

# Lessons Learned from Officiating Football

By Scott Reilly

# Simple Definition

- Lessons Learned are experiences distilled from past activities that should be actively taken into account in future actions and behaviors

# Detailed Definition

- A lesson learned is knowledge or understanding gained by experience. The experience may be positive, as in a successful mission or test (or game in our avocation), or negative, as in a mishap or failure...A lesson must be significant in that it has a real or assumed impact on operations; valid in that it is factually and technically correct; and applicable in that it identifies a specific decision, process or design that reduces or eliminates the potential for failure or mishaps, or reinforces a positive result

# Goal

- The goal is to create a team or crew that learns from its missteps and repeats and improves its successes

# Lessons Learned Process – Officiating 101

- Identify – identify the things you can learn from (areas for improvement as well as what was done well)
- Document – document the lessons learned (group effort)
- Analyze – Analyze pertinent information and share with others
- Store – Store information in a shared database (at least in your own head)
- Retrieve – Retrieve and implement in future games

# Five crew self assessment objectives

1. Did we effectively and fairly manage the game?

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2. Did we consistently apply the rules and philosophies to each play?

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3. Did we demonstrate sound and fundamental mechanics?



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4. Did we work together as a team?

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5. Was our individual performance up to the standard that is expected?

# Being part of a Crew

- Chemistry (Crew Credibility – Keep it)
- Can't be late (understand timelines and other requirements)
- Approach – try not to offend, work harder to not be offended. Don't argue, chose words carefully
- Pick crew members up
- Check ego at the door
- Know your position (For me, be the best LJ I can be)
- First Impressions – don't get typecast

# Judgement Development

- Things can happen if you lose focus and concentration
- Take philosophies given to us, don't think, just react
- When they are beat, they cheat
- Global with your vision, local with your call
- Don't be surprised, stay focused
- Look, see, wait and rule

# Judgement Development

- Don't guess – if any doubt exists, keep that flag in your pocket
- If you know it's a foul – It is, if you think it's a foul – it's not
- What's natural versus unnatural – i.e. pulling jersey, see him change the guys foot pattern
- MIBT – Make It Be There
- GTBO – Get the Big One
- Get the alligators, let the lizards run free
- See the Entire Action
- Dead Ball Officiating is Key

# Mechanics

- Be in an optimum spot to see fouls (usually make the right call when in position)
- Mechanics are designed so you do what you need to do when you get there (instinct – automatically happens for you)
- The best officials always seem to have the best mechanics
- Why do we miss calls, standing in the wrong place
- Have a hop in your step. Perception is you are doing your best
- Know what double action is (move it back a yard, you'll be right all the time)

# Mechanics

- Marking off penalty with CJ or Umpire, make sure you start from the same line
- Spots – Bread and Butter. Good officials always get good spots all game long. Cruise control as a LOS official. Repetitive action/motion equals instinct. Take pride in spots. This is the fun part.
- Guy going OB be aware of which arm he has the ball. Could be a yard difference.
- Inbounds/Out of Bounds Plays – get them right
- Crossfield Mechanics

# Dealing with Coaches

- Be honest and direct with Coaches
- Emotions run high, give him a chance to get out of the situation (OK Coach, OK Coach, Coach I've heard enough)
- Coach, I've answered your question. Get away from him if you have to
- Coach, do you have a question for me?
- There is a difference between complaining and being abusive (you may need to flag a coach)
- Silence can't be misquoted
- If I'm wrong coach, I apologize (Disarms coaches)
- Coach, if it was, as you are describing it, then I missed it



# Down Indicator Importance

- Indefensible to miss a down, sometimes replay is wrong, your down indicator is important
- Be very careful on fouls and the down after enforcement (and replays)
- Be careful writing on your game card, leave down indicator in place
- The down indicator is the very last thing I change, after the CJ or U spots the ball and I'm backing up to sideline (all is clear)
- Have the box person turn the down when he/she gets to the new spot
- Have the box person echo the down to you when you give it. Sometimes chains don't flip down on OB spots

# Applying Self Control

- You never get a second chance to make a first impression
- The things you do off the field can get you into more trouble than the things you do on the field
- Manage your emotions. Don't be negative
- Maintain self confidence but do not develop arrogance – Body Language
- Poor body language can escalate a negative situation, positive body language help ease and control a potential conflict
- Stay professional under pressure

# Making Decisions

- Trust your eyes. Trust what you see.
- Your eyes direct your body, body will get you in the right position
- Your instincts tell you what to do at times – Trust yourself
- Make your decision from the sideline, then rule accordingly
- Keep things in proper perspective – don't let one play ruin a great game or an entire career
- Great Officials make mistakes
- You are going to make mistakes, its how you recover that is important

# The C's of Officiating

- Concentration
- Consistency
- Communication
- Common Sense
- Courage
- Comportment (Your demeanor is **your outward behavior**. It includes the way you stand, the way you talk, your facial expressions.)
- Confidence

# Professionalism

- If you want to be treated as a professional, then look and act like a professional on and off the field – This always intrigued me
- Professionals meet or exceed expectations whenever possible
- Share your knowledge. Information isn't a limited resource. Your mind won't be emptied by giving away kernels of wisdom or experience
- Negative images are hard to shake
- Getting angry or defensive or otherwise taking it personally when someone gives you feedback can be an easy trap to fall into, but it will make you look less professional. Be vulnerable. You don't know everything

# Professionalism

- Be flexible when it comes to changes in plans, goals or other things that might evolve as the season moves forward
- Be aware of the bigger picture
- Professionals exhibit qualities such as honesty and integrity
- Keep your promises. Do what you say you are going to do
- Take responsibility for your actions

# Penalty Enforcement, Close Plays

- If you are not involved in the penalty than watch and observe the choreography of the Process. Is the flag adjusted, are we marking off from the right spot (critical), is the announcement correct based on preliminary signals?
- Marking off penalty with CJ or Umpire, make sure you start from the same line
- On tight sideline and goal line plays and officials come together to talk, do just that, talk in a calm voice and find out what your fellow official saw and compare to what you saw. This may not just be two sentences. Take your time and get it right
- GL pylon. Guy steps out at  $\frac{1}{2}$  yard line, FJ/SJ looks back if stepped out, need to go to him to discuss I had him out but don't know where the ball is. Then it is up to FJ/SJ to rule if ball had crossed the GL

# Presnap Routine

- Need a great presnap routine or you're not going to make it. – Same thing over and over every play – 200 plays (exhausting). Puzzle to put together on LOS – every single play. Is the formation legal, find your key. Calling numbers out in your head, get to this level. Is everyone set? Check this off your list. May pass on a flinch unless it draws a defensive reaction. Is D lined up tight. Down & Distance is a critical presnap routine
- You officiate from the end of the last play. Presnap, subs, counting, get ahead of the game. So many distractions, snap back if lose focus. Always have to be focused. Guys at the top do not have breakdowns on simple basic LOS fouls – Presnap way before team breaks the huddle. Relaxed zone, things run in the background, check yourself, automatic. Can't write a mechanics manual for everything, read the play



# Packing for the game and weekend

- Make sure your uniform is in your luggage first (have a check list)
- Always look at the weather report. Ensure you have the layers you need (bottoms and tops)
- Know what attire is required by Crew Chief for game day (down to the shoes)
- Think light jackets or pull overs (good to have these in your bag)
- Don't over pack. Why do you want to carry a bag of rocks around
- Don't forget charge cords (maybe your buddies can bail you out)

# Final Thoughts

- Be humble and stay positive
- Have fun
- Be patient
- Keep expectations real
- PPPPP – P to the 5<sup>th</sup> – prior preparation prevents poor performance
- Be honest with yourself – Be the best self evaluator
- Enjoy the Pressure – Pressure is a Privilege