

# PLAYOFF

## CBOA OFFICIATING POSTSEASON PRIMER



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#### LEARNING CURVE

An in-depth review as you make the transition into three-person mechanics.

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Don't be afraid to deal with coaches when they question your motivations.

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#### WHERE TO BE ON T'S

Proper technical foul mechanics are key to keeping on.



By Michael McNeilly  
CBOA Instructional Chair

## FOLLOW THESE THREE P'S THIS POSTSEASON

It is hard to believe another season is almost in the books! Every year seems to fly by faster and

faster. With the postseason just around the corner, I wanted to congratulate all the officials who will be working the playoffs. Especially those that will be working the finals for the different levels of playoffs.

I don't think I need to remind you that this is the most important and intense time of the season! Coaches and teams have been working hard all season to get to this point. Let's make sure we as officials continue our hard work on the floor as well. Here are a few points to think about for the postseason:

- **Professionalism** – Please make sure we arrive earlier than usual to the game. The referee on the game should communicate with the crew as to the location and time to arrive. Please make sure that we are professional with coaches, players, table and staff that are at the games.

- **Pregame** – Please make sure to have a thorough pregame. Especially if it is a

three-person crew. If a partner does not do a lot of three-person games then it would be best to discuss coverage areas. This will establish a good foundation for your game.

- **Playcalling** – We need to strive to be on the same page. It starts with the pregame but continues by recognizing what is being called on both ends of the floor. Communication should not stop

after the pregame. It should just be the beginning.

I wish everyone the best as you work your playoff games. A lot of sacrifice and hard work has gone into your season. Please travel safely and enjoy the run!

Respectfully,  
Michael McNeilly  
CBOA Instructional Chair



The postseason should be a fun reward for all CIF basketball officials. The best way for Chris Nuanes, Westminster, Calif., to have an enjoyable postseason experience is to work the games with professionalism and have a keen focus on a solid pregame and consistent playcalling.



# EMBRACE THE THREE-PERSON LEARNING CURVE

If you are working the postseason in California, you may be at the point in your officiating career where you are transitioning from the two-person to the three-person system.

Before we get into some advantages, differences and mindsets, one note of caution: It takes quite a few games to get comfortable transitioning from two-person to three-person officiating.

After getting the hang of the three-person system, you'll wonder how you ever survived two-person and you'll realize just how many plays you were not officiating and begin wondering how often you guessed.

## Advantages

One advantage is three-person reduces the number of players to officiate at any given time. When the three-person system is followed, no official should ever have to referee more than two matchups at a time. Officiating only two matchups (two offensive players and two defenders) will raise your correct call and correct no-call percentages.

Another advantage is the ability to see plays from beginning to end. In two-person, there are several times a game when you turn to pick up a play and see contact, but are unable to see the beginning of the action. This leads to guessing. Three-person will eliminate the guessing because officials will be able to see plays from beginning to end. We all know that officiating the defense is the key to correctly adjudicating a play. While only responsible for one or two matchups, officials have time to judge the legality of the defender before any contact occurs.

Also, court coverage is improved. Obviously, dividing the court by three officials rather than two gets us closer to some plays, especially in transition, but it is the improved angles and open looks that make the big difference. The three-person system enables officials to obtain and maintain views between the offensive player and the defender. As we continue to improve three-person skills, we'll begin to recognize more and more plays where the official closest to the play does not have the best look. My favorite play to describe this concept is when a post player has the ball right in front of the lead. The post player then spins to the middle of the key. When this happens, the lead official is still the closest to the

play, but the post defender is directly in between the offensive player and the lead official, resulting in a closed look. The trail official might have a decent look at the play, but it's usually the center official (farthest from the play) who has the open look between the post player and defender.

Off-ball coverage is greatly improved in the three-person system. When executed properly, the lead official and the trail official are on the strong side of the court. This frees up the center official to watch off-ball action on the weak side of the court. When the center official cleans up illegal activity away from the primary action, the game is less physical and has better flow. Freedom of movement is enhanced when bumps, chucks and holds are disallowed.

## Things to Remember

With three officials in a crew, the number of potential double whistles increases if officials are following the ball. Ball-watchers will get exposed in three-person by creating unnecessary double whistles and by that "deer in the headlights" look when a big crash happens in their primary coverage area and they have no idea what happened. Officials need to learn to have slow whistles and recognize which official has the primary responsibility on each play to cut down on unnecessary multiple whistles. When beginning three-person, concentrate on only putting whistles on plays involving matchups in your primary area. After getting comfortable in three-person, there may be rare occasions when you look outside of designated coverage areas briefly, but don't worry about that at the beginning.

It will take a little while to get the rhythm of switches after a foul is called. If a foul is called by one of your partners and you aren't sure where you are supposed to go, just stop. Let your partners move to their spots and then fill in the unoccupied spot. Other than your two partners, nobody in the gym will even realize that you didn't know.

Don't get mentally paralyzed by all the new things and forget to officiate. Inevitably, there will be a few trainwreck plays that don't have a whistle on them. Mentally, officials are thinking, "Do you have that play? Do I have that play?" The result is that nobody had it. Be ready to put a late whistle on obvious plays. Take

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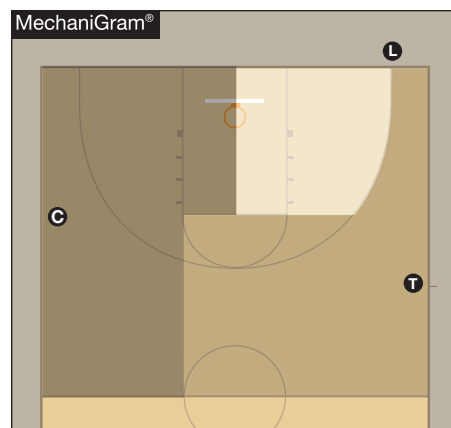
a deep breath and don't forget to at least get your out-of-bounds calls if you feel like you are overwhelmed.

## Speeding Up Your Mastery

Pick up a copy of the NFHS Basketball Officials Manual. It has great diagrams to improve your understanding of all kinds of plays, rotations and switches.

Attending a three-person learning camp in the offseason is another way to improve the velocity of your improvement and understanding in preparation for next year's postseason. Find a camp that is set up to teach. Those camps are usually far less expensive and provide more grace and patience to those learning three-person.

Good luck in your journey to three-person. If you apply yourself and give yourself some patience, you'll soon see the benefits and advantages of three-person and wonder how you ever survived the two-person system. □



There are several resources available for learning three-person officiating mechanics, including the NFHS Basketball Officials Manual, which uses MechaniGrams to illustrate various scenarios, such as basic frontcourt coverage areas.

# THREE HOLES IN THREE-PERSON

The NFHS Basketball Officials Manual states the three-official system is designed to provide better coverage with more emphasis on primary areas of responsibility. Executed properly, the concept eliminates over or under officiating, positions officials as a deterrent to fouling, and provides the crew with better angles and distance than they would have with two people. The mechanics committee believes the combination promotes better basketball.

Even with all the built-in benefits of the three-person officiating system, there are still holes. Just like individual officials themselves, no system is ever perfect. Here are some potential holes for three-person crews and how you might fill them.

**Division line trap on C side.** In a normal halfcourt set, the ideal starting position for the trail official is at the 28-foot mark, but he or she is responsible for the division line. The center official is best positioned at the free-throw line extended, but is responsible for the sideline on his or her side of the court all the way up to the division line.

A trouble spot presents itself when an offensive player, especially the ballhandler, is defended or trapped near the intersection of the division line and the center's sideline. While the lead official is usually responsible for initiating a rotation in the frontcourt, the center should take initiative in this situation to get where he or she needs to be to rule on illegal contact and violations involving the sideline or division line (see MechaniGram). The lead and trail officials need to be aware of center movements and adjust accordingly.

**Elbow jump shot on lead/trail side.** Frontcourt primary coverage areas (PCA) leave distance and angle troubles for action, especially contested jump shots, at or near the strongside elbow. The PCA between the lead and trail is divided at the free-throw line extended from the middle of the lane out to the three-point line. A quick catch-and-shoot or a dribble-drive pull-up jump shot near the elbow can often leave the trail looking through the shooter's back and the lead looking through the defender's back.

If the trail is unable to move down the sideline to see between the players, and the center does not have a competitive

matchup on his or her side of the court, the center can extend coverage across the lane and might have the best angle of the crew to see contact on the shooter's arm.

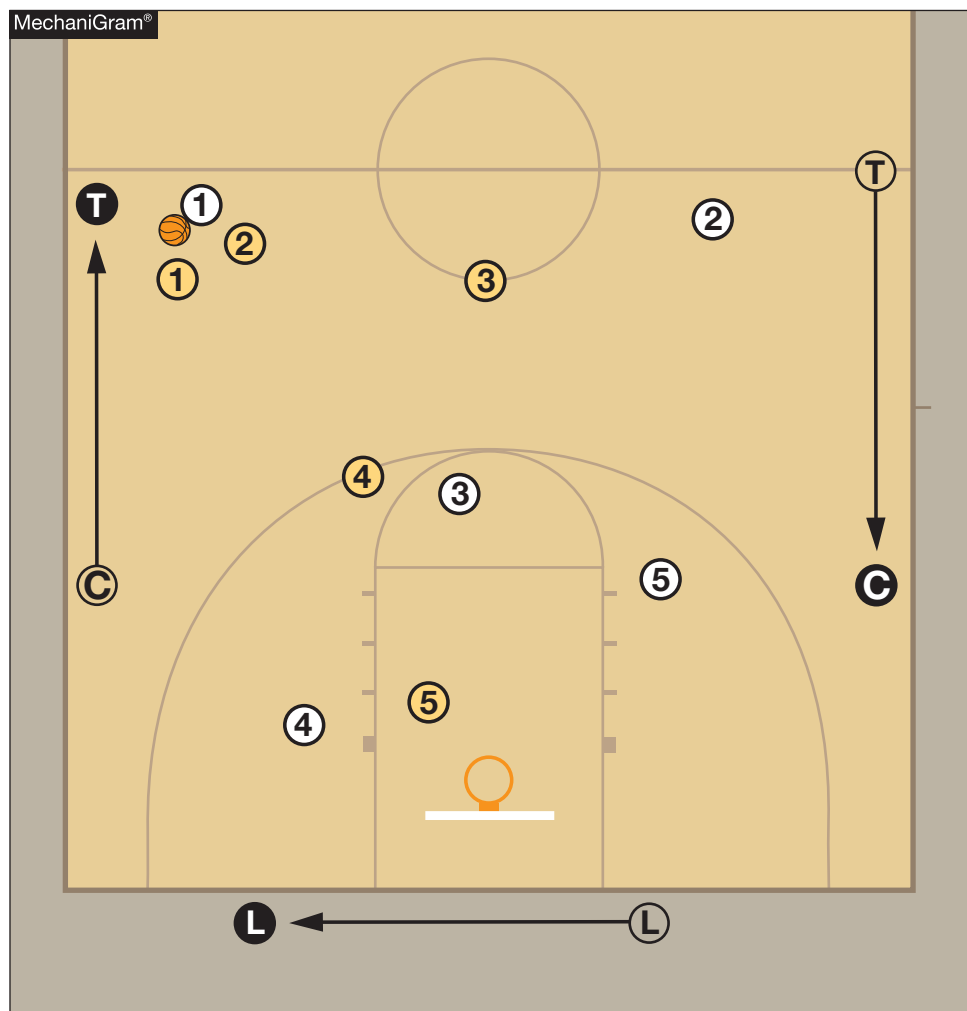
While our advice is not to have the center official make a habit of extended coverage across the floor, it might just be that on occasion the lead and trail officials get stacked and the center has the farthest, but most open, look on the contact. If you are going to extend coverage outside your PCA, make sure the contact is obviously illegal before putting a whistle on it.

**Endline drive in front of lead.** All basketball officials have had that feeling of angst when a strongside drive gets on top of them in the lead position. The closer two opponents are to the official in these situations, the tougher it is to maintain a vantage point to rule on fouls and violations with certainty.

As peripheral vision decreases, so too does the ability of the official to see both the feet of a ballhandler potentially threatening the endline and the legality of the contact between the opponents.

If you feel the action approaching as the lead, consider taking a step farther from the endline to maintain any part of the angle you can. As the trail, if you see your partner in the lead getting closed down with an endline drive, consider taking a step toward the endline (or wherever you need to get a vantage point on the contact between opponents) and be ready to rule on contact between opponents.

Except in the rarest of instances, the lead is left alone in ruling out-of-bounds violations involving the endline, so the trail can be of great assistance in ruling contact between opponents, especially on the torso or arms. □





# INTEGRAL INTEGRITY

If it weren't for the emotions and drama in basketball, a reasonable game fee might be about 20 bucks. We could do it just for the fun of it.

According to many officials, though, it's the things we have to put up with that place a premium on what we're willing to work for. Fans will be fans. There's little we can do about them that isn't better handled by the constabulary. Players are penalized when they cross the line; their actions have an immediate effect on the line score, their ongoing participation and their coach's blood pressure. The coaches, meanwhile, lead a charmed existence, subject to certain rules of tolerance that don't appear in any rulebook. At least, that's the way some officials treat them.

Coaches come in three basic types. First are the straight shooters. They're the ones who will focus on winning the game and instructing their players. They'll speak to you occasionally for clarification and rarely produce an outburst when disappointed in our rulings. These folks seem to understand that if we were mutually wonderful, we'd all be on ESPN on Saturday afternoon. They seldom bleat because they wouldn't tolerate the same in their classroom ... they might have a pet unicorn, too.

The second type is the lifer. These are coaches for whom basketball seems to be their all-consuming focus. They invest great effort in their preparation before, and execution during, the game. Their state of mind and level of animation ebbs and flows as events transpire. The result is, while they can be very unhappy with a decision you just made, it isn't personal. They state their opinions — sometimes vociferously — but are usually smart enough to avoid embarrassing you or saying the magic words that will get them in trouble.

Finally, there are the sweethearts; the ones who view referees as merely another cobblestone on their road to the Final Four. Every interaction with the officials, among their many targets, is calculated to gain advantage, with a side of intimidation. How they do it varies. Some are statisticians applying the null hypothesis. They helpfully remind you all the numbers on the scoreboard should be about equal for both teams. Others are the whistleblowers — quick to remind you of how dimly the state office views blind



**It's perfectly acceptable for a coach to ask Jaime Oseguera, Montebello, Calif., a question about why he made a particular ruling during a game. If the conversation shifts to questioning the integrity of the official, however, then punitive measures need to be implemented.**

buffoons like you. Still others like to turn your relationship into a pantomime of stares, smirks or disgust calculated to turn the crowd against you in a way that is unquotable. The end game for all of them is egging you into a half-dozen needed points they can't gain by skill alone.

Remarkably, way too many officials cave to the sweethearts — the ones who can ruin our nights. Why? There are many reasons, it seems. Some of us played for a coach just like that and figure it's the norm. Others have a phobia the coach really can influence their future assignments. There are also officials who are bred to avoid conflict and choose not to notice the person cartwheeling in front of them. And, yes, some of us just don't care: The world out there is like this, they

claim. Why should a basketball game be any different?

What can be done? Scratch that: What should be done? That's an easy one. You should apply the rules as written and deal with the people who are ruining the game. A sad notion in the 2020s seems to be that a problem you face is best dealt with if you can make it someone else's. They used to call that passing the buck. We're not talking about the first two coaches I described above. They're working for the same purposes as you; it's reasonable to cut them a little slack if they have an issue with a judgment you've made. If they do happen to cross the line, T'ing them up comes across as an act of mutual agreement. You know they had it coming, they know they had





it coming, and life goes on. But let's focus on the Lotharios who are bringing the game into disrepute. What are their motivations?

The statisticians are the ones who remind you it's six fouls to one against their team. They aren't proving they can read; they're trying to suggest you're treating their team unequally. They're implying you don't understand the unwritten code that fouls should be even. That being the case, they're suggesting you should even things up, regardless of the gang tackles you might already have witnessed. Worse would be the insinuation you're somehow biased or even prejudiced against their team or in favor of their opponent. The whistleblowers are the people who will try to intimidate you by suggesting you can either submit to them now or wish you had, later. They're trying to shame you into their own redemption. Finally, the coaches who try to humiliate you want to get rulings out of you that will make it all stop. In all three cases, they are challenging integrity: the integrity of the game, the integrity of the rules, but — most importantly — yours. This can never be allowed to happen. If it ever becomes apparent your integrity has gone in the porcelain, you'll never get it back in the game ... or perhaps ever.

We owe it to ourselves, the sport, other officials and all the other coaches who behave themselves to never get in this spot. But here's the thing: You don't deal with it by lying in wait and seizing

the moment for the heroic technical or disqualification just when Coach hits the high note. By then, it's already gone too long; you seem like you've dithered and are now trying to clean up your own mess. Instead, you must proactively address the bad behavior when you first begin to see it. How you deal with it is up to you; many experienced officials say it depends on your own personality.

It's no fun writing about how to deal with some of the problem-children-in-suits we occasionally come across. The fact of the matter is, however, that we make the avocation look bad by failing to deal with them appropriately. We make it worse for us, worse for our fellow officials, worse for the game ... and worse for them. Put yourself in the position of those coaches, who teach a roomful of students, interact with protective parents and go to the grocery store for a gallon of milk. If they get away with their antics on the court, why shouldn't anyone they encounter expect to treat them the same way? Sure, some think they're a rockstar, but others see them as a symbol of what pisses them off about the rest of their daily lives. Who knows? Perhaps by dealing firmly with these people, you're giving one person sitting up there a breath of fresh air.

When the officials deal effectively with the coaches, it protects the integrity of the game. Be proactive when they question you but take care of business when they challenge you. It benefits everyone. □



When a coach questions the foul count, at a minimum, the proper response is to ask whether the coach is challenging your integrity. In many instances, assessing a technical foul for unsporting behavior is also in order.

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# KEEP CALM AND REF ON

All officials do it, even if they don't admit it: As their schedule takes shape before the season, they look at the teams, the sites, the dates and anticipate the stakes that may dictate the tenor of a game. Are they rivals? Will the teams be vying for a league title? Perhaps one (or both) will be looking to gain some momentum for a late-season playoff push?

Any of those variables can add some extra juice to a game. If, however, the excitement surrounding the game turns it into what resembles an out-of-control, three-ring circus, it's our job as officials to be beacons of calm and composure and restore order.

We've all been there ... a heretofore well-played game somehow goes sideways without warning. As a crew, we want nothing more than to get things back on track. To lower the temperature in the gym, lean on your crewmates, get back to basics and run the game at your pace. When faced with chaos, consider these tips to improve your game.

## Before the Tip

There is a difference between being prepared for trouble and "looking for" trouble. But going into any game knowing "Murphy's Law is always in effect" is a good mindset with which to start. In other words, understand on any given night, anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

Teams scout each other. Some coaches keep a book on how officials call games. There's nothing wrong with doing your own homework and researching previous meetings between the teams. Talk to fellow officials who may have been assigned to those games and comb through recaps from any news outlets that may have covered them. Take time to watch game films that are archived on the internet. This will help identify any issues that may cause tensions to boil over. Communication among crew members can start well before arriving at the gym. Share anything you read, anything you watch or anything you hear in the days leading up to the game or during your pregame meeting in the locker room.

When you arrive on the floor, do your best to get a feel for the atmosphere by observing the players (especially any interactions near midcourt during warmups), the coaches and the crowd.



As the temperature rises during a game, it's important for the officials to lead by example and keep emotions under control in the heat of battle. Ronald Carter, Los Angeles.





Communicate with team captains and coaches during the pregame conference that any unsporting conduct will not be tolerated. It's helpful to use "we" statements versus "you" statements. This sets the expectation the officials and both teams are going to work together on this night. It also avoids any interpretation of singling out players or teams.

"We are going to have a great game tonight."

"We know this is an important game for both teams."

"This game deserves our best effort, and we are going to treat it that way."

"We are going to work hard tonight. And we know you are going to play hard."

### During the Game

We control the pace of the game. Don't underestimate how a few extra seconds during dead balls can help a crew run the game at the proper tempo. Communication among crew members — both verbal and non-verbal — and consistency can present a completely unified front.

In chaotic moments, our first instinct is often to overcorrect with a whistle on any possible occasion, fearing we may miss something. It's a proven fact call accuracy goes down as we start whistling plays outside our primary coverage areas, so resist the urge to "reach" and stick with the basics of trusting your partners, calling the obvious and refereeing the defense.

Dead balls are not the time to relax. If pressure is mounting, the most important times officials' antennae should be up are: timeouts (especially when one team must pass the other team's bench to get to its huddle), halftime, delays in play, and as teams are lining up for free throw attempts — if teams attempt to huddle in the lane before free throws, be aware of an opposing player that may be lurking to eavesdrop or any other unsporting actions.

An in-game meeting with the captains and coaches can be an effective tool in several ways. First and foremost, it is our chance to remind everyone to just play basketball and no further funny business will be tolerated. Secondly, it's a visible way of transferring pressure of proper behavior to the teams. Everyone in the gym will see your crew is attempting to take control and it's now up to the teams to adjust. If they don't, and any technical fouls are called, nobody can say they were not warned.

### Be a Referee, Not an Umpire

Lead by example, especially if you're the senior member of the crew or the game's crew chief. It may not be the way we like to call a game, but if it is careening off course, it may be necessary to step up and straighten things out.

Be your crew's morale booster. Discuss the game during timeouts and offer supportive comments to instill confidence. Flush out any tough plays and learn from them. There is a time and a place for discussing plays or disagreements around questionable calls. On the floor during timeouts is not it. Wait until after the game when you're in the locker room.

### When in Doubt ... Don't

When a game gets away from your crew, what you should not do is equally important as what you should do. Some important "don'ts" to consider:

Don't leave the players on the honor system. If the game has descended into chaos, trusting the players to "just play the game" has long since passed. All officials

should have eyes on all 10 players at all times (dead balls, live balls, when players get tangled up on the floor or during held balls, players trailing in transition, etc.).

Don't compound mistakes. Move past any incorrect calls that may not fit how the game is being called. Doubling down on a mistake will often make things worse.

Don't guess. As was mentioned previously, trust your partners. You will have talked during your pregame about dual-coverage areas, double whistles and plays that block out the primary official. Now is the time to put all those words into action and be the best team on the floor.

Games that get away from us are inevitable. It's OK to acknowledge to each other that it's a tough night, but it doesn't have to brand us as officials that can't control a game. In fact, navigating the rough waters of an out-of-control game can be your time to shine and highlight your ability as a crew that can be trusted to run the game under any circumstances. As officials, it's up to us to embrace that opportunity. □

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# FOLLOWING A T, WHERE SHOULD WE BE?

By their very nature, the moments after a technical foul ruling tend to be chaotic for all the individuals involved in the encounter. The official who has made the ruling has obviously experienced some manner of behavior that is not conducive to the spirit of the game and is therefore having to take corrective action. The player or coach who is being penalized is not going to be happy with the sanction. And too often, while trying to get all necessary parties in the proper positions to resume the game, confusion reigns.

We are taught how important it is for us to keep our heads about us when all others are losing theirs. As such, it's important we understand where we are supposed to be on the court when administering the free throws and throw-in that result from the technical foul ruling. For purposes of this article,

we are going to examine this procedure regarding technical fouls administered by a three-official crew that will ultimately result in a throw-in opposite the table at the division line for the offended team, which is how play is resumed for all technical fouls (except double technical fouls) in NFHS.

The first order of business is when a technical foul is called, the officials should switch just as they would with any foul. Now, this comes with the caveat of using common sense. If the lead official, during the first half of a game, issues a technical foul against a coach for any type of behavior that is disrespectful to an official, it doesn't make a lot of sense for that official to report the foul at the table and then take a position immediately in front of that team's bench as the new trail official. That is a potential recipe for disaster and the crew must recognize it and make adjustments to avoid it.

Otherwise, the officials switch and administer the ensuing free throws just as with any other free-throw scenario: the lead official administers the attempts, the center official observes the shooter and the trail is near the division line observing

the remaining players (MechaniGram A), keeping in mind the remaining nine players do not have to be on the opposite side of the division line, as many people incorrectly believe.

The next step is the transition from the completion of the free-throw sequence to the administration of the division-line throw-in. Because the ball is going to be put in play opposite the table, the officials must again move on the court (MechaniGram). A common error is for the trail official to believe he or she remains the trail, moving across the court to administer the throw-in. This is not the correct mechanic. Instead, the official who was the center for the free throws should remain on that side of the court and move to the division line, becoming the new trail. The old trail slides down to the free-throw line extended and becomes the new center. The lead remains so, simply moving to the opposite side of the lane and balancing the floor.

By precisely administering these situations, we can create a sense of confidence and credibility in a situation where these attributes can sometimes be in short supply. □



## General Education

- ▶ [Referee.com](http://Referee.com)
- ▶ [NASO.org](http://NASO.org)
- ▶ [SportsOfficiatingSummit.com](http://SportsOfficiatingSummit.com)
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**By precisely administering these situations, we can create a sense of confidence and credibility in a situation where these attributes can sometimes be in short supply.**

