

The Importance Of Halftime Discussions

Imagine that the signal to end the first half has just sounded. The game is going to be a real barn burner. The teams are tied at halftime and there is no sign of either team gaining an advantage any time soon. The stadium is filled with spectators, and the atmosphere is electric. You can't wait to start the second half. Now imagine another scenario. The signal to end the first half has just sounded. The spread is 30 points at halftime, and the score is much closer than the action on the field suggests. Few fans occupy the seats; most of them seem to be more interested in the concession stand than the game. It could be a long second half.

Undoubtedly you have officiated both types of games. While those two games may seem worlds apart, the fact is that they are not. Both games have one thing in common — the success or failure of the officiating crew depends on what happens in the officials' locker room during the halftime conference and on the field in the second half.

Every official learns the importance of the pregame conference as one of the foundations of successful officiating. There are even laminated cards that organize all of the items to be addressed in the pregame conference. Postgame analysis receives similar emphasis. Videotape and postgame breakdowns have become very valuable tools to officials.

With the emphasis on pregame and postgame in officiating, one critical point is sometimes overlooked — halftime. While it may be brief, halftime is a crucial point for officials. At halftime, officials are given the opportunity to communicate in the privacy of the locker room and take time to discuss the events of the first half. The officials can also use that time to refocus and concentrate on making the second half of the game even better. How many times have you heard before taking the field, "That was the easy half."

While there are many things a crew may cover at halftime, three topics should always come up:

1. What plays stood out in the first half?

Were those plays handled correctly, or could they be improved upon? Perhaps there was a pass interference call that was very close or a short-yardage play that could have been more effectively covered. (Officials in the professional leagues even have the technology to watch a play from the previous half right there in the locker room.) Discuss the type of offenses involved and how those might affect crew positioning. Understand the defenses being used and how those might relate to the tempo of the game. Halftime is a great time to discuss plays. It is not, however, a time for

argument. Any discussion that isn't positioned in helping the crew improve should be eliminated. Save it for after the game.

2. Are there any players or coaches that deserve attention in the second half?

Perhaps one of the crew members has spoken to a coach or a player about something, but hasn't had the chance to tell the rest of the crew. Now is the time to do it. If there is a particular match-up between players that is closely contested, the crew should be aware of it for the second half. Talk about the demeanor of the players and coaches, how it may change and how the crew will handle such a situation.

3. What might the second half hold in store?

If the game is close, and you expect a barnburner, make sure everyone in the crew stays focused and reviews rules regarding overtime. Games in which the margin is larger require particular focus and attention. The crew should discuss what is expected in the second half and make sure that everyone is focused and prepared.

Don't let a well-timed cheap shot catch your crew off-guard in the waning moments of a blowout.

If a crew can thoroughly cover at least those three topics in their halftime conference, the chance for success in the game increases greatly. Hopefully, the crew held a thorough pregame, and will do the necessary post-game analysis as well. A thorough halftime conference, however, is the best chance a crew has to address issues during the game, when it may matter most.