

Consistency on the Field...

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Every fall officials across the country hear the age-old complaint from coaches... “Be Consistent!” More times than not the coach is really saying, “I didn’t like your call”. There are times when the coach is right. Let’s take a look at consistency and what it takes to be consistent during a game, a season, and a career.

Consistency starts with the individual official. It goes beyond knowing the rules and mechanics of the game. Consistency occurs when an official combines sound, accepted philosophies with rule knowledge and mechanics. You need to be at a point in your officiating career where you’ve experienced enough repetitions of a call to draw the line in the sand for what is and what isn’t a foul before you even walk out on the field. Waiting for it to happen and then trying to judge it puts consistency on shaky ground. It almost becomes a coin toss each time a play happens on the field. An official needs to honestly evaluate his or her work through film study and with the help of a respected mentor who can help fine tune the gray area calls that happen game in and game out. Being able to adjust to a mentor’s suggestions and your own self-analysis will lead to a more consistent individual performance.

You need to adjust to the game. The game isn’t going to adjust to you. Realize too that the game is an ever-evolving process. Officials a few years back worked a game dominated by the run. Today’s game is the high powered passing variety that challenges officials with passes behind the line, bubble screens, trips with potential OPI, quarterbacks who can show pass and in an instant be sprinting out on a run. Add to this list the growing player safety responsibility for targeting. Like we said, you need to adjust to the game. We guarantee you coaches across the country are spending countless hours devising the new offenses and schemes that will challenge us even more in the seasons ahead.

Equally important to individual consistency is crew consistency. When holding, pass interference, and catch/no-catch situations aren’t called the same on each side of field,

coaches, players, and fans will be left scratching their heads at what's being called and what's not. Crews need to discuss and evaluate their individual philosophies and work toward getting on the same page. Coaches and players have a right to a consistently called game from your crew. We've all been in games where DPI was called five times on the HL side of the field but the same contact situations were never called on the LJ side of the field. Mistakes are going to happen in a game, but lack of crew consistency is unacceptable and makes the game difficult to play, coach, and watch as a fan. If you and your crew are on different planets regarding what to call and can't resolve the issues, then it may be time to start looking for a new crew with similar philosophies.

The coach may not be saying he doesn't like your call, he may be saying he can't predict you. There's nothing wrong with a coach wanting to be able to predict you and your crew. That's part of coaching. Important practice time goes into a coach's plan knowing who's working his game. How tight DPI or holding is called is critical to both teams playing the game. Right or wrong, you and your crew should be predictable.

The final strand of consistency comes from the league or conference you work. Not an easy thing to do at the youth or high school levels where countless numbers of crews work for a supervisor or assignor. This is where local associations can be instrumental in discussing philosophy, what is or isn't a foul, and giving feedback to its members and supervisors.

Consistency... a tough skill to master but one that should be a primary goal of each official, crew and conference.