

CIAC GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COACHES AND OFFICIALS

Revision of 1/8/2025

CIAC athletics is an [education-based](#) endeavor. Sports are a continuation of the classroom and as such should foster the most positive learning experiences as possible. Both coaches and officials are the adults most accountable for ensuring good sportsmanship. Communication between coaches and officials becomes vital to the effective operation of athletic events. The responsibility is on both parties to work together constructively, professionally and positively, especially since they serve as role models for student athletes.

← CIAC GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COAC...

Both Coaches and Officials Need to:

1. Have respect for the game and understand that this experience belongs to the kids.
2. Address each other professionally, even if you know each other personally.
3. Greet each other professionally. Don't hug, muck it up, or show other signs of fraternity that give the impression that you are there for any other purpose than to do the job. Perceptions start before the game. Do not give the impression that you have a special relationship other than coach-official.
4. Have a productive pre-contest meeting. The pregame meeting with coaches and captains are used to deliver the message that good sportsmanship is expected by all stakeholders at all times.
5. Post contest, say good-bye discreetly. No hugging, pats on the backs or handshakes.
6. Follow the proper channels when dealing with lingering issues. Other than during the game situation, there should be no communication of any kind between coaches or officials. Contingent issues should be dealt with between the athletic director and the official's assigner.
7. Avoid discussing the game in any other context, even if you are personal friends, other than when you are at the event performing your duties.
8. Avoid holding grudges left over from previous games.

Officials Need to:

1. Understand that the game you are assigned to on any given night is very important to the participants.
2. *Know the situation*-Be aware of body language and the tone of your voice. Attempt to build a relationship of respect. Nonverbal behaviors can escalate or de-escalate a situation. It should never come down to coach versus official. Body Language: eye-to-eye contact, tone and choice of words are critical.
3. *Don't react: but respond*-Answer questions and acknowledge statements. Communication should be a response and not a reaction. Be professional and respectful and listen. While effective communication is a key part of the coach-official dynamic in the game, it doesn't require engaging in conversation throughout the contest.
4. *Be authentic*-We are all human and capable of a "bad night". You should embody fairness, honesty, and an openness to communicate rather than being seen as robotic or too businesslike.
5. Do not respond to a coach on every whistle. Avoid anticipating coaching motives. Don't assume a coach has a motive for their techniques of asking questions. Remain neutral. Don't attempt to influence or appear overly friendly with coaches. Find a balance.
6. Avoid responding to everything a coach says if there has been an increase in conversations. It is a balancing act. Try to communicate but every play does not deserve an explanation. Respond to legitimate questions.
 7. Actions speak louder than words. Officials should strive to excel at their craft. Using approved signals and mechanics, understanding positioning and overall rules knowledge will garner respect from coaches and fans.
8. Use the technical or the unsportsmanlike penalty call when necessary for the sake of integrity of the game. When feasible, give coaches a chance to intervene, and correct a player before it gets to the point of issuing an unsportsmanlike penalty.
9. When feasible, give a warning to the coach rather than issue an unsportsmanlike penalty immediately.
10. Process unusual or difficult situations between officials and take the time to explain the call to both coaches.
11. Have a feel for the game. Don't overreact. Unnecessary penalties for sportsmanship are counterproductive. Understand when to assert yourself.
12. Make sure your communication is clear and effective. Speak clearly but don't shout. Avoid arguments:
 - a. Listen first.
 - b. Don't engage with volatile coaches.
 - c. Use one liners-"I had a clear view coach", "coach I'm 100% sure", "coach you've made your point that's enough". Or say "ENOUGH!" and walk away.
 - d. It's okay to admit a mistake.
 - e. Don't ignore a coach's concern.
 - f. Walk away after issuing an unsportsmanlike penalty.
 - g. Use captains to help with relaying messages.
13. Hustle. Being in position to make the call is not only critical for getting it right, but also eliminates much of the criticism.
14. Avoid giving off the impression of arrogance. Be approachable.
15. Improve communication skills so explanations are short and effective. Head coaches are entitled to an explanation of all unusual rulings or situations and the following information for all fouls.
 - a. Nature of the foul or penalty.

- b. A brief description of the act.
- c. The number or position of the offending player.
- d. The enforcement and the result of the enforcement. If the play is unusual, or the rule is something not seen often, give a full explanation to both sidelines. When you talk to one coach, make sure you offer to talk to the other. Explaining unusual rulings can diffuse situations later.

16. Assistant coaches and other authorized sideline personnel (e.g. athletic trainers, chain crew, photographers, athletic directors, security personnel etc.) are not entitled to any information from the officials. However, saying things like, “I don’t talk to assistant coaches,” shows a lack of respect and professionalism.

17. If asked by the head coach for an explanation, give it, and allow it to be heard...don’t walk away after giving a curt answer.

18. Address the coach as “Coach”. Don’t use first names or nicknames.

19. IMPORTANT: When an official witnesses or is the recipient of exceptionally bad behavior or inappropriate verbiage from a coach they should report it to their assigner. It is not up to the official to contact the school administration directly.

20. Officials must complete their game report as dictated by the processes for their sport.

Coaches need to:

1. Attend the pre-game meeting with the officials and captains. The head coach should attend the pre-game meeting. Not the assistant coach. By sending the assistant coach to the pregame meeting you are disrespecting the officials and sending the message that sportsmanship is not important to you.

2. Have the head coach shake hands with opponent players, coaches and officials; not the assistant. If the head coach has the assistant shake hands you are sending the message that sportsmanship does not deserve your attention.

3. Game control is not only the responsibility of the officials. Game control starts on the sidelines and works its way onto the field or court. Realize that players and spectators take their cues from you.

4. Understand that you are not “owed” an explanation by the officials. Their job is to call the game and if they feel

there is not time or purpose to giving you an explanation then you need to move on. If you're asking for an explanation, allow the official to explain. Don't walk away.

5. Be responsive to warnings by the official. If the official tells you "That's enough!" then it is time to let go of the issue and stop complaining.
6. Never get an unsportsmanlike penalty or technical. Unnecessary penalties against the coach are counterproductive. Keep your cool. Penalties only hurt your team, tarnish your reputation, and make the school look bad.
7. Call the official by name in a manner that is acceptable according to the culture of your sport. ("Ump", "Blue", "Ref" in some sports. In others, calling them by their name is acceptable.)
8. Constant complaining or "officiating from the bench" is not effective communication. Pick your spots. Coaches will quickly lose credibility by over complaining.
9. Assistant coaches should never address the officials, only the head coach.
10. Never attempt to purposefully get an unsportsmanlike call against yourself in an effort to motivate your team, or "fire up" the crowd. It is completely unacceptable and has no place or purpose in high school sports. A coach who does so should face corrective disciplinary action from the school's athletic director.
11. Know the personalities of your players, especially the more volatile student athletes, and try to circumvent problems before they occur.
12. Communicate fairly. Questioning an official in anger by yelling from a long distance is inappropriate. Your approach is important – be discrete; avoid broad gestures such as waving your arms. If you need an explanation from an official, wait until one of them are in close proximity. Question discretely and fairly.
13. Do not question the integrity of officials (e.g. stating the fouls/penalty counts or ask that the game be called "the same at both ends"). These actions suggest and infer that the officials are cheating.
14. Make adjustments to how the officials are calling the game. If you feel the officials are calling the game "too tight" or "letting too much go" help your players to adjust by coaching them on it.
15. Intimidation and gamesmanship is bad sportsmanship. The edge you should strive for is in having the best-prepared and trained team possible.
16. Remember that your job is to coach your players. When you argue or complain excessively, you are not doing your job to instruct kids. You can't be thinking about what to say to an official while instructing your players. The real job is to instruct players. When things don't go well for the team, it is an opportunity to teach them to work through difficult situations. Most people find more difficult situations in their real life than they do in sports. So

using adverse sports situations as a teaching tool is a good way to transfer the lessons of a difficult sports situation into a lesson on how they can grow as a person.

17. NEVER approach an official in the locker room, in the parking lot, in public or anywhere off the playing surface after the contest is completed. It does not matter how “courteous” you are in your approach, talking to the official when the contest is over is unacceptable. If you have a serious concern about an official, then ask your athletic director to address it with the officials assignor.

18. Know the rules. By having a strong, in-depth understanding of the rules for your sport, you will avoid many misunderstandings. Know what can and cannot be corrected. *Anticipate trends* – These are due to rule changes and adjustments to a sport. Coaches need to be aware and understand rule changes and the rationale for them.