

## **The Four “C’s” of Umpiring**

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Thank you for allowing me an opportunity to share some thoughts on the Four C’s of Umpiring -- Commitment, Character, Courage & Communication.

When thinking about commitment to umpiring . . . rules study, mechanics review, physical conditioning, preseason preparation, etc. immediately come to mind. Additionally, committing to umpire at the college level impacts many aspects of our individual lives . . . long travel, time away from family and job, not to mention the commitment necessary to consistently perform at a high level while constantly challenging oneself to improve. As a Coordinator, I try to acknowledge and reward those who are the most competent on the field and those who make a strong commitment to umpiring; however, I caution you to make sure your commitment is appropriately prioritized. I've seen many friends and colleagues lose jobs and, even worse, destroy their family life by not keeping officiating in proper perspective. It is a tough balancing act that we all need to work on and think about every day.

I often lump aspects of character and courage together as they relate to officiating. The only thing you really truly own is your character. Your character is defined by what you think/say and how you act/ behave when no one is looking. Do you do the right thing even when there is no reward? Or do take the easy way out "since nobody will really know anyway?" A strong character is developed away from the athletic field, yet it is perhaps the trait that most defines and predicts how successful you'll be as an official.

Courage seems to be the natural sibling to strong character. Courageous officials are willing to make the tough call even when it isn't the popular call. Courageous umpires will impact umpiring off the field, as they are ones willing to challenge the veteran umpire or local assignor who is mistreating another umpire or bad mouthing one of our comrades when they're not present to defend themselves. Courageous officials are not always the most popular, but they are usually the most respected. Courageous officials don't get involved with petty jealousy and don't advance their careers at the expense of another umpire. Courageous umpires have the ability to admit a mistake and acknowledge when they are wrong--they don't make excuses. Be a courageous umpire.

The final "C" is for communication--perhaps the single skill that separates the great umpires from the good umpires. Communication skills make or break more umpires than ball/strike, safe/out, fair/foul, etc. combined. If you don't have great communication skills and you want to survive and advance, then get to work immediately on all phases of your personal communication skills. On the field--stay calm and keep your poise when challenged. If/when a coach arrives for a visit (assuming his behavior is under control), allow him to have his full say one time--don't interrupt him, as that will only escalate the situation; when he is done, give a calm and thorough answer/explanation and then end the discussion. Do not raise your voice or become animated. Never do or say anything (profanity) that would be the same as something you would eject a player or coach for saying--if you swear at a coach, your Coordinator will not be able to defend you. Never initiate contact or do

anything that gives the perception that you are the aggressor. Umpire and communicate with the assumption that everything you do and say is being observed and/or will be reviewed on videotape.

Your written communication skills must be equally refined. When you do an ejection report, state the facts and be thorough. Be careful in your ejection report not to use any words that could be interpreted as an action that may require a suspension on top of an ejection. Don't say in an ejection report "the coach chested me," "he then got in my face and bumped me," "he was so close he spit on me." You get the picture, I hope. If your report includes some of these types of phrases, you should be sending a suspension report. Understand the difference and don't exaggerate or allow emotions to dictate the facts in your written reports.

Two final thoughts on communication . . . "shut up and listen" and "silence cannot be misquoted."