

Talking to coaches/captains: The art and the science



Talking to coaches is a part of the game. Whether you talk to a coach or not depends on your style, the demands of the game, and the level of hockey. Here are some guidelines for you to consider:

- State your opinion, listen to the coach/captain, then leave. Do not argue or debate or discuss.
- Never talk to a coach/captain at the end of the period (especially if there is a flood). This sets you up for a long conversation that may be related to his or her being upset.
- If you must talk to a coach/captain between periods, do so right before the start of the next period (if there is a flood). Make sure you have an excuse to leave (i.e. to drop the puck).
- If a coach/captain is yelling at you, do not talk to him. Penalize, ignore, or talk to the captain/another captain. To the coach, make a circle around the position of an "A" or "C" on your chest and say "CAPTAIN, PLEASE".
- If you penalize a coach/captain, do not go talk to them. The privilege was lost with the penalty.
- Minimize talking to coaches during the game; talk to the captains to maintain flow of the game.
- When talking to a coach; Ask her to step off the bench to equalize the power between you.
- When to talk depends on the circumstance; many officials only talk to the coach for major penalties, injuries, disputed goals or multiple penalties. Otherwise, talk to the captain.
- Whether you talk to a coach or not is up to you. Some referees never speak to coaches (they prefer captains, some always talk to coaches, and sometimes (i.e. little kid hockey) it is a necessity.
- A lot of the time, you need to find a balance between talking or not talking; understand what the situation requires and adapt appropriately.

When talking to a coach/captain, **you can phrase a statement to decrease the odds of a long conversation**. Remember, the coach or captain may be right but you need to stick to your original call.

For example, consider the following statements

1. "Coach he stuck his leg out and made contact ankle to ankle not knee to knee so it is a two minute minor for tripping..."
2. "From my angle, Captain, I saw his leg come out then contact was made ankle to ankle so I felt a tripping penalty was more appropriate."

The first statement will get you stuck because you do not leave any "grey-area" as you have effectively made a black-and-white statement. The second statement leaves room for differing opinions for two reasons:

- "From my angle..." gives credit to the nature of refereeing hockey; the referee's perspective effects most calls on the ice. Nothing is black-and-white.
- "I saw..." and "I felt..." both are "I" statements that allow you to take ownership of the call. Again, without saying outwardly, the "I" statement says that you have one angle or perspective and the coach has another.

After you have made a statement with "From my angle..." and an "I" statement the coach may still want to talk (or may say "thank you"). In the event that she wants to talk, your response may be "I am sorry we saw this play from two different angles. However, we need to drop the puck so we can finish the game in the ice-time. Thanks." At this point, even if the coach or captain wants to talk more, the conversation needs to end. The game needs to keep going.

If the coach does not stop wanting to talk or argues, then consider four communication pieces that may effect the message:

1. Volume of voice-were you yelling? Did you sound mad? If you had to yell due to a loud arena, did you tell the coach you were yelling due to the arena not due to the conversation?
2. Tone of voice-were you assertive with a calm voice? Did you sound like you were lecturing?
3. Pace of voice-did you speak too fast so the coach could not understand or too slow that the coach lost patience?
4. What you said-did you use "from my angle" or an "I" statement? Did you focus on the problem (different angles, getting the game going again) or the person (telling the coach off)?