

Effective Communication Techniques Between Mississauga Hockey League Officials, Coaches, Players and Spectators.



Qualities of the Best Officials Include:



- Ability to be fair and consistent
- Complete understanding of the rules
- Resolve to ensure participants safety
- Determination to want to learn and improve their craft
- Proficiency to know when and how to **communicate** effectively

Communication

...the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else.

Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>



How Officials Communicate

- MHL officials are taught that as soon as they enter the rinks, they are judged on their appearance, demeanor, attitude and ways they interact with others.
- These forms of communications can be verbal:
 - Words
 - Tone and
 - Volume
- Nonverbal Communication includes:
 - Facial expressions
 - Gestures
 - Eye contact and
 - Posture

Nonverbal Communication

Positive Body Language

- Standing up straight with arms at the sides
- A relaxed, calm posture
- Clear and definite hand signals
- Good hustle to keep up with the play and to get face-offs going quickly
- Professional appearance – clean jersey, crests on properly

Nonverbal Communication

Negative Body Language

- Standing with hands on hips
- Standing with arms crossed in front of chest
- Pointing or shaking a finger at someone
- Facial expressions (e.g. rolling the eyes)
- Not hustling before and/or after the whistle

Important Aspects of Communication

- Learning how to effectively communicate helps officials when dealing with conflict.
- Officials have no control over what is said to them, but they have full control in how they react to conflict.
- Conflict is natural in sport. How Officials & Bench Staff handle it is the important thing. The more intense the game becomes, the more important it is to stay calm and in control of their emotions.

Why Officials Communicate

- Communication between players, coaches and officials is extremely important.
- The official's responsibility is to enforce the rulebook to ensure the game is played safely.
- To accomplish this, officials have to communicate with coaches and players.
- Productive communication with the participants is encouraged as long as it is purposeful and does not slow the game down.

Communication Reality

- However, sometimes players and coaches will not always participate in productive communication.
- Officials are expected to deal and resolve conflict.
- Officials will interact with people who treat them with respect.
- Officials are taught to treat all with respect and remember, that the rule book has penalties which may be assessed to coaches and players who choose to be abusive.
- Ultimately, officials have the option to penalize a player or coach whose behaviour is in question.
- Officials must always remember to resolve conflict without their conduct or methods being questioned.

When to Communicate

- Officials are expected to set the tone for open dialogue during the pre-game greeting at each of the team benches.
- During the course of the game, or between periods, coaches may request a rule interpretation or opinion of a recent event. Officials are expected to acknowledge the request and if warranted and time permitting, approach the bench.

What to do When Approaching a Bench

- Officials are expected to take a partner to the bench who can observe the conversation and watch over the ice surface while the other official engages with the coach.
- Coaches are expected to come down to the surface level on the bench to establish eye-to-eye contact.
- Officials understand that the opening remarks from a coach may be to blow off steam, and the officials are prepared to listen, as long as a question follows.
- See following slides for pro and con examples

Typical Bench to Ice Conversation

Coach – *“Hey ref, I don’t know what game you’re watching, but my guys are getting killed out here. Remember there’s two teams and open your eyes!”*

Official – *“ OK coach.”* (official skates away)

Result – Lost opportunity, nothing is accomplished, no effective communication occurred.

Ideal Bench to Ice Conversation

Coach – *“Ref, I'm getting concerned about the escalation of rough play out here. Could you speak with the other team's coach or start calling a tighter game?”*

Official – *“Ok coach. Thanks for your input, I'll keep an eye on it.”*

Result - Coach expressed a valid safety concern. The official can't object to that. Because respect and rapport was established, this allows for future communication opportunities.

Myths about Officiating (1)

“If I’m animated and yell loudly, the referee must come over and talk to me”

Officials understand that hockey is game of passion, and occasionally emotions can get the best of us.

Officials know that the louder coaches yell, the less their points can be understood. Being dramatic negates the coaches intention no matter how valid the issues are.

Repeated outbursts may lead to a game ejection or worse.



Myths about Officiating (2)

“There’s no point talking to the refs. They’ve never liked us and they think they’re perfect. If we argue they will eventually toss us out”.

Officials are taught that each game presents a new opportunity to officiate in a fair and safe manner.

Officials conduct is always under review by fellow officials, supervisors, the MHL Manager of Game Officials and the MHL Board of Directors.

Officials who repeatedly issue game ejection penalties are closely monitored by the Manager of Game Officials.



Myths about Officiating (3)

“These refs don’t know the rules!”

Officials are human, and no one has ever refereed the perfect game.

Mistakes will happen and calls will be missed on both sides. However, each year, all MHL officials must attend clinics, pass exams and show improvement during the 4-8 times they are supervised during the season.

Only those officials who are dedicated and strive to always do their best are allowed back into the MHL.

Official's Performance Report									
Official's Name:				HC OP Level:					
Region:				Role:					
Arena:				Date:					
Reporting Supervisor:				Category:					
Type Of Game:									
	Superior	Acceptable	Needs Improvement		Superior	Acceptable	Needs Improvement		
1. Application of the Rules	●	●	●	10. Penalty Calling Procedure (Referee only)	●	●	●		
2. Attitude Off The Ice	●	●	●	11. Physical Appearance	●	●	●		
3. Attitude On The Ice	●	●	●	12. Physical Fitness	●	●	●		
4. Awareness	●	●	●	13. Positioning	●	●	●		
5. Communication	●	●	●	14. Reaction to Pressure	●	●	●		
6. Duties and Procedures	●	●	●	15. Safety and Risk Management	●	●	●		
7. Face-off Procedure	●	●	●	16. Signals	●	●	●		
8. Game Control	●	●	●	17. Skating Ability	●	●	●		
9. Judgement	●	●	●	18. Teamwork	●	●	●		
Strengths:	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 20px; transform: rotate(-10deg); display: inline-block;"> <p>Sample Official's Performance Report</p> </div>								
Weaknesses:									
Remarks:									

Myths about Officiating (4)

“I’ve been watching hockey all my life, and I’ve never seen those rules enforced. Let the kids play!”

We’ve all grown up watching Saturday night hockey. However, some forget that what they see on TV is professional sports and entertainment.

The NHL uses a different rule book from Hockey Canada, and so the rules for amateur hockey are in favour of inclusion, fair play and foremost - safety.



Myths about Officiating (5)

“There's no way the ref could see that! How can they make that call?”

Indeed, hockey is a fast-paced game. However, officials are taught to be in certain zones on the rink in order to best see the play at all times. In some situations, officials will delay an important call to confer in order to get the call right. In situations like this, officials are encouraged to go to both benches to explain their decisions.



Effective Ways to Communicate

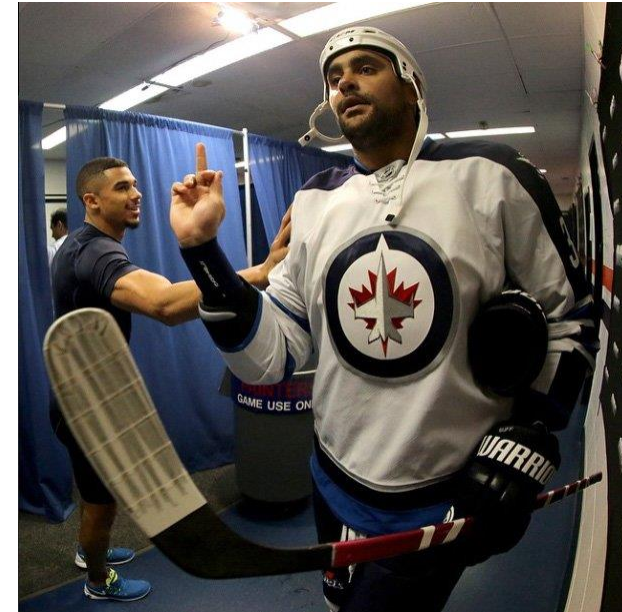
- Officials are taught to treat disrespect with respect.
- Officials are expected to try and establish rapport with an open friendly attitude.
- Officials understand that everyone has their own perspective and sometimes we will agree to disagree.



Ineffective Ways to Communicate

Use of Profanity

- Officials must NEVER use profanity when reacting to others or in conversation with players, coaches or spectators.
- Any official who disrespects others by using profanity will be held accountable by the MHL.
- There will be times when tempers flair; but officials are expected to remain professional and not engage.
- Coaches and players can be penalized for using profanity in a disrespectful manner.
- Officials are always expected to rise above the situation.



Ineffective ways to communicate

Animated Coaches

- Officials are taught to not approach a bench when the coach or players are using threatening or abusive gestures.
- If an official deems it necessary to approach an irate coach, they will do so with a partner and instruct the coach to first calm down before going directly to the bench. If the coach refuses, the official can skate away and not approach the bench until the environment has calmed to the point a rational conversation could take place.



In the Perfect World at a Hockey Game...

- Officials would never miss a call
- Coaches strategies would always work out
- Players would never make mistakes
- Spectators would praise the efforts of everyone
- All involved would go away happy to have participated



But Hockey is a....

- game of high passion
- game of high drama
- game of intense sport, and
- game of mistakes.



Think about this.

If no one made mistakes, you wouldn't need officials for off-sides, icings, penalties, rule interpretation, fight separation, safety awareness, and crowd control.

Conclusion

The MHL with its Board, Coaches, Assistants, Officials, Timekeepers and Volunteers work collaboratively to ensure that safety and fair play is the foremost outcome for all participants.