

Game Management: Officiating A Blow Out

It's the third quarter of a lopsided game, and the team that is down by a double-digit score has just went offside on the far side of the field (away from the benches). The player realizes his mistake and gets back on the proper side of the field before anyone can notice.

Anyone, that is, but you.

You are the trail official and have the play covered. What do you do? Do you penalize the player and his team for a play that will have no bearing in the game? Do you put his team man-down for thirty seconds (defensive offside), or take away a potential scoring opportunity (offensive offside) when his team is down by 10 or more goals?

The answer to these questions could be both yes and no. The player did commit an infraction and by rule and he should be penalized. But what advantage did he gain? Will it affect the outcome of the game?

More than likely the play in question will be inconsequential to the final outcome. If that's the case, then where is the need to stop play and add more fuel to the burning emotion of the losing team's head coach, fans, and players? Maybe the right call is a non-call.

But when should a potential call be overlooked? When should one be executed?

“First and foremost the official must remain objective in officiating the game despite the score,” says San Diego County Lacrosse Officials Association director of training, Tim McGarry. “Many times, officials allow for subjectivity to set in and lessen the fouls called on the team being overwhelmed. But making the necessary calls, keeping the game under control should always remain the objective.”

Objectivity vs. subjectivity: it's a part of game management that can cause officials to walk a fine line. We're taught in our training sessions to officiate the game – not the score. This is particularly true when the fouls are of the injurious nature. A slash is a slash whether the score is 20-1 or 2-1.

“It is important [to call penalties] as the game continues, even as it gets more and more lopsided,” offers McGarry, who is also a COC clinician and a high school coach. “Out of

frustration, the losing team may start to commit more fouls. Particularly personal fouls - ones of the unnecessary roughness, slashing and/or unsportsmanlike nature.”

In short, McGarry is stating that we must keep the players safe no matter what the score.

Don't let late hits or even legal hard hits go uncalled if the game begins to take on an overtly physical nature. The rules allow for officials to call unnecessary roughness on a player who commits an avoidable, deliberate or violent act, even if the body check was otherwise legal.

One way to counteract potential physicality and prevent it from overwhelming a game of this type is through communication

Penalty adjudication in boys/mens lacrosse allows for penalty time to be served in one, two, or three-minute increments for personal fouls. This is a tool that officials would be wise to use whenever necessary. The thuggish player who already has committed two or three personal fouls and is obviously trying to ruin the game experience for his opponents is an easy target for a three-minute timeserving penalty. An unsportsmanlike call in addition to the unnecessary roughness call on this player can serve multiple purposes: It can lock that player in the penalty area for a substantial amount time and get him one penalty call closer to fouling out of the game.

Of course the best medicine to avoid a game from getting rough around the edges is to employ some preventive officiating methods. Maybe an official's timeout for an impromptu meeting with both coaches may be in order. You could offer a polite yet stern warning that excessive physical activity will be subject to two or three-minute penalty calls.

But what about the substituting player who leaves the box a step early in the 20-1 game, or that team's inability to get the ball into the goal area within the required 10-count?

This is important as the game continues to get more and more lopsided, the losing team out of frustration may start to commit more fouls, particularly personal ones of the

unnecessary roughness, slashing and or un sportsmanlike nature. Making the calls, keeping the game under control remains the objective.

If the game is all but decided, it's entirely possible that the covering official can turn a blind eye to the illegal substitution by the losing team. Or he could extend his 10-count by another two or three seconds. In these scenarios there is no need to punish the team that is already being punished by its opponent.

But again, beware that fine line. If the illegal substitution allows the losing team to play with seven players in either half of the field for any length of time, a too many men call is warranted. Don't sell out on your integrity as an official just to make life easier for the team that's on the downside of the score.

These are just a few examples of some minor technical infractions that can possibly be overlooked if the situation allows, but what about the big fouls?

We mentioned the slash call is one that must be made no matter what the score. This will also apply to the illegal bodycheck/unnecessary roughness penalties. It's not uncommon at all to come across a game situation where the team that's has no chance at victory will resort to brutish behavior.

"Head on a swivel," is a term we use often as officials. Just because a game has gotten out of hand score wise doesn't mean we should let our guard down. Be alert, stay alert; look for opposing players that may be yapping at each other more than your comfortable with. Certainly they could be buddies talking about an after game activity, but it couldn't hurt to check in with them with a "Hey everything okay here guys?" If the players know you're watching, and you use good communication skills to diffuse a potential altercation, then you've probably saved yourself from having to break up a fight or eject someone from the game.

All the situations mentioned in this article have happened and will happen again a thousand fold times again. The onus is on you as an official to recognize what type of officiating methods you should employ to keep a one-sided game from getting beyond control.

Remember the keys:

- Felony vs. misdemeanor – injurious fouls must always be called. Fouls that are technical in nature can be ignored if the situation warrants.
- Communication – preventive officiating starts with talking to the participants letting them know you haven't lost interest in the game.
- Check your six -

that may go uncalled in a tight game

But do you make

The home team has built up a lead that's reached double digits and has decided to settle into the visitors' goal area and play an extended game of keep away. The ball flies around from attack player to attack player with nary an attempt to go to the goal and try to score.

The field judge makes eye contact with his referee and makes a gesture that suggests it's time to warn the offense for stalling. The referee smiles, shakes his head, and makes it clear to the younger official that "no, they do not have to keep it in."

According to the rules this is clear and evident stalling by the home team, but what is the intent

The sport of lacrosse is growing. And with that growth first- and second-year high school and college programs abound across the nation. More often than not these start-up pr Hey Tim,

sorry just getting back to you. Was out of Town Friday/Saturday and then Sunday was Super Sunday.

I sent Bob Klein an email re: new officials.

And I'm in hopes you can help me out with this story. Just a couple of questions with maybe some perspective as a coach too. Your help is greatly appreciated.

I was going to cite you as SDCLOA head of training, COC clinician(?), and high/middle school coach. Anything false here?

SDCLOA Training Coordinator: COC, HS and MS. (I am COC via John Hill program certified in 10/04)

Lax Bio Attached.

Thanks Tim.

Biz

Questions:

1. What advice to you give for newer officials on reffing a one-sided game? **First and foremost the official must remain objective in officiating the game despite the score. Many times officials may allow for subjectivity to set in and lesson the fouls called on the team being overwhelmed, as time serving penalties will add to the lopsided score via man up situations. This is important as the game continues to get more and more lopsided, the losing team out of frustration may start to commit more fouls, particularly personal ones of the unnecessary roughness, slashing and or un sportsmanlike nature. Making the calls, keeping the game under control remains the objective. In the event an official out of subjectiveness lessens the calls, the stronger team may become aggravated and start pushing back on the lesser team committing fouls out of frustration. Keep in mind the setting. If you are on the superior team's home field, fans may start ridiculing the inferior team and its players. Make sure you address this situation with the home teams coach to keep that from happening. If it's the reverse, fans may become so frustrated and start making in appropriate gestures and yells from the sideline or bleachers. They too need to be kept in check working through the head coach if need be.**

2. What do you think are helpful points of emphasis in controlling a blow out? **Most helpful is for the officials to provide preventative measures by way of communicating to players during the game to keep them focused on playing the game according to the rules as well as sportsmanship. Thus assisting them in staying under control which means any bating or taunting that can occur during a blow out by the superior team. Additionally, keep line of communication open with the coaches. At times it may be prudent to suggest to the coach of the superior team to keep the score respectful by employing various methods of ball movement and substitutions. As for the coach of the team getting blown out, keep a finger on the pulse of his disposition as for as he goes so goes the players of his team. In some cases he may be concerned with the protection of his players if the superior team is greater in size and strength to his players. So if you let him know you understand the situation and you will do you best to keep the game under control, particularly in terms of sportsmanship. Lastly and most importantly, slow the pace of the game down. Don't be in such a hurry to get the ball back up to the center X for a face off. Take your time, but don't walk. Get the postions, work your cards, count to make sure all players are on the field, look to your other official, then go to the face off. Same for out of bounds on side lines and end lines, though it's a quick restart, try not to treat those restarts as one would in a very competitive game situation. The lopsided team may have problems with getting their personnel in place after whistles. Remember the running time clock will kick in sometime and when it does, continue to keep the game at a pace as discussed above. Time will run out and the clock will be your best friend here.**

3. How important is communication with coaches, players, and your partner during this type of game? **Make sure you are communicating with the players on the field, especially the captains as you see the situation going downhill fast in regards to domination of play and a lopsided score. In some cases it may not be a bad idea to suggest to the captains that they consider more ball movement, pulling up on the physical play and make sure his players understand not to react to any verbal or gesturing incidents by the team being beat. In fact, make sure you as an official are close to the play, particularly after the whistle on a foul or goal, dead ball situation, where issues can occur between players. Talk down any situations quickly, firmly but with a controlled demeanor and respectfulness.**

4. What is your take on these points from a coach's perspective? Or rather what do expect are the main priorities for the officials in this type of game?

- A. The coach of the superior team should PULL UP on his offensive attack at the goal when the score becomes lopsided, particularly when it is in the first half of play. He should

- instruct his players to move the ball several times before shooting or going to the goal. Many times it is best that no score in a game like this should come without an assist. But he should not allow it to become so apparent that it looks like they are “toying” with the other team in some form of “keep away”.
- B. The coach of the inferior team should instruct his players to keep their cool, continue to work hard, stay focused, play the ball, maintaining control, slow down the game as in first time down instead (slow breaks, balling moving down the side and behind to X) of fast breaks where the ball can come right back the other direction due to lack of skill or overwhelming defense by the other team.
 - C. Main Priorities
 - a. Keep control of the game and the personnel on the field
 - b. Keep good communications with the coaches to let them know you understand the circumstances they are playing under
 - c. Keep the superior team humble and in check
 - d. Keep the inferior team encouraged and focused on the game, not their frustrations.
 - e. Keep the game slowed down, and let the running clock then become your best third official
 - f. Keep the fans under control.

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