

TOWER PHILOSOPHY (Advantage-Disadvantage)

(By Jacky Loube, IAABO Executive Director)

I remember the very first time I was asked to make a presentation at the IAABO Interpreters Seminar; it was in Orlando, FL. My topic that Friday morning was the “Tower Philosophy” and its impact on different levels of basketball. When IAABO Executive Director, Paul “Frosty” Francis gave me the honor, I really didn’t know where to begin. I attempted to research the impact the “Tower Philosophy” had on the game by interviewing coaches and officials. I was amazed by the many different interpretations of the rule and the cavalier approach veterans had when explaining the rule to me. I found that officials working youth basketball while exercising the Tower Philosophy gave a great deal of latitude to players at that level, while those at the high school junior varsity and varsity levels gave less leeway. I was concerned that this implementation should have been reversed. Should not the youth league players have an understanding of what actions are within the limits of the rules? Is not a travel a travel? But young officials start early in making their own determination as to what is within the “spirit and intent” of the rules.

Sound Rules Foundation

The more I observe the training of applicants who want to become officials, the more convinced I become that the concept of advantage-disadvantage should remain a “foreign language” until a sound rules foundation has been realized and processed by the official. Officials should be absolutely certain and well versed on the description and explanation of each foul and violation. A literal approach should be taken. Only then, with knowledge of all the elements of the rules, will they be able to make rulings on the realistic philosophy of advantage-disadvantage.

It is true, that all the great officials have put the Tower Philosophy into practice. But I don’t believe that skill develops overnight. A well-officiated game is one which the official has adhered to the spirit and intent of the rules as established by the rules committees. The basic and fundamental responsibility of each official, while officiating the game, is to have the game proceed and played with as little interference as possible on his/her part. This is not to say that an official should not blow the whistle when a rule has been breached. The intention should be to avoid calling infractions that were not intended by the spirit and intent of the rules.

Dr. John Bunn

Over 50 years ago, Dr. John Bunn, IAABO Interpreter and editor of the NCAA Rules, introduced what was called the “Oswald Tower Philosophy,” named for his friend and fellow IAABO Interpreter, Oswald Tower. The philosophy best represented what the Basketball Rules Committee believed and supported regarding the officiating of a contest. The philosophy is expressed as follows:

It represented a realistic approach to guide the judgment of officials in making decisions on all situations where the effect upon the play is the key factor in determining whether or not a rule violation has occurred. As an illustration, if A-1 sets a legal screen on B-1 and B-1 generates notable contact with A-1, should play stop and a foul called on B-1. What about A-2, who executed the play just as the coach designed it, used the legal screen and has broken free for an easy layup? If an official did not take a realistic approach to this

particular situation and officiated literally, team A would have been penalized and the game would be one of continual fouls and whistleblowing. A veteran official realizes that contact, not only in the instance cited previously but in other aspects of the game, must be looked at in terms of the effect it creates on the opponent. If there is no apparent disadvantage to an opponent, then realistically speak-

“It is the purpose of the rules to penalize a player who by reason of an illegal act has placed his opponent at a disadvantage.”

ing, no rules violation has occurred. The official must use discretion in applying this rule and all rules.

Tower Philosophy Stated Another Way

The “Tower Philosophy” stated in another manner is as follows: If they are unfairly affected as a result of an infraction of the rules, then the one not in compliance must be penalized. If there has been no appreciable effect upon the progress of the game, then the game shall not be interrupted. The action should be ignored. Is this contact incidental and not vital? For example, the crowd is screaming for an “over the back foul” on B-1 when the ball is hit out of bounds. A throw in from out of bounds is given to team A. Realistically and practically, no violation or foul has occurred.

Play Situations

Obviously, this philosophy assumes that the official has a thorough understanding of the game. Officials, as independent contractors, are hired to officiate basketball games because schools believe they have basketball intelligence and an understanding of the mood

“It is not the intent that the rules shall be interpreted literally, rather they should be applied in relation to the effect which the action of the players has upon their opponents.”

and climate that prevails in the game today. Better officials exercise mature judgment in each play situation in light of the basic philosophy stated. The IAABO office is consistently bombarded with issues concerning trivial and unimportant details about play situations during the game. Much time and thought is wasted in digging up minor technicalities, which are of little or no significance. Traveling throughout the United States to conduct rules clinics and to attend officials’ meetings and interpretation sessions, there are those who sidetrack the “fundamental” discussions too often and get involved with emotional discussions over situations that might occur once in a lifetime. In many instances, I have found that these very same officials—who are the ultra-literal minded—have no faith in their evaluation of judgment and more times than not, lack basic game management skills. Some would call these “excessive whistleblowers or interferers” an affront to the game. They are the very ones who want a spelled-out and detailed rule for every tiny detail to replace judgment. At the higher levels of competition, assigners are looking for the official with an advantage-disadvantage and humanistic approach to officiating the game. Did the player violate the spirit and intended purpose of the rule? The below listed guidelines must be adhered to as far as officials, coaches, and players are concerned for the game to be well officiated.