

# Little Things Do Matter

(By Jeff Janosik, Independent Member, PA)

What mysterious factors are impeding your progress as a basketball official? Not that it brings any solace, but the answer to this puzzling question has eluded and frustrated many a basketball official. Officials have searched high and low for answers to why their officiating career has not progressed as far—or as fast—as anticipated. Often misguided, they become caught in the trap of over-analyzing areas that are convoluted and/or totally out of their control—when, unsurprisingly, the root cause for much of their frustration typically is due to neglecting personal characteristics thought to be minor or insignificant, if recognized at all. Such neglect is imprudent, for in a competitive activity such as basketball officiating, the Little Things Do Matter.



**“What we call little things are merely the causes of great things.”**  
—Henri-Frédéric Amiel

## Improving Skills

In order to realize individual goals, basketball officials must continue to improve their officiating skills. It is logical to assume (although hardly a guarantee) that improved skills can lead to further opportunities such as an expanded schedule, key game assignments, and advancement through the officiating ranks. It never hurts to enjoy a little good fortune along the way—if it materializes. However, from a practical standpoint, the key to meeting personal goals associated with any challenging profession or activity is sticking to a flexible game plan in which hard work towards an achievable series of goals is the basis for improvement. Basketball officiating is unquestionably no different.

## Challenges to Basketball Officiating

Make no mistake, basketball officiating has its share of challenges—both on and off the court. To maximize productivity, basketball officials must tackle these challenges head-on. A related and extremely important point to mention is that a realistic approach is necessary when assessing one’s abilities and setting goals. Regardless of the magnitude of the goal, a basketball official should give 100 percent effort and welcome constructive criticism from any reliable source. Although the critiques may seem, at times, trivial, a basketball official should not regard any constructive assessment as something that does not matter. After all, such assessments are fully intended to assist a basketball official in *getting better*.

Basketball Officiating 101 emphasizes that improving skills is necessary to overcome the challenges to officiating. This should not be a revelation to anyone. What may come as a shock to some: realizing goals does not entirely depend on improving one’s skills! Assignors value those officials most who are not only proficient, but also highly reliable, demonstrate a deep understanding of the game and respect for the players and coaches, display a professional appearance and demeanor, and conduct themselves with class. Therefore, if a basketball official is truly set on achieving goals, then he or she must be prepared to address any aspect—big or small—that can positively affect their officiating ability and stature.

In no particular order, the following are several common examples of the so-called “little things”:

- **Appearance:** weight control, shined shoes, personal hygiene, uniform, attire at official functions
- **Reliability:** calling partners, returning phone calls, being punctual, handling administrative tasks (closed dates, game reports, registration forms, association dues, etc.), attending required rules clinics
- **Demeanor:** attitude, language (verbal and non-verbal), tone of voice, listening skills, composure, tact, manners (saying “thank you,” “great job,” “please,” etc.)
- **Personal Conduct:** unnecessary contact with an assignor, gossiping, being loyal, having integrity
- **Technical:** rules knowledge, use of approved mechanics, strong whistle, hustle, running style, calling in your primary coverage area
- **Physical:** developing and maintaining the strength, speed, agility, and stamina necessary to keep up with a fast-paced sport

**“Practice yourself, for heaven’s sake, in little things; and thence proceed to greater.”**—Epictetus

## The Way Ahead

How many times do you need to be told to correct the same “little things” by the same important people before it becomes ridiculously repetitive? You probably like hearing such trivial reminders less than the source likes to repeat them! The solution to not having to bear the brunt of such comments should be obvious: acknowledge the problem, identify and implement a solution, and be determined to not let it happen again. Failure to do so not only allows the sad saga to continue, but it just may be the hindrance that is blocking the way ahead.

Being criticized on judgment is one thing, but opening yourself up for obvious areas of criticism gives critics an abundance of ammunition. Nothing ruffles an assignor’s feathers more than observing a talented basketball official’s failure to respond in a positive manner or, worse, digress by continually engaging in the same poor habits. Could it be that Dr. Naismith himself originated the phrases, “Earth-to-(insert name here),” “Hello, McFly!,” “Duh,” and “Wake up and smell the roses”?

## Clean Up Your Own House

Most likely every basketball official has experienced some degree of exasperation at his or her pace of advancement or of opportunities received or not received. To offset this trend, make a sincere effort to improve upon those “little things” within your immediate control. The adage, “Clean up your own house” is relevant here, and it should be applied to all matters—big and small. Attending instructional summer camps, volunteering for scrimmages, working Special Olympics or charity basketball events, and mentoring younger officials also facilitate the pursuit of excellence.

**“For want of a horseshoe nail, a shoe was lost;  
For want of a shoe, a horse was lost;  
For want of a horse, a rider was lost . . .  
And viciously slain by the enemy.**

**All for the want and care of a horseshoe nail.”**

—Benjamin Franklin

Thinking BIG is completely acceptable, but realizing goals starts with perfecting the “little things.” Tending to your *horseshoe nails* can make the difference in just how fast—and far—your basketball officiating career progresses.