Calendar

Hey, Ref!

Basketball Officiators' School

Alman's school for basketball officiating, students learn a skill that you wouldn't think they'd need to be taught: how to blow the whistle.

Alman is obviously someone who has studied the subject. "There are lots of ways to do it improperly," he says by phone from his home office in Fashion Valley. "If you blow from the throat, there is a tendency not to put as much power into it. Our whistles have peas in them, and the pea needs to rotate in order to produce the right sharp sound. So if you don't blow very much air into it, the sound you produce will be an rrrrrrrrrr... instead of an rrrrrRRRRRR!

LOCAL

So what we have to teach, in order for you to sound confident and like you know

what you're doing, is that the strength actually comes from your sternum."

The duration of the blow is crucial, says Alman, who has been an officiator at basketball games himself for 30 years, 24 of them in San Diego. "Some people produce the right sound, but they don't make it quickly enough. They produce what's called a 'slow' whistle. This makes no one stop, because they just don't hear it. But if you blow too quickly, you'll produce a RRRPT! And again nobody stops, because it sounds almost like the squeak of a sneaker on the floor."

An officiator needs to keep the whistle in his or her mouth throughout most of the game, so Alman has to teach aspirants another skill: "How to talk without removing the whistle and without having the whistle go off unintentionally. That's because when you're working a basketball game, you want to use 'verbal preventatives.' For example, if a person is about to foul, you'll say, 'Back off!' or 'Go easy!' And it's difficult to do that with the whistle in your mouth unless you've been trained. This is the way to stay out of trouble."

It's one way, at least. Trouble comes, as well, when players get argumentative. It happens at adult games more often than at kids', says Alman. "With adults, you have to be a policeman, lawyer, judge, and friend. Many adult players aren't used to being told what to do. At work, they're the boss. So at the school we teach the philosophy: use your people skills to defuse anyone who wants to get into it."

Officiators are also employees, being paid to "hustle," says Alman.

Show this for Block Technical foul Charge any kind of foul. Followed by: Show this to stop Travel Double Jump Ball clock for anything other than a foul Chop clock, time in 3 point attempt When made One and one two shots. Fist means violation

Basketball referee signals

Count it

Then point direction

"You don't need to be able to dunk, but you do need to be able to move up and down the court in a reasonable fashion. You need to get there to see if something happened and, if it happened, what it was." Only ice hockey is more physically demanding for officiators, says Alman.

It's not necessary to be or to have been a player in order to excel. "If you have played, especially as a point guard, you have the court vision, and that gives you a little advantage, because you can see the point developing — you can anticipate what might happen — and you can get into position just a little bit quicker. But if you are open-minded, if you are willing to listen, we'll teach you what you need to know."

Other requirements for the job are "integrity, good judgment, and the ability to make instantaneous decisions" — lots of them. "You have to make maybe 100 calls in a game," says Alman. "In most other sports,

there aren't nearly as many."

Anyone who has followed the game knows that it has changed over the past three decades. "The players are not only bigger, stronger, and faster than they were when I started," says the 52-year-old, "the level of teaching and instruction and commitment by the players is higher. That has increased the performance required of us."

Because the game is more popular than ever, Alman is in constant need of new officiators. He gives his classes twice a year; he recruits all year round. Still, he cannot keep up with demand.

So he wants to stress that the benefits of the job are twofold: "Officiators will make good money, especially if they work every night. They'll also be recognized around town. They'll be called by name or they'll hear, 'Hey, ref! Hey! What's goin' on?' San Diego is a big city with a small-town mentality. It really gives you a good feeling."

What is more, there are jobs available immediately. "We're gearing up for the season." Of the expected 40 attendees at the upcoming classes, Alman predicts, "As many as six to eight of them will go to work even prior to the end of the three sessions."

— Jeanne Schinto

B.O.S.S. Basketball Officiators' School and Recruitment **Three Saturdays** September 28, 10:00 a.m.-noon October 5, 10-00 a.m.-noon October 19, 10:00 a.m-12:30 p.m. Ray & Joan Kroc **Salvation Army Center 6845 University Avenue** (between College & 70th Street) Cost: \$25 Info and preregistration: 619-297-2677 or www.sdboss.com

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