



A Tennis Official's State of Mind

Most tennis matches are completed without on-court officials or problems. How then should we view our role as officials?

Officials serve two purposes:

1. Make sure opponents do not take unfair advantage of any circumstances.
2. See that the match is carried out according to the rules of tennis.

Players play matches, officials don't. Officials should be "*invisible*" until needed. Match outcomes should be determined by the merits of the competitors alone and not affected by the intervention of officials. I like to say that I help players "*manage*" their match. I don't "*run*" their match for them. My role is to assist players as they play their match. I may never have to intervene in a match if there is no need for me to do so as I fulfill my dual purpose. A great match is one in which nobody even knew that an official was present!

I generally see two basic shortcomings in officials:

1. Overly officious, dictatorial management, as in, "I'm in charge and I want everyone to know it". These umpires intervene too much.
2. The timid, "I hope nothing happens that I have to deal with in this match, but that my sheer presence is enough for these players to tow the line". These umpires intervene too little.

I believe both shortcomings can be avoided and overcome. The overly officious approach can be diminished by realizing that you are there to help players manage their match and not to run it for them. Having a thorough knowledge of the rules and gaining more experience as you apply them can help overcome the second shortcoming. Viewing your role as a member of an on-court team that includes all officials as well as the players will help you become seamlessly integrated into the match.

The trademark of good officials and well officiated matches is when we are effective doing our job while being invisible.