

CBOA: Helping Officials Take the Next Step

“We’re the only collegiate association in the country that has an evaluation process not dominated by one supervisor who hires and fires.”—Tommy Lopes, Executive Secretary, Collegiate Basketball Officials Association, Inc.

Take a green official, sprinkle in some training, give him some experience, mentor him, slowly work him into big games, and voila, you turn out a college official capable of taking on the big



CBOA Past Presidents (L to R): Bill Varno, Ed Strickler, Frank Majikes, Nick Gaetani, Ray Perone, Wally Vogelsong, Mike Lonski, Frank Henry, Tim MacAleer, William Mulvihill, Lou Filippetti, Jim Lennon, Edgar Cartotto, Norm VanArsdalen, Tom O’Connor, Jack Hannon, and Richard Lynch.

assignments. The Collegiate Basketball Officials Association, Inc. (CBOA) uses much of this formula to bring high school officials along to Division II and Division III college level. If the drive and talent is there, these officials help serve as an East Coast pool for Division I.

IAABO is a critical component to this feeder network. According to Lopes, 98 percent of CBOA officials come up through the IAABO system. “IAABO is structurally sound with its instruction programs. We want 3 years of high school varsity experience before an official comes to us. Most come through the IAABO cadet program.”

CBOA’s basic objective is to improve officiating for inter-collegiate basketball and promote officials to varsity and associate membership through an approved rating system. It is a system that has evolved successfully over time to take into account the changes that have affected the game of basketball.

CBOA’s Infancy

CBOA was established in 1948. In addition to the goals of improving officiating and identifying good officials, it was also set up to work closely with the Eastern College Athletic Conference. CBOA provides officials to the ECAC and negotiates the officiating contracts with them. CBOA provides the offi-

cial for varsity and subvarsity contests to improve sportsmanship in coordination with the ECAC. Another CBOA goal is to ensure proper working conditions for its officials.

Before moving to its current system of selecting and training officials, prospective candidates applied to CBOA and were separated by region for staff members to rate them. The CBOA is broken into 11 areas: Harrisburg, Lehigh-Scranton, Metropolitan New Jersey; Metropolitan New York, Baltimore-Washington, Pittsburgh, Eastern New England, Philadelphia, Eastern New York, Western New York, Western New England.

Under the previous system, once staff rated the prospective official, a decision was made whether to bring the highest rated officials into the conference based on the needs of the supervisor. One problem with that setup, according to Lopes, is that close to 90 percent of the officials never returned their rating forms, so the decisions were more subjective.

“For example, in one area, we might have had 70 officials that needed to provide a rating, and only got back one rating



CBOA Final Four Officials (L to R Back Row): Larry Lembo, Tim Higgins, Jim Burr, Reggie Greenwood, Tom Lopes, John Cahill, Ed Corbett, Bob Donato, Mike Kitts, and Frank Scagliotta. (L to R Front Row): Mickey Crowley, Jim Lennon, and Jim Howell..

from a member of the staff. You’re not going to have the best qualified refs working games if that’s the best feedback you get,” Lopes observes. While acknowledging the low response rate was not true for all areas, it was enough of an issue to drive change, he says.

New Ways to Rank and Promote Officials

The current system involves a number of components to improve officiating. Integral to this goal is a rating system. “We’re the only officiating group in the country that uses one,” Lopes says.

Assignments are based on ratings, with the ratings coming 35 percent from supervisors, 25 percent from fellow officials, 30 percent from officials and 10 percent administrative (atten-

dance at an annual clinic and the annual NCAA written examination).

Ratings are based on factors such as physical condition, personal appearance and conduct, mechanics, knowledge and enforcement of rules, mental alertness, poise, judgment and intestinal fortitude.

“We preach to keep the ratings based on talent, not whether you like the guy. The ratings are compiled and officials ranked. The supervisor of an area can drop up to the bottom 20 percent of officials in any given year,” Lopes says. There is oversight



CBOA Executive Committee (L to R Back Row): *Ray Perone, Jim Toomey, John Leighton, David Elliott, Guy Pagano, and Ron Tyburski.* (L to R Front Row): *Jack Sweeney, Ron Martel, Mike Alvaro, Carl Garlitos, Jim Bruno, and Tom Lopes.*

to ensure ratings are correct and anyone dropped is done so according to the numbers.

An instructional camp is offered for newer officials as well. Going to the camp provides no guarantee of games, as new officials must actually go through a tryout which is publicized

and run by local area rep. Requirements for admission to associate membership include IAABO membership and actual officiating experience within 2 years of the date of application in at least 20 games of types approved by CBOA and ECMBA.

“New officials get 3 years as an untouchable so they receive an opportunity to prove themselves on the court. You have to give them a chance. We build in this protection because we want the best officials on the court. Our goal is to increase the number of games each year for the officials who are improving,” Lopes says.

Eight regional coordinators assign the games for officials in each of the CBOA areas. Fees for games are negotiated by CBOA as well.

NCAA Division I schools were originally part of the CBOA umbrella, but peeled away to form their own conferences in the 1980’s. This left the CBOA with the Division II and III colleges.

Despite the Division II–III focus of the CBOA, Lopes says the association is looking for the types of officials who want to move into Division I.

“We can’t take the green official. It takes a different kind of person who wants to take the next step, whether that’s from high school to college or from Division II or III to Division I. Those are the guys we’re looking for,” he says.

“CBOA has been a phenomenal training ground for NCAA Division I. If you look at the number of officials who have moved through our system, we have had a lot of guys who’ve gone onto work the final four in Division I. That says a lot about the quality of our staff and the experience we’re able to give them through CBOA,” Lopes observes.

“Officials have to ask themselves why they want to drive 2–3 hours to ref a Division III game for \$100. We’re looking for the guys who want to do that because they love the game and want to move up to Division I,” he adds.