

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT A HOCKEY REFEREE

Let's "take a look" at the official who is alleged to be responsible for the inability of players to score goals and teams to win games. He is the living barrier who mysteriously transforms victory to defeat. What are the qualifications and is there anything to be said in his defense?

In the first place, the **IDEAL referee must be an apt student, who is letter perfect in the laws of hockey and their interpretation.** Unlike judges in our courts, **he must see the crime, identify the offense and hand out the sentence – not later in the day, tomorrow or next month, but all within seconds.**

Next, the **IDEAL** referee must be good skater and physically sound. A player can get frequent relief, but officials must be on the ice for the entire game. Moreover, hockey officials are expected to act as peace officers and prevent crime by restraining angry players who intent upon "beating up" their opponents.

An **IDEAL** referee, and there is no such person, should have the speed of a sprinter, the endurance of a marathoner, the tact of a diplomat, the mind of a professor and the unruffled demeanor of a supreme court judge. It would also help if he had 20 – 20 vision and was stone deaf.

Fans, players, coaches and management alike expect too much of officials. Few players ever think their sentence was deserved; coaches shriek in anguish at a borderline offside call; and fans view with alarm, every decision that goes against their favorites. Yet contrastingly, a judge has his judgment appealed and his decision repealed without loss of prestige. No less than perfection is expected from the versatile hockey official.

It is an old but valid argument that referees don't make rules; they are merely agents charged with the responsibility of enforcing the laws as provided by the rule book. The fact that players trip, charge, smear or high stick is not the referee's fault any more than a police officer is responsible for the actions of offenders who break society's laws.

Few men are so constituted that they can suffer silently while they are publicly criticized. While it is unlikely that hockey' governing bodies will do much to ease the referee's life while the sport is enjoying a prolific boom, it does seem that there should be less official criticism of referees and linesmen. For instances, it isn't fair to second - guess them with slow motion film. The man on the ice has to call the penalty instantly; he can't wait for the crowd to tell him and he can't see what goes on behind his back. Neither can he ponder over borderline incidents in his private chambers nor delay a decision momentarily while waiting for the instant replay. He just has to do the best he can based on his years of experience. He doesn't expect to be popular; but he has the right to be recognized as the representative of the lawmakers and to be spared from the public humiliation and criticism from those who themselves involved in the development of the sport.

Certainly, hockey cannot exist without officials; so we had better learn to live with them and, who knows, we might even learn to like them.