Dealing with Head Coaches

1. Make eye contact. A coach wants to be assured that he has your attention. Don't act distracted.

2. Never call coaches by their first names. They'll feel most comfortable, particularly in front of their players, simply by being called "coach." If you know their last name, it is all right to say mister.

3. Show respect to get respect. That means using formal language, keeping communication brief, adopting a neutral tone and avoiding any personal remarks. Stick to the issue at hand in a straightforward way.

4. Ask them to deal with problem players. Be sure to identify the problem in explicit terms, without making the player to be an evil person. Sometimes that is hard to do, but can be accomplished with a careful choice of language.

5. Remain calm under all circumstances. If a coach moves toward you to "get in your face", pivot sideways so that you are shoulder-to-shoulder. It is hard for someone to speak in an aggressive, confrontational way when the proximity between parties is side-by-side.

6. Let coaches have their say. When a coach approaches to protest or argue, adopt an instant "listening mode" and let the aggrieved individual finish his remarks. **Do not interrupt**.

7. Use non-confrontational body language. To be aware of body posture, facial expression, head tilt and arm position, one must say, "I am going to appear receptive and contemplative. I can think best and measure my words that way. I am determined to not escalate the problem."

8. **If you make a mistake, admit it.** A simple apology is sufficient; do not elaborate or rationalize (i.e., make excuses).

9. When coaches raise their voice, lower yours. A soft voice has a way of triggering a reciprocal soft reply.

10. Get both coaches together. Sometimes there is a need to reach a uniform agreement in a joint consultation. Weather problems in an outdoor situation are examples. Other issues could include clock problems or difficulties with game equipment.

11. Support fellow officials. Never betray partners by showing that you doubt their judgment. Instead indicate faith in someone else's decision by saying the partner had a better view of a more favorable angle than the responding official or protester.

12. Acknowledge the coach: "I hear what you're saying." "I understand" or "I see what you mean" are equally effective. If the next sensible step is to confer with a partner over a controversy, make that next move firmly.

13. Give praises when proper; promote sportsmanship. When a coach makes a gesture of consideration for the opponents or toward the officials, be sure to acknowledge it. Sometimes a smile and a nod of the head are enough.

14. Determine from where the coach is coming. Put yourself in their shoes just as you would in trying to understand a player's viewpoint. That means having some insight about a coach's motivation and overall goal. Sometimes how the coach will be viewed in the eyes of players and team supporters is the primary stimulus for behavior.

15. Keep your ego under control. Often a mere glance will carry a significant message, whether it's negative or positive, whether it is meant to curtail dialogue or to encourage it. A quizzical expression can signal a desire for additional input, whereas a frown may denote closure.

16. Give the coach the benefit of the doubt, but be sure there is doubt. If you are uncertain about the accuracy of a ruling, make a decision and tell the coach what you believe is correct. Avoid being too adamant about a rule interpretation. Someone has defined the word positive as "being wrong at the top of your voice."

17. Permit the coach to disengage. Recognize (through facial expression, body language, and terminating vocal patterns) when it is time to cease a dialogue. Nothing is gained by insisting on the last word.

18. Don't use your hands when talking to a coach. Your gestures will reveal more than you'll want to convey.

Remember that a coach's job depends on many factors and doing your best is one of them. He prepares hard for many hours, so you should work hard in being consistent and fair. Help the coach to be a better coach by allowing him to coach and not be overly concerned with officiating. Listen to him, answer his questions honestly, and provide him the respect that he deserves, within the spirit and intent of the rules, and you will reduce his anxieties about the one aspect of the game that he cannot control and should not be focused on—officiating. Refereeing a game is not brain surgery, but managing people in a highly emotional environment takes constant awareness and skills. The most successful officials have these skills. Practice the above skills and take the time use them every game when an opportunity arises. You'll be surprised at the results.