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# The Philosophy of Officiating

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# The Philosophy of Officiating

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UH 498 with Dr. Kadlac

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The human race has always been driven by competition, and no type of competition drives people more than competitive sports. People have been playing sports of some sort since the beginning of civilization, and since the invention of sports, players have needed a set of rules and a code of conduct to make sure the sport is played fairly by all participants. Along with the playing of sports, came the need for the participants to have a way to settle disputes about the rules and the code of conduct, which is why we have officiating in sports today. Officiating has become such an integral part of the world of sports that many people cannot separate it from the game itself.

However, it is a separate part. Officiating alone can, and sometimes does, affect the outcome of games. Plenty of fans have seen their teams win and lose on the backs of officials. Officials are not judged on the outcome of the game, like athletes are. Officials are judged on how well they control the game, which is independent of any other aspect of the sport. This means that officiating has its own standard of success. The goals and standards that are used to evaluate officiating are distinct, individual, and separate from the sports they officiate over. This is why the ethics and philosophy behind officiating should be explored by all sports enthusiasts.

My interest in the subject of officiating stems from my participation in ultimate frisbee. This sport is not mainstream, but it is gaining support to head that direction. One of the most important rules when I was introduced to the sport was called “The Spirit of the Game.” This is the idea that all players will agree to play as hard as they can, but within the rules of the game. This allows ultimate frisbee to be played as a competitive sport without being run by outside officials. Instead, the entire game is officiated by the players themselves. Just like many “pick-up” games of basketball or football are run by

the idea of “calling your own fouls,” ultimate frisbee is played the same way. However, unlike pick-up sports, ultimate frisbee has a governing body and a highly competitive pool of players. After playing for five years, however, I have seen the sport slowly change. More and more people think that being competitive means taking advantage of the rules instead of using them to maintain fair game play. This problem is at the heart of the conflict between what I will call “self-officiating” and “outside officiating”. That is why not only should officiating be reviewed in ultimate frisbee, but in many other sports as well.

Throughout this discussion I plan to investigate three major ideas central to officiating, and at the end of the discussion, arrive at a meaningful conclusion about how to best officiate sports. First, we shall discuss what the purpose of officiating is. Without answering this question, we do not know in which direction to start our investigation. After defining what the goal of officiating is, we need to explore how officials attempt to achieve that goal. We need to know what we are talking about when we begin discussing different ways to officiate games. I hold that there are two distinct ways to officiate, and after defining the goal of officiating, we will decide which type of officiating is better at achieving that goal. Finally, I will discuss what implications each of these types of officiating has on major avenues of officiating issues. Each type of officiating has different implications at different levels of competition, and depending on what is at stake for those participating in the sport. All of these things need to be discussed and defined in order to decide how to officiate in the most efficient and effective way according to goals of officiating. Once we define these things, I will argue that each type of officiating has different major flaws in them, and each has different strengths that the other cannot

replicate, meaning a new type officiating may be the answer. This new type of officiating involves combining the best parts of the two original types, creating a hybrid that involves “passive” officiating. However, before we dive into that, we need to investigate officiating in general.

### *I. The Purpose of Officiating*

Officiating is meant to keep sporting events fair. This idea is outlined in the “Oswald Tower Philosophy” which was created by Oswald Tower. It states that “it is the purpose of the rules to penalize a player who by reason of an illegal act has placed his opponent at a disadvantage” (Morris). This seems like a very simple and straightforward definition for officials to use, but it has some important underlying implications. Perhaps the most important one is that officials do not need to call every infraction that occurs. Officiating is meant to keep the game fair, and progressive (in the sense that the sport should be constantly progressing toward its own goal, which is deciding a winner). Since in almost every sport, a foul stops play, calling unnecessary or trivial fouls takes away from the spirit of whichever type of game is being played. Instead, when officiating under the Tower Philosophy officials concern themselves only with penalizing rule breakers when their action of breaking the rules gives them an unfair advantage over the opposing players (Loube).

Thus, according to this philosophy, if a player breaks a rule, whether purposefully or accidentally, even though the effect of that action does not give him an advantage (obviously this advantage would have been unfair because a rule was broken) then play should continue. By stopping play, the official would be unnecessarily stopping the momentum of the game. Jacky Loube, an Executive Director at the International

Association of Approved Basketball Officials, describes this by explaining that “it is not the intent that the rules shall be interpreted literally, rather they should be applied in relation to the effect which the action of the players [have] upon their opponents”. This means that good officials are expected to be subjective and use their judgment to decide which infractions should be penalized. This also implies that the best officials not only know the rules extremely well, but how the rules affect the flow and spirit of the game (Loube).

The best two sports that illustrate why this distinction is important are basketball and ultimate frisbee. Perhaps the reason for this is that both sports limit the amount of time the ball (or disc) can stay motionless. In basketball this is done with the shot clock, and in ultimate frisbee this is done with the stall count. In basketball, the team who is on offense (in control of the ball) will always benefit from a stoppage of play (assuming the stoppage is not to award possession to the opposing team). The reason for this is because they get to restart their offensive sequence. If a team runs a play, but fails to open up a clean shot, the defense has an advantage. However, if play stops, then the defense loses that advantage because the offense gets to restart. Additionally, whenever a team is on a scoring run (multiple scores while the opponent is scoreless) they have a momentum advantage. Such runs are extremely difficult to maintain, especially when play is stopped. This is why good basketball officials try to only stop play when absolutely necessary. Inefficient officials will call every infraction of the game without considering its implications. For example, Team A may be on a scoring run and have another fast-break down the court. Team B may be out of position and in an attempt to stop the score, try to knock the ball out of Team A’s hand. When the player from Team B misses and makes

contact with the player from Team A's body, but not enough contact to interrupt his movement, that contact is a foul. An inexperienced official may call this foul, but an experienced official may recognize that Team A will retain its more important advantage (namely the momentum advantage) that it has earned, with a no-call.

This distinction is similar in Ultimate Frisbee but there is one important difference. Ultimate Frisbee is a self-officiated sport and basketball is not. I will explain the difference in depth later, but I want to bring up this difference now to show how this distinction between these two approaches in officiating is relevant to both types of officiating. In ultimate frisbee, anytime there is a stoppage of play (assuming the disc doesn't change team possession) there is an advantage to the defense. This is because ultimate frisbee moves fast, and a stoppage of play allows the defense to catch their breath and look around to size up where all the offense players are located. An experienced player will know this and use this knowledge when deciding whether or not to call a foul. For example, when a player has the disc (called a thrower); he has ten "counts" to throw it. Often, there is a defender guarding him trying to stop that throw and counting to ten (and if the defender reaches ten before the thrower can throw the disc it is a turnover). If the defender contacts the thrower it is a foul. The inexperienced player will call the foul and stop play (unintentionally providing the defense with an advantage). An experienced player though will only call the foul if that contact keeps him from advancing the disc (avoiding stopping play and giving the defense an advantage) (Lou).

There is a possible objection to this idea. One could argue that this philosophy of officiating gives too much power to the officials. It allows officials to easily manipulate aspects of the game. When the rules of a sport are written, they are written to best govern

how the sport should be played. One could argue that the rules themselves should be enough to ensure fair gameplay. In that case the officials should call every single infraction that occurs, and not be subjective at all. However, I would argue that even with this type of attitude officials still need to be subjective rather than objective. Many rules in sports require officials to be subjective. For example, in football it is against the rules for a defender/receiver to make contact with each other while a pass is in the air. This penalty is called pass interference. The penalty can be called on either player though. If there is contact, then a foul occurs, but it could be the fault of either player, and officials need to be subjective to determine who is at fault.

Another possible objection is that this definition of officiating puts too much responsibility on officials. In this case, the game is often in the hands of the officials. Missing just one call or making one incorrect call can change the outcome of a game. This argument only holds weight because this kind of responsibility puts a lot of pressure on officials as well. This pressure could easily cause an official to doubt his abilities and knowledge as an official. Coaches, players, and fans are always going to try and tell an official how he or she needs to do his or her job. Whenever an unpopular (which is different from incorrect) call is made, players and coaches are going to verbally jump all over an official and try to get him or her to change his or her mind. Because of this, officials need to be extremely confident in their abilities and in the calls that they make. This added pressure from such a huge responsibility could affect an official's confidence.

While this is a good objection, it does not mean that this type of officiating would not work. There are plenty of other positions in sports that put people in positions of high pressure and high responsibility, and they succeed. Just because a position comes with



pressure and responsibility, does not mean that people cannot succeed in that position. It just takes a certain type of person to do so. Officials are highly trained in what they do. Just like athletes, officials start off in recreational leagues and minor leagues before they are thrust into a position with a high level of responsibility. Also, they are not promoted before they are ready to handle the types of situation they will encounter as a higher ranking official. So even though asking officials to be subjective does add a lot of responsibility to their jobs, it is the type of job that prepares its occupants to be ready for that responsibility.

It is important to keep this idea in mind as we discuss officiating as a whole. The traditional view held by most people is that officials are supposed to call every infraction that occurs during the course of game. I do not agree with this idea. I think the ideas presented in the Tower Philosophy are worth considering. While it lacks a certain specificity, I think that it is heading in the right direction. The Tower Philosophy could be usefully modified by adding a distinction between types of fouls. While this may be implied with the Tower Philosophy, I feel obligated to spell it out to avoid any type of confusion.

Flagrant or intentional fouls should always be called. No player should be allowed to continually foul another player even if those fouls do not affect the game. However, those fouls that are deemed incidental by the official and do not affect the game should be ignored. With this distinction, there will be fewer unnecessary stoppages of play, but players will still be protected from malicious players on opposing teams.

This distinction is important because without it, fouling can actually be to an advantage of certain players. If a player knows that the fouls he commits that do not

affect play will not be called, he may be encouraged to foul other players. The reason for this could be to cause harm to a player, or wear down a player's morale. When an athlete continually gets fouled, he or she will begin to get frustrated and lose their poise, causing their play to suffer. By achieving either one of these outcomes, a team may gain an advantage, and the fact that officials are ignoring fouls that do not affect play would allow this behavior to take place. Player safety must always be protected. If a player knows he can get away with harming the opposing team, he or she may take advantage of that, so officials must let players know that behavior that endangers participants will not be tolerated. By making a distinction between flagrant/intentional fouls and incidental fouls, officials have the tools and reason to keep malicious players from taking advantage of the Tower Philosophy. It also gives us a working, over-arching goal for officiating that we can use to frame the discussions in the rest of this project.

## *II. Types of Officiating*

There are two basic types of officiating. There is the mainstream version, which usually comes to mind when people think about professional sports. To avoid confusion this will be referred to as "outside officiating" or "professional officiating". This is when the organizing body of the sport employs (whether through compensation or volunteering) someone or some people to be unbiased officials, unrelated to any team, to control the game's rules and code of conduct. The other type of officiating is what will be called "self-officiating". This is when there are no "outside" officials. The players of the game control the rules and code of conduct while they play the game. Historically, this would be the kind of officiating done when friends play a game of "pick-up". People who do not have the resources to have outside officiating often turn to this type of officiating

instead. Mainstream thought is that self-officiating is something done in the absence of outside officiating, and thus not as useful or effective. However, more sports are adopting this type of officiating at higher levels of competition. Self-officiating deserves a modern comparison against outside officiating, and not only to determine which is more useful and effective, but also what other implications accompany each type of officiating.

Let us begin this comparison with the type of officiating that I am most familiar with, namely self-officiating. The biggest, and most obvious, downfall to self-officiating is that it is very easy for players to take advantage of the rules. When the entire sport relies on players keeping the game running smoothly and fairly, it seems inevitable that some players will use that fact to gain an unfair advantage on the field. For example, there is no unbiased participant when two ultimate frisbee teams compete, so there is no person to make sure players are not abusing the self-officiating system.

To understand an example of what I mean you must know a little about the sport. Any player can call a foul on any other player at any time. When this happens, play stops and the accused player must either accept the call or contest it. If the call is accepted, the appropriate measures are taken to make sure play remains fair, and play continues. If the call is contested, then play will restart from the point before the alleged infraction took place. This makes it very easy for less athletic and less skilled players to curb their deficiencies by calling erroneous fouls. The game must stop, and this ruins any rhythm or momentum that a team may have gained.

This problem is not unique to ultimate frisbee. Other self-officiated sports like tennis and golf have similar problems. In tennis, the players call all the “in/out” calls whenever the ball is in their court. The call is entirely up to them. At higher levels of

competition there are often judges added to make sure players are fair, but we will discuss the different implications of levels of competition later. It is easy to see how a player could simply call a ball “out” even though it was “in” in order to score a cheap point. In golf, the fouls that a player might call are called on themselves. Anytime a player breaks a rule it is often up to them to call a foul on themselves. This could be anything from accidentally touching the ball with their club, or even having the ball move after a golfer has set up to hit it (called “addressing” the ball). In most cases the result is a stroke penalty. The reason is that even though the ball may only move slightly, it could result in a better lie, allowing the golfer to make stronger contact on his next stroke (thus giving them an unfair advantage). The sport relies on golfers calling their own fouls because often the individual player is the only one close enough to see these infractions. Many players do follow this code of ethics, but it is hard to know how many people do not, because they do not make people aware that they are cheating. This type of abuse of the rules is hard to control in any type of self-officiating situation.

Another problem that self-officiating poses in ultimate frisbee is that with fourteen players on the field, there are fourteen people who have the ability to stop the flow of the game. As explained before, the best officiating happens when officials focus on keeping the game fair instead of enforcing every rule, all the time. However, this as a concept is extremely hard to control when every player in the field has the ability to stop play and call a foul. It is a rare occasion that all the players on the field have this understanding of officiating. Thus, you get ineffective officiating. The game is stopped unnecessarily time and time again. While great officiators must be subjective when they officiate, it is hard for an involved player to be subjective in a fair way. They will always

have a tendency to notice all the rules the opposing team breaks without really taking into consideration if the offender gained an unfair advantage by breaking the rule. People's need for justice will make them want to call a foul on every person who breaks a rule without considering if it is worth stopping the momentum of the game or not. Not to mention, most sports move quite fast, and require athletes' undivided attention. Having to call one's own fouls adds another thing that athletes' must worry about.

Before we discount self-officiating however, it does have many positive aspects. One of the most unique things that comes with self-officiating is a need for a thorough understanding of the rules of the sport. When a player is responsible for calling his own fouls and having control over that aspect of the game, it forces him or her to have complete knowledge of the rules, not just to be able to call fouls accurately, but also to make sure that the opposing team is not cheating. In any sport, there are going to be players that are over-confident in their knowledge of the game and make fundamental mistakes because they are unaware of some specific rule that may have importance in a specific situation. However, when the players themselves are responsible for enforcing the rules and spirit of the game, then they are much more likely to study every aspect of the rules. In a way, self-officiating encourages athletes to be more informed about the sports they are playing.

It is possible to argue that players do not need to have an intricate knowledge of their sport to play it well. While there are certainly players who through natural athletic talent can become star players in their sport, without having complete knowledge of the game, one will always be playing at a fraction of their potential. No matter how athletic someone is, the more knowledge they have, the better off they will be. There is a

common argument that discusses whether brains or brawn is stronger. Brawn seems to be more akin to natural ability, but brains can be taught and learned (at least at higher levels of competition). Since brains can be taught it would seem obvious that this is where players can always grow their skills. However, there is also a value to knowledge that exceeds just being able to win. Knowledge itself within sports is intrinsically valuable. Not just knowledge of the rules, but how to play the sport well. When people learn to play a sport they love, they love that entire process. Without knowledgeable athletes, sports would be boring.

Knowledge has intrinsic value, meaning it has value in and of itself. People pursue knowledge for the sake of only gaining knowledge. They do not expect to get anything else out of it than knowledge itself. This is in contrast to items that have extrinsic value, like money. Money itself has no value, but it has value because of what it can get you. If our economy traded with shells and not money, money would have no value. Knowledge however, will always be valuable. No matter what changes, knowledge will continue to be valuable in and of itself. This includes knowledge of one's sports and of the rules governing one's sport.

Another positive aspect of self-officiating that needs to be considered is how it affects the spirit that surrounds the sport. With sports that are self-officiated, there is often a sense of an important ethical code that players follow. Golfers love to claim that their sport is the gentleman's sport because real golfers always call the appropriate penalties on themselves. There are many instances when players have called fouls on themselves over infractions that did not affect the game. While this would not be efficient officiating in the strict sense, the momentum and flow of a golf game are different than

that of any other sport. The point is that the ethical code that golfers play by is only possible because the sport involves self-officiating. This allows athletes to embrace a virtue of honesty and integrity. This unique ethical code is also prevalent in ultimate frisbee, but in recent years it seems to be under attack. (When we address levels of competition later we will see why). The pressure to call a fair game as a player and an official leads to players competing with a high level of honor and ethics (Harig).

This value of an ethical code is worth diving deeper into. There is something worth preserving above winning at all costs. Within every sport, cheaters are looked down upon by their peers and by their fans. Even if those cheaters are winners, their peers and fans will still feel that the shame brought upon them by playing unethically is not worth shouldering, even for a championship win. The reason behind this is because acting ethically has intrinsic value, while winning a game is mostly only extrinsically valuable, when compared to playing ethically. This means that within sports, ethics can stand alone as valuable, no matter what other circumstances surround it. When you compare this to winning, it quickly becomes obvious that playing ethical is more important than winning, or setting a record.

It is important to note something about the value of winning however. Winning does seem to have some intrinsic value in the form of excellence. Winning is one way to show that an organization is pursuing and achieving excellence. The important thing to remember though is that winning only shows excellence when it is done in an ethical way. Without ethical playing, winning does not show that a team is excellent, and that type of winning has no intrinsic value. It is only good for what else it can get you. Winning while playing ethically has a value of integrity, honesty, and excellence, all of

which have intrinsic value (value in and of themselves). This means ethical play has more value to people than winning does, because the former is required for the latter to have intrinsic value.

Obviously, winning is an important aspect in sports. It is important however to recognize when there is more at stake than just winning. The things at stake that we are talking about are virtues. Self-officiating allows for the virtues of honesty and integrity to rise above winning. When players are involved in calling their own fouls, they have the opportunity to show that they play with integrity and honesty. They are not only liable for following the rules, but for enforcing the rules as well. When players are only liable for when they get caught breaking the rules, they do not necessarily feel an obligation to act with integrity and honesty. However, when players know that they put their own reputations on the line as a player and official every time they play, they can be confident that they will be judged on their honesty and integrity whether they win or lose.

Many players claim to be involved in their respective sports “for the love of the game”. This simple phrase seems to mean that being involved in the sport itself is the only reason that these players need to be content. This would include acting within the bounds of the rules specified by the sport and conducting themselves ethically. By breaking the rules, a player’s actions say that they do not respect the conditions that the game is meant to be played under. Each rule is an equally important part of the sport. By ignoring even one rule, a player is saying that his or her sport is flawed and he or she does not think that playing within the parameters of the sport are worth it. Unethical behavior marks a player as someone who does not respect the sport that he or she is



involved in. This is why players that are responsible for enforcing their sports own ethical code, follow that code extremely closely.

Ethical behavior also matters to fans. When a favorite player is found cheating, and playing unethically, fans often turn on him or her. The reason for this is because fans look up to players. Fans expect players to be good examples of people who show they have virtue. No one wants to support a cheater. Fans feel betrayed when their player whom they have cheered for and supported ends up being a cheater. It also brings down the prestige of the sport itself. Fans do not care about a sport when the rules and conditions that they know the sport should be played by are ignored by players who only care about winning, or reaching a benchmark record. The reason for this is because fans know that a player's ethical behavior is intrinsically valuable.

An example of this is when Barry Bonds used steroids. Bonds wanted to increase the chances that he could beat both Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa in the homerun race to beat Hank Aarons record. To get ahead he used steroids. While this did increase the number of homeruns he hit, many fans turned against him when they found out he was using steroids. Steroids are illegal in them MLB, so Bonds use of them was clearly breaking the rules. He got caught breaking the rules and many of the people who looked up to him decided not to support him anymore (Williams).

This is in contrast to many sports that use outside officiating. Often, the sports that employ outside officiating methods have a spirit of competition that pushes players to get away with anything they can. Because players are not liable for enforcing the rules, the only care that they have is that they do not get put at a disadvantage. They do not care if the opposition gets put at a disadvantage, and even most times they relish the idea that

the opposition could be at a disadvantage. This means that players will try to break rules and put opposing teams at a disadvantage if they think they can do so without getting caught. One of the sports that embodies this best is football. One common phrase mentioned when people talk about football and officiating is that there is holding (a fairly common penalty in football) on every play, but it is only called when an official sees it. While this is probably not true, what it really means is that there is always someone trying to get away with something that puts the opposing players at a disadvantage.

This attitude is completely different from the one in self-officiated sports, and it is not prevalent in only football. Soccer also supports this idea in a different way. Instead of trying to get away with cheating, though, many soccer players try to trick officials into thinking that the other team is cheating. They take “dives”. The term means that they fake falls and over-exaggerate the affects of contact during play. Fouls are extremely important in soccer because if a player receives just one red card or two yellow cards then he or she is out of the game and the team must stay down a player. So players will attempt to fake major fouls in order to convince an official that he or she needs to give out a yellow card or a red card. While this seems incomparable to the self-officiated sports above one can compare it to a game of self-officiated “pick-up” soccer. Clearly there will not be any players taking a dive in a pick-up game because there are no officials for someone to trick. This difference in attitude definitely seems to be a drawback to outside officiating. In this example the attitude encourages the vices of greed and dishonesty, instead of encouraging virtue.

Ethical values in sports often seem to take a backseat position to winning. The competitive spirit that is inherit inside every human being makes people want to win.

While not every person is as competitive as the next person, those that play sports do have enough of a competitive drive to want to compete. This drive often accompanies a win at all costs attitude that clashes with the ethical values present in competitive sports. By having outside officials, there is a loss of accountability for the players. It is easier to ignore the ethical code of the sport when players know that it is not up to them to make sure that the ethical code is followed. Even though officials are employed to make sure that game is played fairly, that is not an excuse for players to ignore the ethical code inherit in the game. Like knowledge, ethics also has intrinsic value that should be preserved.

Another drawback is that with outside officiating there is the possibility of corruption. Corruption of officials is different from abusing the rules. When a player abuses the rules, their goal is to somehow affect the game in their own favor. Their motivation is a simple impulse of survival. They want every advantage to win the game. However, with corruption, there are many reasons that an outside official would be convinced to act outside moral convictions. In most professional sports where officials receive top salaries, those salaries are often not enough to sustain them and they have to take second jobs. This means that the possibility of bribery is always open. If officials cannot make enough money to sustain a lifestyle they want, then instead of taking another job, some may be susceptible to bribery. These bribes could come from people betting on games, extreme fans, players, or even owners and managers of teams. With outside officiating, this will always be a threat. While I have no doubt there are plenty of moral, upstanding officials that rise above this kind of behavior, there is no doubt some officials whose ethics are weakened by the opportunity to make more money. And even if

these officials are caught and reprimanded, the damage is already done and whatever sport they work in has been tarnished (Patterson, 9).

The best example of this type of scandal happening is when Tim Donaghy placed bets on games that he was officiating. He was a NBA referee who was caught betting on the outcomes of games that he had control over. He also provided insider information to friends who wanted to bet on NBA games. This happened several years ago, but the affect it had can still be felt. People do not trust NBA officials as much since this scandal took place (CNN.com).

Also, there is the potential for a snowball effect to occur here. Once a sport is labeled as “dirty”, it is hard to shake off that label. Once fans believe that a sport is corrupt and its players and officials are cheaters, then they will lose faith in the sport. Once a sport begins to lose fans, it becomes extremely hard to maintain the high levels of respect, competition, officiating, and ethical conduct that the sport is expected to maintain. As these levels fall, interest from investors and people who could save the sport begins to wane, hurting the sport even further. Basically, it is much easier to maintain the reputation as a high quality sports organization, than it is to reclaim that reputation once it has been lost. This threat is higher to sports that have more uncontrollable parts. Because outside officiating is a separate entity from the sports that use them, this is a very large uncontrollable part. This means that this threat is much higher in sports that use outside officiating.

Another problem that outside officiating has to deal with is a lack of resources. There is the lack of monetary resources mentioned above that seems to be the worst. The reason for this is that officials have their own governing body. When officials are

assigned games, paid, punished, and evaluated, it comes from a separate governing body from whatever sport they are involved in. So, just because a sport may make millions of dollars that does not mean the officials involved in that sport see a lot of that profit. The lack of significant monetary resources means that officials often try to work near where they live. That way they do not have to be burdened by travel costs. This means that sports that involve long distances of travel to play teams based far away are subjected to play under the officials located in that area. Sometimes officials will be forced to travel so the officiating governing body can make an attempt at exposing every team to a mix of different officials. Often however, the traveling team is exposed to a group of officials they are not familiar with, and that in itself gives the home team an unfair advantage (Rains 157-158).

It may seem that these problems could be easily solved, but the problem is that there is not a lot of interest in solving them. Solving these issues is not going to make any sports industry more profitable. There is also no more money to be made from the officiating side by addressing these issues. To me, the most effective way to address these issues would be to make officials a more intricate part of the sport they officiate. If officials are affected more by their sports (by receiving pay based on how profitable the governing body is, but also receiving pay cuts when the governing body does worse), then they would be more involved in making sure the sport is attractive to fans and players by being fair, and governing bodies would more concerned with fixing these issues. However, no million dollar industry is going to risk their profit by doing something like this.

Another disadvantage of the lack of monetary resources is that officiating bodies cannot afford to run charities. Some sports do not have the capital to begin an officiating program, and no other officiating program can afford to lose people, time, or money to help a sport trying to break into the outside officiating world gain a foothold. The best example of this is ultimate frisbee. This sport does not generate a lot of revenue. Any profit generated by USA Ultimate (the largest governing body in ultimate frisbee) is poured right back into raising awareness about the sport and improving playing conditions for players. Any type of attempt to experiment with a type of outside officiating is done through volunteer work. USA Ultimate cannot afford to pay people to learn how to become effective officials, and most people do not have the time to devote to becoming a professional official for ultimate frisbee, especially since once they have learned through all their volunteer work, they will continue to work as a volunteer and not receive a paycheck. This means that there is a complete lack of motivation for people to push ultimate frisbee to incorporate outside officiating.

There is also a lack of time and people in general for outside officiating. Since most officials cannot make enough money by just officiating they must take other jobs as well. This means that their time is split between jobs, so not every trained official is always available. However, the bigger problem is during the off-season. Like any other job, officials need to be involved with continued training and education about their respective sports. This is difficult when many officials must spend their off-seasons working another job. Not to mention the governing bodies for officials struggle with paying for continued training and compensating officials for taking continued training

courses. This means that some officials will not have sufficient knowledge on changes to rules or philosophies between seasons (Rains 155).

There is also a downside to outside officiating when it comes to the knowledge that players have about their sport. When players rely on outside officials to make sure that the game is going to be fair, it means that they do not feel pressure to know the rules inside and out like one does when one is their own official. While this may not seem like a big negative on the surface, I think it has deeper implications. When players do not know the rules completely it detracts from the game. While someone's technique and physical abilities are at their peak, it is often those who can think on their feet and capitalize on others' mistakes that are truly great athletes. Even if someone is smart, if they do not fully understand the boundaries that they play within they will not be able to take full advantage of their situation. It is also more fun for some spectators to see athletes come up with genius solutions to otherwise common obstacles on the field (Rains 155).

Do not think that outside officiating is all bad though. It does have plenty of positive aspects to it as well. One is that, as mentioned above, players do not feel pressured to know the rules inside and out. This means that they can focus on other things like technique and strategy. It makes many sports more accessible to both players and spectators. It is not imperative for every player to be a genius. This allows people who are just genuine, physical athletes to shine as well. It is a modern representation of the old adage brains versus brawn. Sometimes brains wins and sometimes brawn wins. However, with outside officials the brains versus brawn matchup evens out. When the officiating of the game depends on the players, the ones who know the rules best (brains) will have an

advantage. When players can rely on outside officials to keep things fair, then it is more of an even fight between the brains and the brawns, and that is always exciting to watch.

Another thing outside officiating does well is that it keeps games moving smoothly. This is a huge reason that spectator sports are so popular. When a sport is self-officiated there are often arguments when a foul is called, which causes lots of down time during play. This can be infuriating as a spectator. Imagine watching a movie and having it pause fifteen to twenty times throughout it. With outside officials controlling the game this would be much less common. When outside officials have control of the game, any foul calls that stop play are necessary (assuming they are officiating under the Tower Philosophy mentioned above). This is one of the main reasons that sports with outside officiating are usually spectator sports while those that use self-officiating are not. Because spectators seem to favor outside officiating, that is where they choose to spend their money. Outside officiating allows for faster, more exciting, and more consistent gameplay.

To reiterate, the goal of officiating is to keep the game fair, but to interfere as little as possible. Outside officiating is more efficient at keeping the game fair, but allows for more interference because they control the game. On the other hand, self-officiating allows for fair play, and only the players themselves can interfere in the game. It also seems to allow for players to more easily play with virtues and ethics, but it has more potential to be abused by players, making it effective, but perhaps not as efficient.

### *III. Other Avenues of Implicated by Officiating*

Now that we have a sense of the positives and negatives of each type of officiating, we must now explore each method in two more dimensions, the first being



what is at stake. This could be anything ranging from fame and money, to bragging rights and a drink at the bar. While each are vastly different and on opposite sides of the spectrum, they both drive people to be extremely competitive.

At the top end of the spectrum are those who play for fame and vast amounts of money. These are athletes who can make a living, and even a fortune playing sports. When money and fame are on the line, attitudes can be very different from playing a game in the back yard. Most people will do anything to gain an advantage. Historically the major sports that people can participate in that produce lots of fame and money are sports that use outside officiating. The reason for this is because the stakes are so high. Athletes know that they need every advantage to compete at the highest level. The reason that these athletes get so much reward is because people expect them to be the best and to win. This type of pressure can easily lead to players taking every advantage they can on the field. That is why when fame and money are on the line, outside officiating seems to be needed. Coaches and players in the National Football League, for example, are constantly getting fined and punished for cheating, and taking cheap shots during games. Without outside officials to control the game, these types of things could easily spiral out of hand.

The reason for this could be the added pressure. When people are under duress, often, they lose sight of their ethical values. Stress can make people fall back on their survival instinct and ignore their ethical values. When players are under enough stress to win, it becomes easier for them to rationalize abandoning their ethical values and do anything for a win. The problem is that this seems inevitable. There is no way to have high levels of quality competition, and not have the people involved under pressure.

Pressure can be a very good thing. It drives people to compete harder than they normally would; it just also has the unfortunate quality of urging people to cheat.

Also, when fame and money are on the line, people want to watch the competition because that is the highest level of competition. The money and fame also add more layers of pressure on athletes. Not many spectators really care about a pick-up game being played for bragging rights. Because people want to watch athletes compete whom they expect to perform perfectly, these spectators expect officials to keep the game moving smoothly. While they want a fair game, they are more concerned with being entertained, having outside officials to keep things consistent is important.

The other end of the spectrum is people who play for nothing except bragging rights. These athletes are driven by something totally different from those who are paid to play in front of thousands of spectators. However, it is important not to assume that these athletes do not care about the outcome of their games. They are just motivated differently. They are motivated by a sense of pride more than anything else (and pride has the potential to be a greater motivator than money and fame). While the televised events that most spectators watch are what come to mind when someone initially thinks about sports, in reality, the closest most people get to sports is playing for bragging rights. A greater number of people have played football in someone's yard than in a field for an NFL football team. This is where self-officiating shines. One of the obvious reasons for this is that athletes playing for nothing more than bragging rights are not going to pay someone to officiate their game. But, more importantly, this is the kind of environment where the ideals of self-officiating can be valued. The pressure that is on professional athletes is lifted from those just playing a pick-up game. Players can afford to be

responsible for officiating their own games because they do not have to cater to spectators, and their love of the game will help them retain a moral fiber. Not to mention, no one wants to ruin a pick-up game by being a cheater. The “spirit” of a pick-up game is to play hard and have fun, by being both a player and an official to make sure the game runs smoothly. Do not think that these athletes play with any less intensity than those playing for fame and money.

The other dimension that needs to be explored is the level of competition. This dimension has a wide variety of options. At one end, you have professional sports where people make a living playing sports. And at the opposite end you have people playing to just pass the time and have fun. These two options line up with the discussion above about what is at stake when people play, but there are some specific, common examples of different types of levels of competition that need to be examined.

One is pee wee sports. The point of pee wee sports is not only to teach children how to play a sport, but all the morals that come with it. Pee wee sports are supposed to teach kids morals, ethics, and sportsmanship. The best type of officiating for kids to use growing up is self-officiating. Outside officiating has its place as well, because it can be used instructionally while new players learn the basics of their sport. But, self-officiating will teach them valuable lessons as soon as they are mature enough to start playing games using self-officiating. By using self-officiating at a young age, children are instilled with the importance of fairness and ethical behavior. The negatives that accompany self-officiating are related to a natural immoral behavior driven by the greedy need to win at all costs. If children can learn to play sports with a healthy level of intensity and

competition but ignore their need win at all costs, then all sports may eventually adopt a spirit of fairness in competition.

Another specific avenue of competition to look at is club sports or intramural sports. These are groups of people who already have a passion for their sport, and want to be part of that sport community. This type of competition also seems to adopt the self-officiating policy. Many clubs cannot afford to pay officials, but many would not get officials even if they could. Club sports and intramural sports tend to foster a very competitive attitude. However, the athletes that compete in them are not pressured to win like those playing at the professional level. This removes some of the temptation to take advantage of the rules and to avoid the win at all costs mentality. The fact that they do not get paid means that they love the sport for the sport's sake, not for any material gain they get from playing. This type of attitude is the one that is fostered and supported by self-officiating.

The important thing to remember at this point is that a decision still needs to be made about which type of officiating is better. This decision must be made within certain boundaries and definitions. The most important one is what the goal of officiating is. As discussed earlier, the Tower Philosophy makes an interesting point that we dissected to fine tune the goal of officiating. The goal is to keep the competition fair, but in a way that does not detract from the momentum and spirit that is inherent during gameplay. Both types of officiating do this, but each has advantages over the other. The difficult thing to decide is which one achieves its goal most effectively, and most efficiently. The answer comes within the two dimensions of sports that we investigated. The first being what is a stake for the athletes, and the second being the level of competition. After some

consideration we can see that these dimensions are dependent upon each other to an extent. The more that is at stake, the higher potential the level of competition has to rise. With higher stakes, and higher competition, comes an attitude change in the athletes that play the game. Athletes that compete at higher levels, and who have more at stake during the game, will play with a win at all costs attitude that can blind them from being effective on the field officials. In the end, when the stakes are at their highest, and competition is at its highest, outside officiating is the way to go. However, at any other time athletes should try to attempt to use self-officiating. Self-officiating more effectively meets the goals of officiating. When players understand the rules and the spirit behind the game well enough to officiate their own gameplay, then sports have reached their highest calling. Self-officiating is a purer sense of officiating under our goal. Unfortunately, human nature dictates that it is not efficient enough to be used at the highest levels of competition. Therefore, in the majority of professional sports self-officiating must give way to outside officiating.

As we sit now there are many irreconcilable weaknesses in both self-officiating and outside officiating. Each also has its own set of unique strengths that the other cannot emulate. This means that each is a better fit for certain sports, and would not work at all for others. The first two sports that immediately come to mind are football and basketball. These sports seem to need outside officials. With the type of play that is encouraged by the spirit that surrounds these two sports, it seems necessary for them to use outside officiating. While this is not my favorite style, it does seem necessary because both of these sports have play at levels and physicality that requires a trained outside official to regulate.

As for self-officiating, my experience in ultimate frisbee leads me to say it works very well with that sport. Play is almost built around this idea, which makes it a very unique sport. It also works very well with golf and tennis. Golf and tennis are sports that have less moving parts than football and basketball, which makes it easier to self-officiate. They also have less of an aggressive spirit to them than football and basketball. This means that the positives that are brought by self-officiating can easily find a home with golf and tennis. One sport that I would like to see attempt self-officiating is soccer. The one thing that most non-soccer fans say they dislike about soccer is the “dives” that players take to fake an injury in an attempt to get a foul called. This would be almost non-existent if the sport were to use self-officiating. It would take a long time for players to learn not to take advantage of the system, but I think the sport would be greatly improved if self-officiating was at least attempted.

#### *IV. A Third Option*

At this point I would like to introduce a possible third officiating option. Instead of being forced to pick either outside officiating or self-officiating, a third option is to combine the two. My only experience with this so far has been with ultimate frisbee. Within ultimate frisbee there is a movement to combine the two opposing types of officiating. The sport would still involve all of the aspects of self-officiating, but would incorporate some aspects of outside officiating into it. It is used in ultimate frisbee to curb some of the disadvantages of self-officiating. Basically, it is a system of self-officiating that uses “passive” officials that are called observers. The role of the observer is not to control the game, but to control the officiating. Observers do not call fouls on anyone; they simply act as someone to appeal to when two players disagree about a call and

cannot come to an agreement. In this way, the sport can have the best parts of outside officiating and the best parts of self-officiating.

As discussed earlier, two of the major problems with self-officiating are people abusing the rules and numerous stoppages in play. With this hybrid type of officiating, these two problems are significantly reduced. When people take advantage of the ability to call their own fouls they can control the game; however, with observers, all the opposing players need to do is bring the foul in question to the observer and he or she will have the final say in the argument. This results in shorter stoppages of play and hopefully less stoppages once players come to realize that their incorrect or marginal foul calls will not be supported by the observer.

The plus side is that it also keeps most of the advantages that come with self-officiating. Because players still have to call their own fouls they need to have an intricate knowledge of the rules. They also still need to act within the sport's ethical code and are encouraged to do so by this officiating system. It becomes clear very quickly when a player is attempting to act unethically because the observer (assuming he is also very knowledgeable about the sport) will overturn someone who is trying to cheat.

Unfortunately, having observers also opens up new disadvantages for the sport. Just as with outside officiating, observers can be biased and corruptible. Also, they may not know the rules well. The important thing here though is to remember that they are "passive" officials. If an entire game is played and no argument occurs over a foul call, then the observers will have had no opportunity to be involved in the game at all. This effectively curbs the amount that these disadvantages can affect the game.

I believe that in principle this type of officiating is the best. Self-officiating offers more value than outside officiating because it has intrinsic value. With self-officiating the ethical code that is inherent in many sports is upheld by the players in that sport. This ethical code has intrinsic value that outside officiating does not have. But as mentioned above, it is sometimes not practical. In higher levels of competition self-officiating is not used because it is too easily abused. With a mix of these two (using observers) we are able to keep most of the value aspect connected to self-officiating, and it increases its usefulness. Since this type of officiating has only been used effectively in ultimate frisbee though there is not enough research behind it to see how it would work across all sports. I think it has a lot of potential to fix problems presented by both self-officiating and outside officiating.

The biggest potential problem that officiating with observers has, is that it is still not as efficient as using active outside officials. So at the highest levels of competition officiating with observers may still not catch on, or be the best option. This is something that would need to be attempted to see if it would work. However, in the short term it will take someone who is okay with taking risks. If officiating with observers was given a chance at the highest levels of competition I think it could solve the lack of value problem that outside officiating has and the lack of efficiency problem that self-officiating has, therefore improving all sports that use officiating by achieving the goal of officiating efficiently and effectively.

The only other sport that does something similar to this at higher levels of competition is golf. Golf uses rules officials. When a golfer needs to make a call, or is unsure about a certain rule, they must call in a rules official to make sure they do the right



thing. If they do not, they risk being disqualified from the tournament. While this type of observer officiating does not involve an official deciding an argument, they still act as “passive” officials, which is the important part of the definition of observer officiating.

I have argued that the goal officiating should be to keep games fair with a minimal amount of interference, and instilling virtue wherever possible. I have also argued that there are a total of three types of officiating that attempt to reach this goal. Outside officiating is quite capable of keeping games fair and doing so with minimal interference. Self-officiating also keeps games fair with minimal interference, but it also allows for players to easily buy into the ethical codes used by their respective sports. However, it is easily abused. Observer officiating combines the two. It keeps games fair with minimal interference, and supports ethical play. It also is harder to abuse this type system when compared to self-officiating.

The problem is that observer officiating will not work for all sports. In sports like football, there is already too much of need for outside officiating. That sport breeds people to become extremely aggressive. It has potential to work in the NBA and in MLB. I know it works well in ultimate frisbee and golf as well. Observer officiating offers a happy medium between the other two extremes, and should be used whenever possible. It would be folly to think though that there is one type of officiating that would work in every situation. Each type has strengths that allow them to cater toward different sports based on the things that sport emphasizes. While I still hold that observer officiating is the best way to official overall, it will not work in every situation, which is why we have different types of officiating in the first place.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this argument, my interest in this debate springs from my involvement in ultimate frisbee. The sport has traditionally been a self-officiated sport where the “spirit” that one plays with has been extremely important. Players used to always emphasize how important ethical play was, but things are beginning to change. At first I was resistant to this change. I thought that the fact the sport used self-officiating was a unique aspect it had that I did not want to see changed. That is until I experienced observer officiating. This will definitely be an improvement for the sport. As mentioned before, the biggest downside to self-officiating is how easy it is for players to take advantage of the system. This was one of the biggest problems for ultimate frisbee as well. Once teams got heated, it was too easy for players to make bad calls and take advantage of the system when they were mad. Observer officiating fixes this problem for the most part. While players can still make bad calls, with an observer, the bad calls will be overturned. The thing that I realized I loved about self-officiating was the ethical play it encouraged, and how an intricate knowledge of the sport was required to succeed. This would not be lost with observer officiating. Because the officials are passive, players still need to call their own fouls, and to do that effectively they need to know the rules well. The fact that players still need to call their own fouls also means that the value of ethical play will be preserved. I think that with ultimate frisbee moving toward an observer officiated system, it will be taken more seriously as a sport. While it is a step in the right direction, I would warn other players that moving too far toward outside officiating would be a mistake because the sport would lose much of its uniqueness. However, as things stand now, observer officiating seems to be a very efficient and effective way to control the fairness of the game.



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