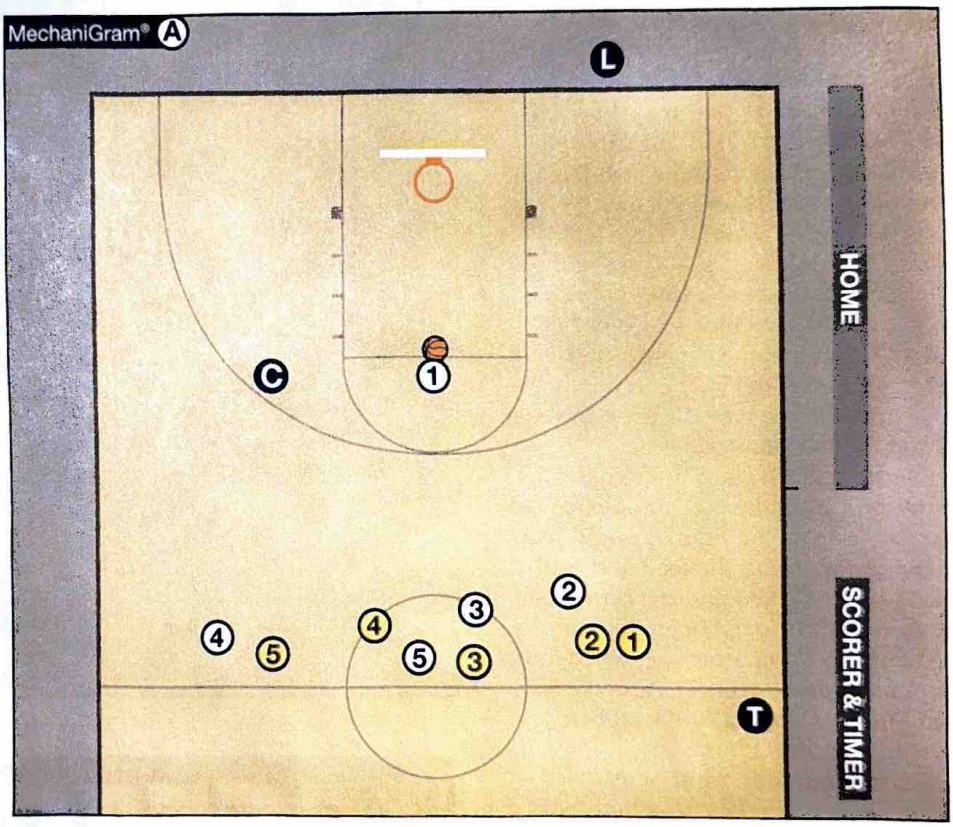
Following a T, Where Should We Be?

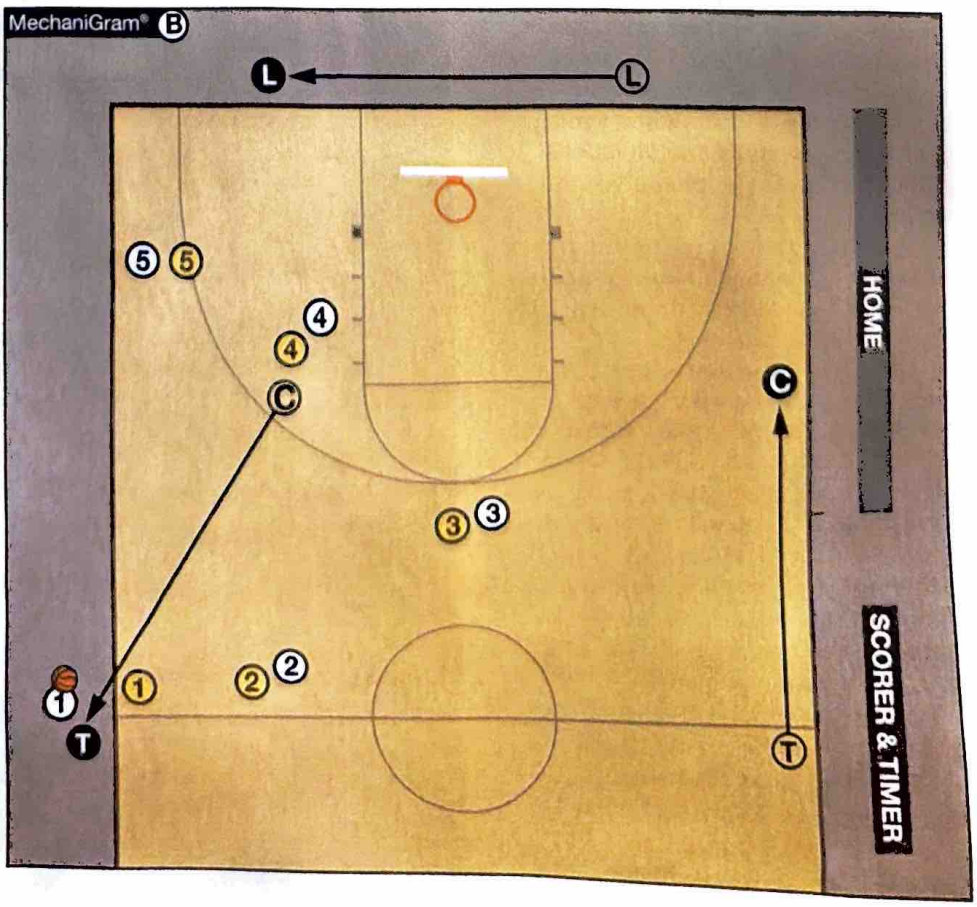
By their very nature, the moments after a technical foul ruling tend to be chaotic for all the individuals involved in the encounter. The official who has made the ruling has obviously experienced some manner of behavior that is not conducive to the spirit of the game and is therefore having to take corrective action. The player or coach who is being penalized is not going to be happy with the sanction. And too often, while trying to get all necessary parties in the proper positions to resume the game, confusion reigns.

We are taught how important it is for us to keep our heads about us when all others are losing theirs. As such, it's important we understand where we are supposed to be on the court when administering the free throws and throw-in that result from the technical foul ruling. For purposes of this article, we are going to examine this procedure regarding technical fouls administered by a three-official crew that will ultimately result in a throw-in opposite the table at the division line for the offended team, which is how play is resumed for all technical fouls (except double technical fouls) in NFHS.

The first order of business is when a technical foul is called, the officials should switch just as they would with any foul. Now, this comes with the caveat of using common sense. If the lead official, during the first half of a game, issues a technical foul against a coach for any type of behavior that is disrespectful to an official, it doesn't make a lot of sense for that official to report the foul at the table and then take a position immediately in front of that team's bench as the new trail official. That is a potential recipe for disaster and the crew must recognize it and make adjustments to avoid it.

Otherwise, the officials switch and administer the ensuing free throws just as with any other free-throw scenario: the lead official administers the attempts, the center official observes the shooter and the trail is near the division line observing the remaining players (MechaniGram





A on the previous page), keeping in mind the remaining nine players do not have to be on the opposite side of the division line, as many people incorrectly believe.

The next step is the transition from the completion of the free-throw sequence to the administration of the division-line throw-in. Because the ball is going to be put in play opposite the table, the officials must again move on the court (MechaniGram B). A common error is for the trail official to believe he or she remains the trail, moving across the court to administer the throw-in. This is not the correct mechanic. Instead, the official who was the center for the free throws should remain on that side of the court and move to the division line, becoming the new trail. The old trail slides down to the free-throw line extended and becomes the new center. The lead remains so, simply moving to the opposite side of the lane and balancing the floor.

By precisely administering these situations, we can create a sense of confidence and credibility in a situation where these attributes can sometimes be in short supply. ■

Make That Switch

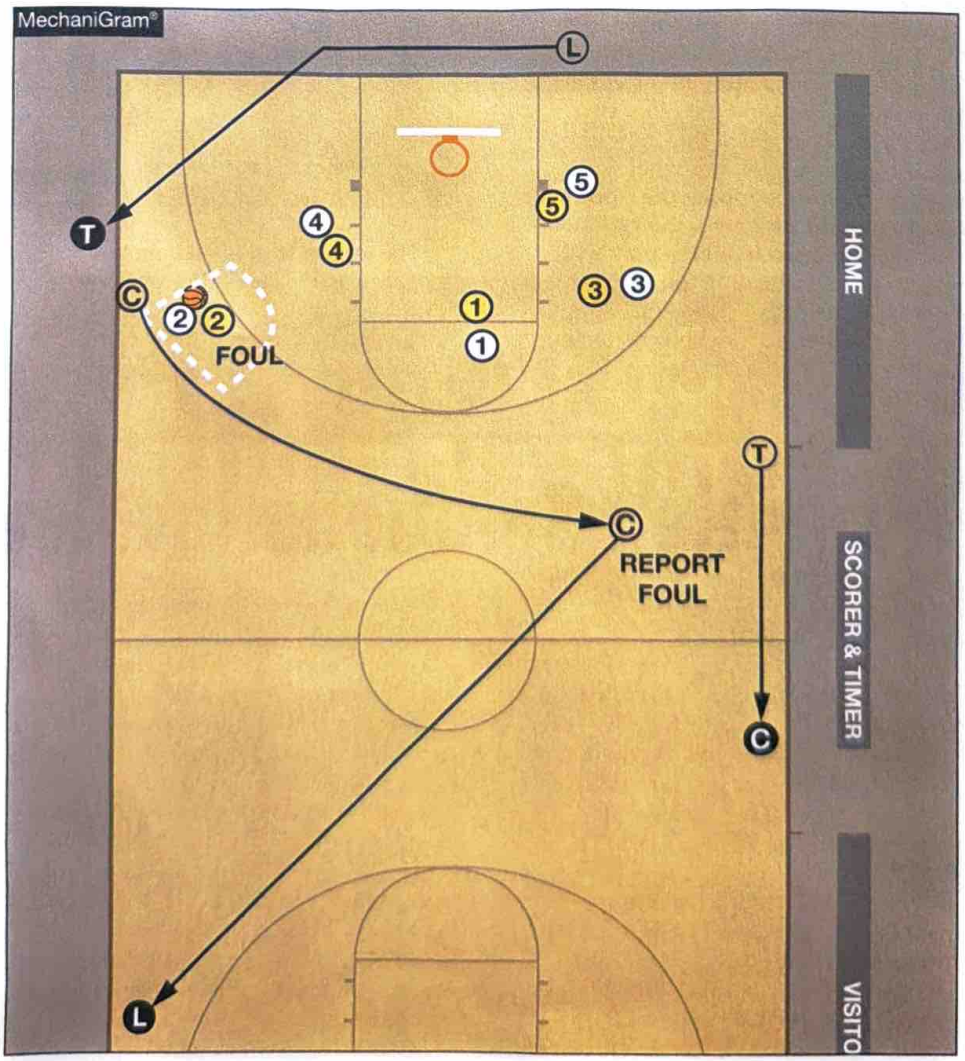
One of the most misunderstood switching mechanics when working three-person officiating occurs when the center official rules an offensive foul opposite the table in a situation where there will be no free throws (see MechaniGram).

For example, an illegal screen by Team A that occurs at the free-throw lane elbow on the center's side of the court. This is a team-control foul, so play will resume with a backcourt designated-spot throw-in for Team B.

After ruling the foul, the center moves to the reporting area to share all pertinent information. The inclination on many crews is for the trail, who prior to the foul was the perimeter official on the table side of the floor, to move to the opposite side of the court, because there is an official coming to him or her.

However, this is not the correct mechanic. It creates a situation where the center, who made the ruling, is not actually switching with anyone. Remember, the old lead/new trail has rotated over to administer the throw-in on the side of the court opposite the table. If the other two officials move in this improper manner, that would mean the old trail, by also moving opposite the table, would have to become the new lead. That leaves the center, now tableside, in the same position.

The correct mechanic is for the center official to move to the reporting area and for the trail official to hold tight. As soon as the center official finishes reporting duties, that official jogs to the endline opposite the table and becomes the new lead official, leaving the old trail tableside to become the new center and therefore completing the switch.



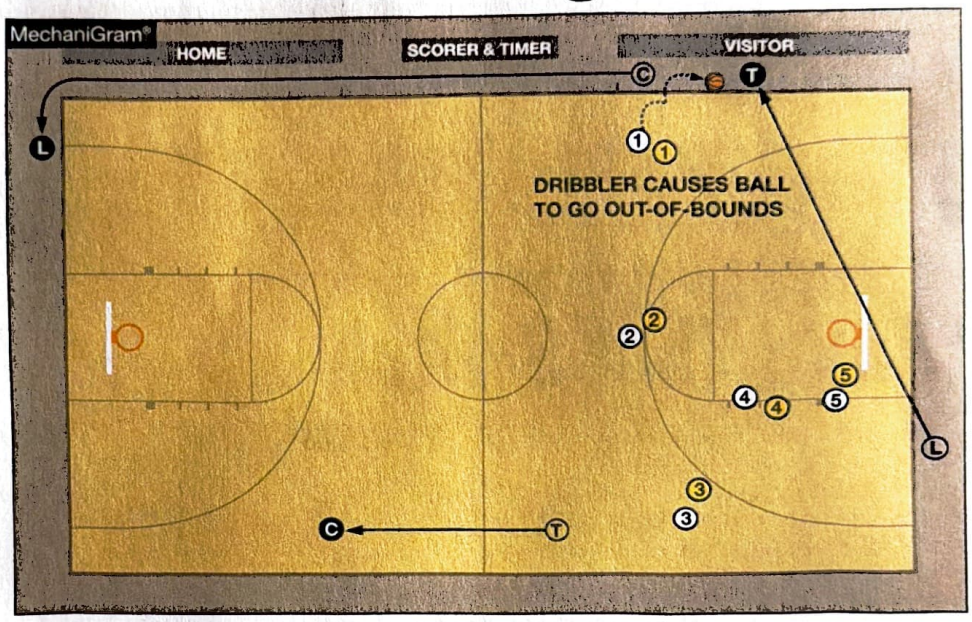
It's a small detail that few people in the gym are going to recognize or understand. Make sure you and your two partners are a part of that select minority. ■

All Done Here, Now Move Along

The words "bump and run" are a part of the lexicon in many different sports for many different reasons, and basketball is no different. However, when used on the hardwood, we are talking about a specific action by the officials, not the players.

The center official is "bumped" any time there is an offensive violation in that official's coverage area during a game being officiated by three-person mechanics (see MechaniGram). This includes when the ball goes out of bounds and the former defensive team is awarded the subsequent throw-in.

Once the center official completes the necessary signaling to inform the players, coaches and the other two members of the officiating crew about what has happened and what will happen next — stopping the clock with an open hand, signaling the violation and the direction in which play will resume, and indicating the spot for the ensuing throw-in — the center should run down the court to become the new lead on that side of the floor.



The former lead official moves to the opposite side of the court and administers the throw-in at the spot designated by the departing center official, becoming the new trail official.

The former trail official remains on the same side of the court and now becomes the center official on the opposite side of the court from where the throw-in is being made. ■

Transition Solutions Involve Entire Crew

It can get easy as a center official to fall into a rhythm.

Neither team is applying backcourt pressure, so you go from free-throw line extended to free-throw line extended, not having to think too hard as you transition downcourt, leaving the trail to handle a one-on-one matchup.

Then, suddenly, a post player decides to set a screen to free up a teammate advancing the ball. Did the screener provide the defender time and distance to avoid a blindside screen? Did the defender, seeing the screener, decide to blow up the screen regardless?

It's a reminder that every trip down the court can turn into something unexpected — and if we're not ready to make a decision, that trip can turn your game sideways.

One way to train ourselves not to fall into the rhythm of moving from one home position to another is to think not in terms of backcourt pressure, but instead consider every trip downcourt as transition coverage.

It requires discipline and focus on our primary coverage area and looking for matchups that could "hurt" us the most. If we turn off for just a second, that's when that back screen will take place, or a defensive player will attempt to draw a team-control foul on an unsuspecting player moving up court.

Center officials must be aware of these off-ball collisions and know whether a player obtained (established) legal screening or guarding position and if the contact rises from incidental to illegal, requiring a whistle.

However, it's not just center officials who can fall into a rhythm. Trail officials transitioning to new leads are trained to get to the endline as quickly as possible to settle and prepare for plays coming to the basket. But how many of us bust to the endline as the new lead, ready to accept a play coming at us, except that play never arrives because something happened at midcourt that we could have assisted in adjudicating if we'd been in proper position?

The NFHS officials manual has a section that addresses press coverage. It stresses the center and lead cannot abandon the trail when the defense applies backcourt pressure.

Remember that in transition, proper coverage is dictated by the movements of the players, and officials should adjust their cutoff lines for

their coverage areas based not on markings on the court, but where the players are (see MechaniGram).

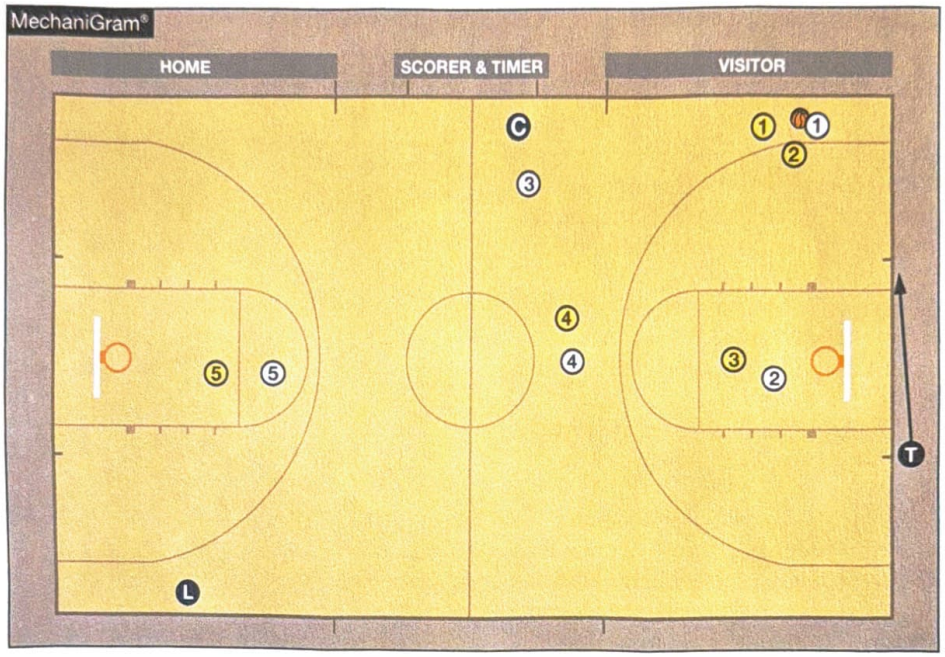
For example, most pregame discussions include a reminder the center needs to stay with the "middle third of players" all the way up the court. This second line of players, especially when the defense applies full-court pressure, is where trouble can arise (remember our example of the post who turns suddenly to set a blind back screen).

The center should not focus on the on-ball matchup — that typically is the trail's primary matchup — but be ready to help with the pass up the court to break the press or the trap near the division line. The center also can help rule on backcourt and 10-second violations.

Even if there is no backcourt pressure, the center needs to pay attention as the ball transitions up the court. If the point guard crosses the division line on the center's side of the court, the center becomes responsible for on-ball coverage. Moreover, if a trap develops on that side of the court, the center must move to referee the play, facilitating a rotation by the lead that best positions the crew to officiate the action.

As a lead, if you get caught overrunning the play in your quest to be ready for plays at the basket, don't hesitate to position adjust back up the court. Even getting to the free-throw line extended in the frontcourt could make the difference on a long outlet pass to a post player at the 28-foot mark that breaks backcourt pressure. In addition, the lead has other responsibilities that can be better handled by not settling at the endline. The lead might spot a coach calling timeout to save a possession or catch a 10-second violation not observed by the trail or center because on-ball pressure means they can't look up at the shot clock.

So just as we have a checklist of things we note after each change of possession — game clock, shot clock, where our partners are on the court — we need to add one more line: watching for player movements that indicate a transition matchup is about to materialize. ■



When transition plays occur, it's important for center and lead officials to recognize that they must position adjust based on where players are on the floor. This MechaniGram shows the need for the center to remain near the division line to officiate possible matchups on that side of the court, and for the lead to not automatically move to the endline, but instead find a good position to assist with any developing plays.



The Art of Moving Parts

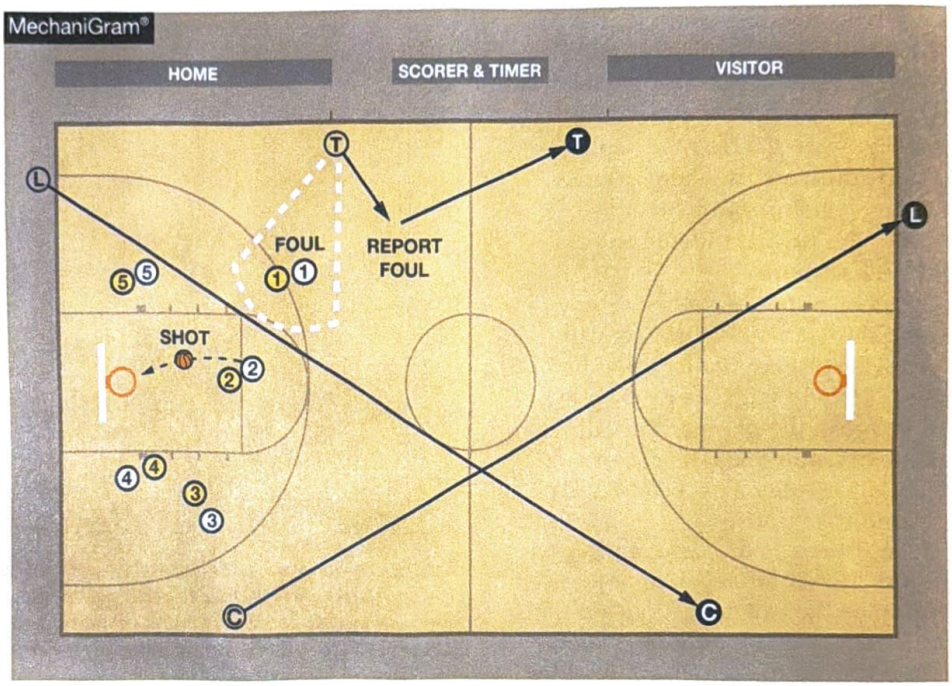
A pregame joke often shared by high school officials working three-person mechanics is if the crew incorrectly handles a switch following a foul ruling, it's not the end of the world, as chances are only the three officials on the court actually understand the proper court movement in the first place.

The truth be told, there are certain situations in which that isn't even accurate.

A great example of a switching situation that often throws a crew for a loop is when the tableside trail official rules a foul on the offense that is going to result in free throws on the opposite end of the court (see MechaniGram). The most likely scenario is a foul committed by the offense during rebounding action after the defensive team has already reached the bonus (remember, if it's a team-control foul on the offense, such as an illegal screen, it is not going to result in free throws).

The easiest duties following this whistle belong to the trail official. In NFHS mechanics, any foul ruling that results in free throws causes the ruling official to remain tableside. As such, the trail official simply moves to the foul reporting position and then remains as the trail. No muss, no fuss.

Where things get interesting is regarding the movement of the two remaining officials. Many times the lead official, who at the time of the whistle is on the same side of the floor as the trail, believes the proper course of action is to head to the opposite endline, remaining as the lead official and administering the free throws. The logic is that in doing so, there are not multiple officials having to cross over to the other side of the playing court from their positions at the time the trail official made the foul ruling.



However, this is not the correct mechanic. In simple terms, what should happen is the official who is closest to the endline goes there and becomes the lead, with the remaining official becoming the center. So, on this play, the old center official crosses the court, heads to the endline, becomes the new lead and administers the free throws. The old lead official also crosses the court and becomes the new center, with responsibilities including the legality of the free-throw shooter, rebounding action and chopping to start the clock once the ball is touched following a missed free throw.

At first, this mechanic may feel awkward for a crew, as it requires two officials to move to opposite sides of the court. The benefit in doing so is it actually creates a switch for all three officials as opposed to keeping any official "locked" into the same position, which would be the case for the center official if the old lead ran the length of the floor to become the new lead at the opposite end. ■

Some Rulings Not as Simple as They First Appear

As an official, have you ever heard of or employed the "fairness doctrine?" It's exactly what it sounds like — if an officiating crew ever stumbles across a situation where it isn't exactly sure about the administration of the rule, the safest course of action is to do whatever is most fair. The vast majority of time, this is a common-sense solution that is going to serve our game well.

However, there are times on the basketball court where employing the fairness doctrine can get you in trouble, because what at first glance seems like the remedy is not actually how



If the officiating crew rules an intentional foul before this throw-in is completed, David Clark, Howe, Texas, and his partners must understand what type of throw-in is allowed by the affected team once play resumes.

things are spelled out in the rulebook or casebook. Let's take a look at a few scenarios and how they are handled at the NFHS level.

Situation 1: A1 makes a successful three-point try attempt. During the ensuing throw-in, B2 is running the endline as Team A has employed a full-court defensive press. B3 starts to break away from the nearest defender and A4 reaches out and grabs B3 with both hands. The center official rules an intentional foul against A4.

The penalty for an intentional foul in NFHS play is for the offended player, in this case B3, to receive two free throws, followed by a throw-in awarded to Team B at whichever of the four designated spots is nearest to where the foul was committed (8-2, 8-5-3, 10 Pen. Sum. 4). Nothing too tricky about that. But what type of throw-in follows those free throws?

In most situations, when the defensive team does something for the ball to become dead during a non-designated-spot throw-in — for example, commits a garden-variety personal foul or a violation — the offensive team retains the right to "run" the endline on the subsequent throw-in. So fairness would dictate the same should hold true on an intentional foul, correct?

No. While the ensuing throw-in may take place on the endline based on where the intentional foul occurred, it is now a designated-spot throw-in, as explained in the NFHS casebook (7.5.7D). One might argue Team A gains an unfair advantage in this situation, having used a foul to turn a non-designated-spot throw-in into one where Team B no longer has that advantage. The counterpoint is Team B received two free throws as a result of that foul, so Team A has been sufficiently punished.

Let's extend the "fairness" fallacy of throw-in locations one step further. What happens if Team A has the ball for a throw-in under its own basket and before completing it, Team B is whistled for a technical foul? We know at the NFHS level, the throw-in following all technical fouls is awarded to the offended team at the division line opposite the scorer's table (8-5-2). It's a rule that makes technical foul administration in NFHS play easy to remember for the officials. But in this case it does the offended team no favors, as Team A lost the ability to run an out-of-bounds set from under its own basket and instead must resume play at midcourt.

Situation 2: Before A1 releases the ball on the second of two free throws, A2 pushes B3. As the lead official is preparing to rule a foul against A2, A4 steps into the free-throw lane.

In this scenario, we have Team A committing two significant infractions — both a foul and a violation. Surely, A1 loses the right to shoot the second free throw, correct?

No. Team A's discretions must be addressed in the order in which they occurred. A2 is assessed a foul, and based on the severity of the action, this could be an intentional or a flagrant foul. Because the foul came first, the ball is now dead and the violation committed by A4 is ignored. As such, A1 is entitled to shoot the second free throw with the lane cleared of all players, as the only way a player/team loses its right to shoot a free throw is if it commits a violation.

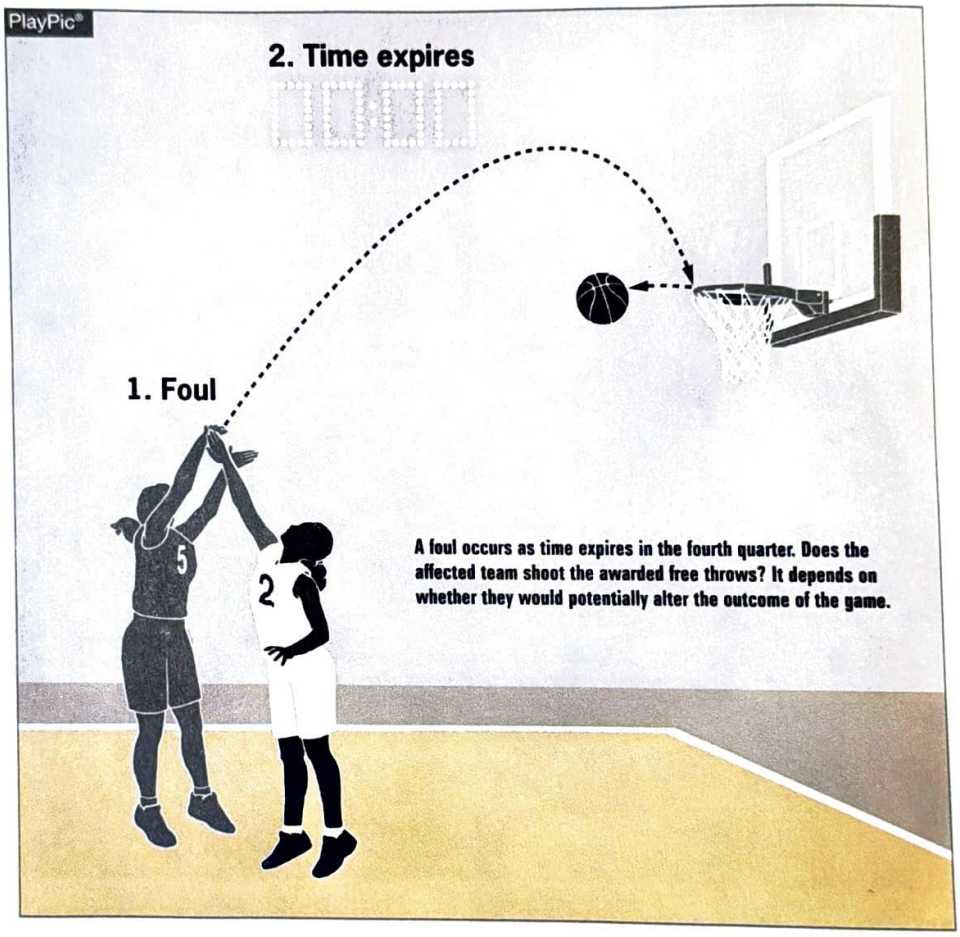
Because this is a team-control foul against A2, no free throws are awarded to B3, even if Team B is in the bonus (4-19-7). The only way Team B would shoot free throws is if the officials ruled the foul was intentional or flagrant.

Situation 3: Team A leads, 64-60, in the closing seconds of the fourth quarter. B1 attempts an unsuccessful three-point shot, and while returning to the floor, is undercut by A2. The trail official rules a foul by A2 and the game clock expires.

If there was a foul on this play, there must be time remaining in the game, correct? And if so, Team B still has a mathematical chance at sending the game to overtime if B1 makes the first two free throws and a teammate converts a successful tap following a miss on the third free throw in the time that the officials put back on the clock.

No. The first thing we must remember is that while B1 is an airborne shooter and is protected as such (4-1), while the shot attempt may have been released with time remaining on the clock, the foul itself may have occurred after time expired. This doesn't wipe away the foul ruling — again, the airborne shooter must be protected and it's not "anything goes" just because the clock has hit 0:00. The quarter (and in this scenario, the game) does not end until the try attempt ends (5-6-2 Exc. 1). B1 is still entitled to the three free throws associated with this foul.

However, no time is put back on the clock in this situation. As such, the most points Team B can legally score as a result of this play is three, should B1 make all three free-throw attempts. Because this would not change the outcome of the game, the free throws are not attempted and the game is over (5-6-2 Exc. 3).



But what if the foul did occur before time expired? Rule 5-6-2 Exc. 3 still applies. If the foul occurs so near the end of the game that the timer cannot stop the clock before time expires, the game ends when the free throws and all related activity have been completed. Again, given the four-point margin, the three free throws would not be attempted.

Now, in the interest of, yes, fairness, let's finish things off by taking a look at a recent NFHS rule change that falls squarely under the umbrella of fair play and making sure a crafty team is no longer able to take advantage of what was a rulebook loophole.

Situation 4: Team A leads, 64-60, with less than 10 seconds remaining. B1 attempts a three-point try and it's successful, dropping through the basket with 4.9 seconds remaining. Team B is out of timeouts and has no way to stop the game clock. The ball is not yet at Team A's disposal for the ensuing throw-in, and B2 bats the ball away.

As recently as the 2023-24 season, this might be considered a smart play by B2 as officials would, at a minimum, have to stop the clock to assess a delay warning against Team B (4-47-3), and according to NFHS casebook play 9.2.10A, had the ability to assess a technical foul. It's a penalty Team B would gladly accept in exchange for the clock being stopped as opposed to Team A holding the ball out of bounds and allowing time to expire.

However, prior to the 2024-25 season, the NFHS made an editorial change in its rulebook and created rule 9-2-10 Note 2, which states officials should ignore an intentional throw-in plane violation or a player interfering with the ball following a goal when the clock is running and there are five seconds or less on the game clock.

Instead, the game is now effectively over, as Team A is in no danger of being ruled for a five-second violation by not completing the throw-in procedure before the game clock expires. ■