

Ask, Tell, Act

Sometimes during a game not all the critical activities occur on the field. The bench areas, or technical areas if they exist, can be the scene of irresponsible behavior that impacts what is happening on the field. In these cases, HSSO recommends that referees use the *Ask, Tell, Act* approach when dealing with coaches or other team officials.

Coaches cannot commit fouls but they can engage in behavior which endangers or undermines the referee's ability to manage the game. Most of the time, coaches behave appropriately, even in the face of their obvious passion and excitement about how their team is performing. However, when those actions become unacceptable, referees must be prepared to take the following actions:

- First, when irresponsible behavior arises, the referee should ask the person to modify his or her behavior
- Second, if the behavior does not return to an acceptable level, the referee should inform the person that their actions will not be tolerated and tell him or her to stop
- Third, if the unacceptable conduct continues, the referee should take action. Depending on the behavior, caution (and show the yellow card) or send off (and show the red card) the team official.

In games using assistant referees and fourth officials, the *Ask, Tell, Act* process requires coordination among all match officials. Only the center referee (as the first among equals) should caution or dismiss a team official, and some center referees want to be involved throughout the process while others may rely on the bench-side assistant referee or fourth official to handle the initial steps.

Ask, Tell, Act supports the powers and duties outlined in NFHS Soccer Rule Book, Rule 5 and NFHS Soccer Case Book, Rule 5 that require the referee to take action against team officials who fail to conduct themselves in a responsible manner. Note, the term team official refers not only to coaches but to other non-playing personnel on the bench or in the technical area.

The irresponsibility of a coach's behavior has to be measured in terms of the extent to which it improperly interferes with the game on the field or with your ability to manage the game within the Rules. The referee has the flexibility to decide what constitutes irresponsible behavior by team officials, some examples may include the use of offensive or insulting language or gestures, persistent questioning of decisions, kicking or throwing items, or refusing to remain near the bench or within the technical area.

Ask, Tell, Act is intended to provide referees with a practical and flexible approach to resolve behavior issues with team officials. It is important to note that cautioning or dismissing a coach or other team official does not require that each step of the process be followed. In cases where behavior is overly disruptive, blatant, or serious, the referee is always authorized to bypass any warning and immediately issue a caution or send off.

Spectators (and that includes anyone other than a player, substitute, or team official) outside a 10 foot limit from the field and technical areas or benches are not mentioned anywhere in the Rules and, consequently, you do not have any direct authority over them. The most you can do is work through the coaches or site administrator if spectator behavior is a problem or, ultimately, to suspend or terminate the match.