

Oregon School Activities Association

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At this point in the season, the optimism of August has turned into the reality of October. Some teams are slowly realizing that they aren't going to make the playoffs this year. And we are getting to the point where the grudge matches are popping up on the schedule, the games against that perennial rival or the rival for this year's league championship. As a result, we are more likely to see and hear things that shouldn't be happening in high school sports. Taunting, retaliation, tactical fouls, dissent and offensive language. For the referees, that means that it's show time. Step up and take care of business, without fear or favor. Expect the unexpected.

We have had some unusual incidents this year, which have served to highlight the importance of our basic mechanics. In one case, a red carded player was observed by the referees addressing offensive language to the opposing players during the post-game handshakes. OSAA policy is that the referees are to leave the site immediately at the end of the game. I know that some people have called this "ref and run." But there are good reasons for this policy. Failing to follow it can leave the officials in a difficult situation. OSAA wants the schools to be responsible for dealing with post-game behavior, not the referees. The referees are also leaving themselves exposed to post-game "feedback" from disappointed players, coaches and spectators. Don't be a target, don't be a provocation simply by giving people an opportunity to vent to you. If someone wants to get in your face as you leave, then you may have to use red or yellow cards, if it will help defuse the situation. But you should ignore all of the shouting, etc. behind you, whether directed at you or other people. It would also be great if the host school were escorting you out, so the game administrator can deal with anyone approaching you. If that doesn't happen, you should include that in your game report.

There was also an incident in which a student-athlete was on the bench, serving his one game suspension for a red card in the previous game. While in the team area during the game, he began directing dissent to the officials. The officials weren't certain who should be given a caution in that situation. Anyone in the team area must be listed on the roster, and that includes anyone not in uniform. As bench personnel, they can be cautioned or disqualified like any coach, sub, trainer or other person on the roster, regardless of why they are not playing in today's game. And why they are not playing today is not your concern.

If you scored 90 or higher on the NFHS soccer rules test, you may be eligible to do playoff games this year. That also indicates that you are at least pretty good on the rules. If you aren't 100% sure that what you did in the game was correct (such as a restart for example), look it up in the rule book when you get home. That way, you can either be reassured that you did it right or you won't make that mistake again.

I hope that everyone has one or two referee things that they are working on, whether the area for skill improvement is under knowing the rules better, applying them correctly, mechanics or game management. I have one for when I am on the line and one when I have the whistle. It's not too late to choose something and then try to remember it every game, until it becomes a habit. If you aren't improving, you are sliding down the hill.

Game management skills are the main difference I see between good officials and officials who get the center for playoff games. Tool number one in game management is quick, clear communication to players, coaches and spectators. For example, the ball has gone out for a throw-in, but the players aren't sure which team gets the throw. Besides the standard signal with your arm, you can say something like "We've got a white throw over here [and point], but first we're doing subs. [point to them.] Wait for the whistle." And then you signal for the subs to enter. Some of us will recognize the term "command presence." Your posture and demeanor, your proximity to play, your hand, voice and whistle signals, all build your communication to the participants and observers. Be friendly when players and coaches are being nice with you and the opponents. Be stern and in command, including appropriate handling of misconduct, when they are not. And don't confuse the two.

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