

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY – INTRAMURAL SPORTS

Effective Communication is Key to Being a Successful Official

As officials, some parts of your job are tough but at times it seems officials bring undue stress upon themselves. The most successful officials are those who are able to **communicate efficiently and effectively** with players and spectators without taking on an air of superiority.



Two way process

Remember that communication is a two-way process. Sending **and** receiving information is a very important aspect of all competitive sports and effective use of this process will make things much easier for you as an official. Ensure you are not just a sender.

Smile

Every time you officiate, regardless of whether it is a non-competitive game or super competitive game with crowds of people watching, always have a smile on your face. We hope you genuinely enjoy working for our program and that it shows. Being happy, positive and smiling is actually a **choice** anyone can make. Make the right choice.

Establish a rapport

Try to establish a rapport with captains and players whenever the chance arises. You don't need to be a comedian but if there is something witty or funny you can think of to say, even if the atmosphere is tense, go ahead and say it. It might just raise a smile and relax everyone.

You don't need to walk around giving high fives to players and spectators but if you can come across as a genuine human being, as opposed to a robot following strict protocol, players will be more inclined to cut you some slack, even after you give them a UC for bad behavior.



Lose your ego

Leave your ego at home, the game is not about you; it is about the players. Remember that you are dealing with players and spectators, equals, not servants. Treat them that way and you'll likely get a positive response.

Admit your mistakes

Here's a secret; most players recognize that you are a human being and therefore they **know** you will make mistakes. You don't have to give an apology every time you get something wrong; you don't want to come across as weak or unknowledgeable. However, if you make a decision and play restarts then you realize it was the wrong decision, don't be afraid to have a quick word with the players' and explain. Something along the lines of, "I apologize, that last play was a flag guarding and I missed it, we will do a better job to catch that next time."

Being told we are/were right is something we all appreciate. Even though you can't turn back time, players will appreciate your honesty and the justification that they were right.

Explain when possible

Instead of simply saying "that's the rule" the next time a player questions about one of our policies, if time allows it, give a quick explanation along the lines of, "The reason we ask for IDs is to make sure all players go to Ferris and they are who they say they are. We've had problems in the past with teams trying to cheat."

This kind of thing goes a long way with players and if you say it with confidence and a smile, 99% of players will nod in agreement and just get on with the game.



Be approachable

Being approachable is a great trait for officials to have. This does not mean you have to act like a counsellor and sit down to discuss every single decision in detail. It does mean that you should allow players to talk to you and approach you without waving them away like they are unimportant to you. Be accessible and receptive to the players as much as possible without allowing the flow of the game to be disrupted by a barrage of comments. Remember, captains are technically the only player able to discuss specific details of the calls you make, but if a player comes up and asks politely and time is available, please answer their question(s).

Body language

Body language is the silent communication tool but is extremely important. Studies have suggested that we communicate roughly *55% through body language, 38% through the tone of our voice and 7% through what we actually say*. Good communication skills (including the effective use of body language) influence player perceptions of fairness and correctness, there is no doubt about that. With this in mind, it is vital that you work on your body language and tone, as well as what you actually say.

Hopefully, this module has provide you with tips to becoming a better communicator. Remember, think before you speak, choose your words carefully, practice good body language and you will achieve your desired outcome.

