

Don't Compound Errors

Pre-game communication key to minimizing mistakes

Consider two true scenarios for the same game situation.

A1 shoots ball at goal. It passes the goal, and A2, behind the goal, fails to catch the ball.

The ball crosses the end line, and the lead official blows the whistle. The lead official rules a pass, awards the ball to Team B and blows his whistle to restart. The trail official, however had ruled it a shot at the goal, and blows the whistle to correct the play. The lead official changes the call, awards the ball to Team A and blows the whistle.

Scenario 1: Two passes later, Team A scores. Team B coach protests.

Scenario 2: One pass is made, and the trail official blows the whistle to stop play.

What fact was deliberately left out of the description that is key to appropriately handling this situation?

In both situations, both teams substituted players on the fly. Team B was substituting defensive players in favor of attack players, leaving Team B essentially shorthanded, and allowing for Team A to easily score in the first scenario. Team A was less

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affected, as it had attack players on the field. Clearly, the officials affected the game.

This game situation is easily correctable and should never occur. The officials in scenario 2 handled the situation more appropriately. After stopping play, the corrected call is communicated to both teams and both head coaches. Coaches are given reasonable time to properly field their teams, the ball is returned to the original restart spot, and officials restart play. Officials should not put either team at a disadvantage.

Other game situations may also cause confusion — a wrong directional signal while declaring the correct team; a “play on” call by one official while a flag is thrown by another official; an incorrect offside call; the inadvertent whistle. It is important not to compound an error by putting a team at a disadvantage. Taking the time to communicate and correct will take the sting out of a bad situation.

How can an official prepare for these situations?

1. A good pregame should include the mechanic for correcting mistakes. Emphasize both verbal and visual communication between officials, and with coaches and players.

2. Use good mechanics. When the lead official is not the “on” official (ball responsibility), he should look to the “on” official

official could also use a subtle hand signal. If the play is an obvious pass that would be awarded to the defense, point the opposite direction of play. For a shot, help your partner by pointing over the chest towards the end line.

3. Avoid inadvertent whistles by withholding the whistle (a good reason for using a finger whistle — it gives you time to think).

4. Avoid pointing the wrong direction — constantly remind yourself which team is going in which direction.

5. For a loose ball, repeat to yourself who should get possession should the ball go out of bounds — “red ball, red ball, red ball.”

6. Constantly work on mechanics and focus by working games at all levels.

Experience and training will minimize errors, but when they occur, handle them promptly and properly. Someday, you will get a game where a critical

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(trail or center) to confirm shot or pass. If visual contact cannot be done or to clarify the play, the on official should verbalize “shot” or “pass” after the play occurs, but not for every shot or pass. The on

call will make a difference.

Mistakes happen. We are only human.

But don't make a bad play worse. **LM**

Steve Hinchey is a past president of the US Lacrosse Men's Division Officials Council (MDOC).