

Evaluating Evaluation Systems

By Donald C. Collins

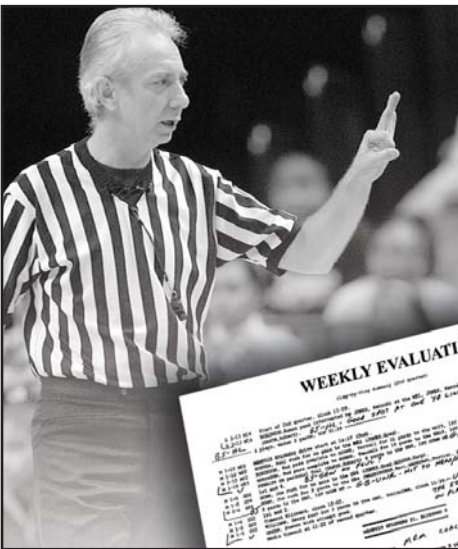


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In an ideal world you'd find the perfect way to evaluate officials and you'd link game assignments to those evaluations. Officials would get only those games they deserved based upon their most recent batch of performances. Their historical performances from 10 and 15 years ago wouldn't translate to assignments.

Unfortunately, assignments are seldom based solely on evaluations. Reality gets in the way. You can't escape it.

Small schools in mountainous regions, driving 40 miles to play their nearest opponents aren't going to always be serviced based upon an evaluation. Availability of officials, and even the need not to have a "hometown

ref," will factor in. Worse, for those officials who live in such regions, assignments to state playoff games, advancement to higher levels and even pay can be negatively hindered by the reality of living in an area where it's tough to be observed.

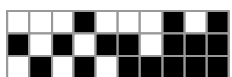
Schools in large urban areas aren't always serviced based upon evaluations either. Some of those schools are in areas with incredibly dense populations. However, local associations can't recruit enough members to handle the explosion of games that has occurred over the last few decades.

It is no longer uncommon for an officials association to tell a school or a

(See "Evaluation Systems" p.7)

Getting More in the Ranks

By Michael H. Babicz



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An increasing number of games; more lights going up on fields; more travel, park district, junior and "in house" leagues; more high schools being built. All of those add up to a major challenge facing officials' organizations throughout the country. In particular, organizations in and around major metropolitan areas are finding an even greater challenge.

Where does one find potential new officials?

First, your own family might be a place to start. Sons and daughters, husbands or wives, brothers or sisters,

relatives, all might be potential new officials. Chances are they know you're an official. Why not talk to them and see if they are interested in joining the ranks?

Existing high school sports teams are a place to take a look. When doing a preseason scrimmage, include a mention of having the athletes consider officiating. How many officials started their careers during a summer park district "little kids" instructional league? Or better yet, how many started while attending college for a little extra

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league to change its game time if it wants service. It is not uncommon for officials to get games not because of their evaluation but because of their availability. Reality sets in. And of course, you know that an awful lot of assignments are based not on current evaluations, but on reputations. At best, that reflects the lag between evaluations catching up with current reality. At worse, that reflects the dreaded good old boy system.

The simple fact of the matter is that you can never base assignments on evaluations until you solve the problem of recruiting and retention. They go hand in hand. The absence of a sufficiently large pool of officials precludes you from properly assigning officials.

At best, you have sufficient officials to at the very least base assignments to your upper tier games on evaluations. You know that state governing bodies are taking steps to ensure that. State governing bodies' upper tier games are a relatively small pool of state playoff games, and the governing bodies have every official in a state to choose from. They can easily take action on their upper tier games. Similarly, college assignments are based upon evaluations because the pool of available officials exceeds the number of assignments. Colleges would be crazy not to take action — and they do. However, at lower levels of play, it is not always clear that you can take action. Yet, even at lower levels an association should be able to define the upper tier games in its league, region or section and base the assignments to those games on evaluations.

Associations, leagues, teams and governing bodies have some obligation to provide an evaluation system. Without such a system, those entities cannot properly assign. There probably isn't a perfect evaluation system that can be applied on a universal scale. However, there are some elements of excellent evaluation systems.

First, you must determine *who* is doing the evaluating. Organizations commonly rely upon association observers, neutral observers, coaches, peer evaluation or some combination of those types of observations. Obviously, there are strengths and weaknesses to each type of assessment. Those strengths and weaknesses derive from the various types of observers: 1. Knowledge of the official being observed; 2. Knowledge of the reputations of the officials being observed; 3. Emotional stake in the game where the observation occurs; 4. Detailed knowledge of specific game events; and 5. Ability to project the officials' ability at other levels of play.

Second, you must determine *what* is being evaluated. Common factors include physical conditioning, physical appearance (with a qualification that it be linked to conditioning and neatness, and not to some defined look), written testing, game performance, game

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mechanics, on the floor positioning and hustle, punctuality, professional pregame and postgame appearance and the all important people skills. To sum it up, your common factors link to creating a professional appearance, knowing the rules, being able to implement the rules and not being a "jerk." The jerk factor is more important than one thinks. You've seen personable officials salvage a poor call and you've seen officials allow poor personalities to ruin otherwise splendid technical performances. At NASO's 2003 Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference football official Jerry McGee said, "We have many good officials who get in trouble by being late and by talking when they should be listening."

Third, you must let officials know what is being evaluated and how often

they will receive evaluations. McGee also stated that "officials need to know what the standards for physical conditioning are. They need to know what is expected in terms of game performance." Similarly, officials should know what is expected on written tests, rules knowledge, off the floor conduct, pregame and postgame appearance and in terms of people skills.

Fourth, you need to choose appropriate tools for assessment. Clearly, you have the traditional tools of written reviews. Now though, you have film and a host of recording devices that can be downloaded to your computers. Consequently, you must select tools. Then, you must acknowledge that you may not be able to grant every official access to those tools in the midst of a busy season. After all, if an association is scrambling to find officials, it's unlikely that the association will have the ability to ensure that each official receives an on-film evaluation. The association must define how often each official gets access to each of its tools and at what time of year.

Finally, you must remember that linking assignments to evaluations does mean that associations will make some officials unhappy. Thus, once assignments are linked to evaluations an association must provide due process in the form of some internal appeals system. The internal appeals process prevents burdensome lawsuits. Indeed, internal remedies limit the likelihood that associations will be in court. Other options such as arbitration and mediation can further reduce that risk — although an internal appeal should always precede the use of arbitration and mediation. In short, even something as simple as linking assignments to evaluations carries some risk. You must manage that risk in order to advance the interests of officiating.

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