

Eight Ways to Ruin Your Reputation

As an official all you have is your reputation. Screw it up and say goodbye to assignments and your career. Here are eight sure-fire ways to ruin what you worked so hard for.

By Tom Schreck

1. **Be high maintenance.** The men and women who assign you to games and evaluate your performance have jobs to do, deadlines to meet and their own series of constituents to answer to. Do you realize that every time you make their lives harder, their days more frustrating and their hours filled with tedium, they're remembering the source of their anguish? "Supervisors and assigners are looking for people who are low maintenance. Everyone wants someone they can trust, someone who will be on time and someone who will get the job done," Randy Wetzel, an NCAA Division I college umpire, says. Making your supervisors' lives easier fortifies your reputation while doing things that they find annoying works against it. Get your reports in on time, be punctual, return phone calls and do what needs to be done even when you find it a pain in the neck.
2. **Talk too much.** Opinions are a lot like backsides — we all have one. Do your best to keep yours to yourself, especially when you're out in public. Criticizing someone else's work is tacky and it reveals more about you than it does the subject of your conversation. Officials, athletic directors (ADs) and coaches all travel in the same tight circles so when you let a "Between me and you ..." go, know that it is the furthest thing from being just among friends. Follow what your mom said and don't say anything — especially about another official — if you can't say something nice.
3. **Create problems off-the-field.** Remember you've chosen to be an official, so don't pretend you're not in a visible profession. Yes, your free time is your own but don't be so naïve as to believe that what you do away from your assignments won't impact your reputation. "Like it or not we have great visibility," Wetzel says. "People know who you are and when you're out and about how you act will get back to the coaches, ADs and supervisors." Those keg stand photos on Facebook, the tweets

about making it rain at the dance club and that arrest for public lewdness will affect how people see you between the lines.

4. **Fraternize.** Hey, we're all human and we all crave interaction. Our assignments involve a lot of alone time on the road and the conversation with the Marriott clerk just doesn't always cut it. It is natural to want to chat up folks that you see on a semi-regular basis but remember your responsibility is to oversee a contest in an unbiased fashion. "We teach that when you enter a gym, survey the area," says Steve Smith, a high school basketball and soccer referee from Colonie, N.Y. "Note where the coaches are sitting and find another spot. Be careful not to give the appearance of fraternizing." High fives and fist bumps with coaches and ADs get noticed and as innocent as they can be, they get interpreted.
5. **Look terrible.** Certainly by now you know to keep your uniform in such a way as to communicate your professionalism. It extends off the field and court too, you know. Showing up to your assignment with your ripped concert T shirt and flip flops may make you feel hip, but don't expect folks not to gossip about your sartorial statement. "We tell our guys when they walk into a venue to look professional and once you put stripes on you are in charge so it is important to not look like an unmade bed," Smith says. Everything you do communicates something. Make sure it's communicating professionalism.
6. **Don't treat people right.** Whether it's the ballboy showing you to the broom closet that will double as your dressing room, the waitress at the restaurant where you're getting your pregame meal or the new official working his or her first assignment, no one appreciates mistreatment. Using "Please," "Thank you" and "Excuse me" goes a long way and their absence goes even further in people's memories. "If you're a jerk to people onsite, that'll get back to people. You know sometimes at the D-III level, you're changing in a bathroom and it's not the ideal environment, but that doesn't mean it's OK to be rude to people," Rick Mansur, a Division I basketball referee from Marlboro, Mass., says. The golden rule is accepted universally and not using it will get you remembered for all the wrong reasons.

7. **Be all about the money.** Every official somewhere along their career got short-changed on mileage, a hotel room or a fair night's pay because of the unlucky dealing of some cards. We all have to write the checks for clinics and associations every year and we all know the realities of today's economy. We're all in the same boat and very few of us are getting rich officiating. Cherry picking assignments or complaining about paying dues is classless and it will cost you more than the amount you write on your check.

8. **Be arrogant and unapproachable.** The games aren't about us; they're about the players, coaches and institutions involved. Emotions run hot and high and sometimes people need to vent about what's going on. Let them. "When I came up, it used to be the less you talked the better. Today they want officials who are approachable and coach friendly," Mansur says. "More and more communication has become crucial and being standoffish is unacceptable." Doing the Mount Rushmore act when someone wants to talk something over is just arrogant. Hear them out, be flesh and blood and be about building relationships, not about being the one who was right.

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