

To the new guy...

by John Mantica

You've decided to become a sport's official? Congratulations and thank you very much! We really need you. Whether you're officiating a girl's varsity softball games in Fargo, a boy's freshman basketball game in Long Beach, or a JV football game in Tampa, you are definitely welcome. The shortage of sports officials is nationwide and it's not getting any better. I sincerely hope you enjoy your first season and will return for many many more.

As a new sports' official, I wanted to give you a few pointers. First, EVERYONE will be giving you some pointers and it will seem like everyone will be giving you **different** advice. Who should you listen to? Who should you trust? What should you expect?

Here are my top ten things to remember (in no particular order):

1. **LEARN** from everyone. Develop yourself based on all the information you receive, especially from the most well respected officials in your local association.
2. **EVERYONE ELSE IS BETTER** than you. As a new official, with "ZERO" experience, you must face the fact that everyone is better than you.
3. **DON'T BRAG** about your future dreams. Don't introduce yourself to someone and give them your goals of getting into college and professional officiating within the next 5 years. It won't happen and you will certainly make an enemy. Face the fact that less than 1% of officials make it to the college ranks and another 1% of them make it to the pros. Sure, you may make it someday – but not this year. And the "first impressions" you make with other officials is hard to change. Start things off on the right foot.
4. **LISTEN MORE** than you talk. Take criticism constructively and, even when you don't agree with someone else's opinion, bite your tongue and just listen.
5. **VOLUNTEER** for everything; a committee, an extra assignment that is 60 miles away, to go with a crew of officials and just "hang around." You'll be surprised how fast you get noticed for your enthusiasm.
6. **DON'T BE LATE** for a meeting or an assignment. Like your real job, the "boss" gets ticked off when you're late. Take the meetings and assignments as an important part of being a good official. The other officials are counting on you and so are the athletes.
7. **DRESS THE PART**. Your appearance is very important. Whether it is when attending a meeting, going to a site, or on the court or field. Dress for success and don't forget any equipment.
8. **MAKE FRIENDS** with the people in your association. There are people from all walks of life and I've made friends with (to name a few) an attorney, accountant, veterinarian, painter, carpet installer and landscape architect – all due to officiating!
9. **BE APPROACHABLE** with the players and coaches during the contest. Be firm, fair, but friendly.
10. **HAVE FUN** in your new part time job. If you don't have fun, it will show. Yes it will definitely be challenging since you've got to learn all the rules of the game, the politics of your association, and just knowing when to blow your whistle! You will make mistakes. You will get booed from the crowds. But always remember... the game can't go on without YOU!

About the Author

John Mantica began officiating high school football in 1985 in Eastern Ohio. He served for ten years on the Board of Directors of the South Gulf Football Officials Association in Fort Myers, FL. Mantica has published three previous articles in the NF Officials' Quarterly Magazine; Spring 1997 "*Mentoring*," Summer 2000 "*Commandments for the Booking Commissioner*," and Fall 2001, "*Use of Good Judgment*."