

Coach - Umpire Relations. How can you address coaches most successfully? Try these tips...

General Professionalism:

- ◆ In any umpire/coach interaction:
 - Be professional, approachable, confident, and use good judgment
 - Good umpires are physically fit, appear athletic, and are dressed properly
 - Cockiness has no place in umpiring.
 - Confidence is built from strong rule knowledge and ability to explain rules/ rulings "in the language of the rules." Read a section/page of your rulebook before each game to commit that language to your vocabulary.
 - Appearance, voice, and manner determine how you are accepted. Be firm but relaxed. Do not raise your voice. Be courteous in all interactions.
- ◆ Even if you know a coach personally and the interaction is friendly, at a game, address them as "coach" rather than their name. The same applies for players – address them as "#19" on game day rather than "Sarah, go 4 meters behind."
- ◆ Answer reasonable questions, even if they are not expressed in a reasonable way. Just because coaches don't act in the professional manner we would hope, it does not mean that we lower our professional standards.
- ◆ Understand that both coaches are privy to all discussions about the game, so it is appropriate to invite a coach from the opposing team for any discussions involving rules/judgment/rulings during the game. When invited, an opposing team can decline to participate.
- ◆ Use the language of the rules and current interpretations when explaining rulings
- ◆ Admit when you were wrong – it will build more credibility with coaches
- ◆ Understand the difference between judgment (which is the umpires' job and grey areas may exist) and application (which is also the umpires' job, but is 'black and white').
- ◆ Never threaten or make personal comments about the coach's rule knowledge, e.g. ("The next time you say something, that will be a card," or "If you knew the rules, you would know that that's not a body ball.") Avoid power struggles at all costs.
- ◆ Umpires work with rules and judgment. Listen to coaches, but direct conversation to those two areas. What rule they have a question about or what ruling (judgment) they have a question about.
 - If a conversation gets off-track (they start generally hammering you about whatever was going on in the first half, from their perspective), remind the coach of what the conversation is about – a particular rule or ruling.
- ◆ It is better to address things early so a coach's frustration doesn't grow into a bigger problem during the game

"Held Crosse! Empty! Shooting space!" Or general commentary during flow of play about what should be called throughout the game in their judgment

- ◆ Understand that judgment is the obligation of the umpire, and that coaches and fans are inherently biased toward their teams

- The ball was in contact with the stick, coach," "The defender was within a stick's length of the attack player," or similar explanation using the language of the rules.
- Ignore, or ask "Do you have a question about a particular ruling/body balls, coach?" if there is time. Sometimes coaches aren't being critical, but are hoping for a call and verbalize that.
- If there isn't time to answer a question/ address a comment, quickly say "Ask me about that during a timeout or at the half, coach."
- If it continues, give a hand, "mom look," or say "enough", then card after the hand/"enough"

"What was that call, ref?!"

- ◆ Coaches are allowed to ask questions, despite the tone. Sometimes they may be emotional about something else but truly need to know what was called. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
- ◆ Answer the question quickly, within the language of the rules, e.g. "Checking across the body from behind, coach."

"That was a terrible call." "Whatever!" Or similar statements that are not questions

- ◆ During flow of play, ignore, give a hand, "Mom look," or say "enough", then card after the hand/"enough":
 - Ongoing commentary that has been addressed should then be carded.
 - G rated" language is appropriate on the lacrosse field. "PG rated" language should be warned. "R rated" should be carded (without warning). "That is the 5th straight call on my team" "Nice hometown call" "You might as well be wearing a blue shirt" "Who's paying you today?" or other comments that question integrity.
- ◆ Progression: "Enough" or "That's enough coach,"; give a hand; then card.

"You need to call the shooting space/body balls/pushes on them."

- ◆ "We got it/I understand you, coach. We'll look for that."
- ◆ "Yes coach, thank you. We were just talking/about to talk about that."
- ◆ "Yes, absolutely coach - for both teams. We have called that three times in the first half, and will continue to look for it."
- ◆ "Absolutely, thank you, we will watch for that."
- ◆ "Is there a specific question you have about that rule?" (and be ready to answer what the rule is in the language of the rules)
- ◆ "We need an opposing coach here while we discuss that. Let me go get the opposing coach."

"We have been running this defense all year, and have never been called for detaining, but today it's a foul. That's ridiculous."

- ◆ "Do you have a question about a particular rule, coach?"
- ◆ "What specific rule would you like me to explain to you?"

- ◆ “By rule, detaining is (explain rule). There are times when we have seen some players doing that.” (the coach may disagree, but you explained what you saw, and it is OK to disagree as long as you explain correctly what you saw and why it is a foul).
 - ◆ “In my judgment, I have seen players extending their sticks outside of shoulder width and impeding players with the part of their stick that is extended.” (Again, the coach may disagree, but you are using the language of the rules and it is OK to disagree – you know the rules and are using your best judgment – this is our job).
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“That has to be a foul, they are killing us. They are pushing from the side every time we go to goal.”

- ◆ “Is there a particular ruling/situation you have a question about?”
 - ◆ “I agree with you that from what you described that would be a foul, but in my judgment, what happened on that play was not a foul. What I saw on that play was the attack initiating contact into a legally set double-team, causing her to check herself.”
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“What is she calling over there?!” (to a coaches-side official when the far side official makes a call)

- ◆ Coaches have the right to ask questions, answer them within the language of the rules (requires good mechanics by the other umpire to communicate that immediately)
 - ◆ If you don’t know: “I was looking off-ball, coach, but I will find out for you.” (and DO get back to them).
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“You’re fine, but that other ref is ridiculous! Can you help/change her calls?”

- ◆ “She had a great angle on that, a better view of the play than either of us.”
 - ◆ “Do you have a question about a specific rule?”
 - ◆ Differentiate between judgment and application. Judgment can almost never be overruled, but incorrect application (penalty administration) should be.
 - ◆ If it is penalty admin before play is restarted, step in, call timeout, and correct administration. Be sure you know what foul the other official called to be sure you aren’t misinterpreting the situation.
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“On that unsportsmanlike conduct call in the first half, shouldn’t we have been given the ball?” (and you didn’t administer the penalty correctly)

- ◆ “Coach, you’re right, that was my mistake. Thank you for pointing that out.” Or explain why your were correct.
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“I have never heard of that ‘forcing through’ rule. Did you make it up?”

- ◆ “No, it’s in the rulebook. You are welcome to check under major fouls if you would like to. The obligation of the attack is also a point of emphasis this year.”
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“That’s a dumb rule,” after you have explained something

- ◆ “There may be rules that any of us don’t like, but it is our job to work within them.”

- ◆ “If you look in the front of the rulebook, it tells you who to contact if you would like to propose a rule change. They discuss all the suggestions from anyone who sends them in. A form is also available online on US Lacrosse’s website.”
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If a coach wants to “pick on” a particular junior official, a more senior official can subtly step between the coach and that umpire to answer questions.

Similarly, it is empowering to less experienced umpire to have a more experienced umpire defer to them when a coach asks the more experienced umpire a question.

- ◆ As the more experienced umpire, know when the less experienced umpire will answer the question appropriately.
- ◆ Find opportunities when less senior partners can step up.