

# Game Management & Impact Penalties



## Introduction

“Feel for the game” or “game management” is one of the most important skills an official can bring to the ice. It is also one of the most difficult to evaluate and instruct.

**The rule book tells us what actions are punishable. The rule book does not tell us exactly when to apply those rules to effectively manage the game. Deciding when to call a penalty, and assessing the impact it will have on a game, are the keys to effective game management.**

Here is a hard truth about refereeing hockey: we cannot call every penalty. Hockey is a contact sport, even at those levels where body checking is not allowed. It is fast, fierce and often chaotic. Assessing every penalty that occurs in a hockey game – without regard to its seriousness and impact on the game – would ruin the experience for players, coaches and fans.

But how do we determine the penalties that must be called, and those that are so insignificant that they should not be used to interrupt the flow of the game?

The simple answer is that officials must become good game managers. They must make calls that promote safety and fairness in all aspects of the game. They must read complex situations quickly and confidently and establish a clearly defined standard for what is allowable and what is over the line.

## The Principles of Game Management

Many officials believe that a thorough knowledge of the rules is the most important attribute. Knowing the rules is very important. However, we must not overlook “feel for the game.”

The foundation of “feel for the game” is built on two equally important principles: games must be **fair**; and they must be **safe**. We ensure fairness and safety by focusing on the timing, type and frequency of penalties.

Let’s look at some key questions that many officials ask as they attempt to grasp the principles of game management.

### When does effective game management begin?

Officials must apply the principles of game management early in the game to establish clear standards for what infractions are unacceptable and which minor infractions will be permitted to keep the game flowing.

Establishing these standards early makes the game safe and fair for everyone. Officials that wait too long to call penalties may find that they lose control of the game. Once a game is out of hand, it is too late to start trying to create a standard of safety and fairness.

## **How do I recognize an 'IMPACT Penalty?'**

Penalties that threaten the safety and fairness of the game are called "Impact Penalties." Of course, identifying Impact Penalties is not as easy as it may sound. As you read this section, remember that all the penalties you call should be impact penalties. If a penalty does not qualify as an impact call then do not raise your arm.

**Ultimately, there are two questions that define an impact penalty. If you can answer "yes" to both these questions then you definitely have an impact penalty. If you answer "no" to both these questions then you should not be calling anything as you do not have an impact penalty. If you have one "no" and one "yes" to the then you will need to decide if this penalty sends the message that you want to send to the arena. The two questions are:**

- 1) Does the penalty set a clear standard for what is and is not allowed in this game?**
- 2) Can the "Guilty" player change something next time to avoid the same penalty?**

Remember, teams will adopt their style to the penalty standard of the referee. All penalties communicate something to the arena. What are you trying to communicate with this penalty call? Think of impact penalties not as a black-and-white rule in a book, but as a communication tool.

## **The key to good game management: self-evaluation**

During a game, referees should always reflect on how players responded to a particular penalty. Did it make the game fairer and safer? Was that an impact penalty? Is that a penalty I want to communicate consistently to the arena? Did the penalty that I called communicate what I wanted it to?

Calling the right impact penalties will help the arena trust you and self-reflection will help the referee adjust her impact penalty selection to avoid calling too many (the arena gets frustrated) or too few penalties (the arena will struggle to understand the standard).

## **Refereeing is like holding a bird...**

Given that the referee is trying to call the right impact penalties rather than too few or too many...think of a hockey game being like holding a bird. If you squeeze a bird too tightly, you can kill it. Hold on to the bird too loosely and it will get away. The same holds true for managing a hockey game.

You need to maintain a firm enough grip on the game to ensure that it is safe and fair. However, you do not want to squeeze the game so tightly that the game grinds to a halt.

The key is balance; holding the game so it is in control, but not squeezing it to death.