

OUR RELATION TO THE GAME

by Nick Kearns,
Big Ten Basketball Official

The importance of basketball officials in our game is evinced by the care and precision with which the coaches select them. They are not picked out of a clear sky, nor from names in a hat. They are carefully considered, and the coaches, as a rule, correspond with each other regarding certain individuals who should officiate in their particular games.

In the selection of these officials the coach, above all, must have faith in the man's honesty. If the coach has the slightest doubt about the official's honesty he should immediately dismiss the latter from his mind. I consider honesty the prime requisite of good officiating. Also, I believe that, if the coach realizes in his selection, that the official has the courage of his convictions, he has selected as good a man for that game as can possibly be found.

For any man who will take a whistle and walk upon the basketball floor with the thought of cheating five boys who are out there with their heart and soul set to win, there is no electric chair or guillotine adequate enough for his execution.

On the other hand, the official is confronted with the coach who is constantly shouting out from the bench, threatening that he will never again engage the official, and otherwise abusing him in the dressing room; and this, from the gentleman who is supposed to be a character builder. A coach's blacklisting an official from future competition in his particular games because of the fact that the official has missed one or more penalties during a game, or has called them extremely close on the particular team which he is coaching, is the cause, on many occasions, of inefficiency on the part of the officials. If we were in a position to penalize by fine the coach who would address us in such manner, there would be no further disturbance, or at least very little, from coaches, during, or after the game; but we would still have blacklisting because there is no organization in back of us. With the exception of the coaches and the schools themselves we stand unprotected.

On many occasions during my twenty years of basketball officiating I have been asked by the president, the trustees, or the director of athletics of many institutions what I thought of his basketball coach. Possibly, if I were truthful, my remarks might lead to the coach's being asked to resign. Realizing that most coaches have obligations in life, such as the support of a wife and children, I have at all times, as I know many of my fellow officials have done, boosted and praised the coach highly. We have been more or less responsible for the retention of a coach for many years after such questions have been put up to us. Why not then have that same feeling towards the basketball official? Inasmuch as you have already designated this man as honest and as having the courage of convictions, why not go along with him and feel as though it is one of the toughest games in our athletic curriculum to officiate to the satisfaction of the coach, the player, and the spectator?