Head of ACC Refs Says Quality Lagging

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The quality of basketball officiating is lagging behind improvements in the game itself, says the director of referees in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It hasn't kept up because we haven't given it the attention and spent the money to keep it up," said Norvall Neve, Assistant ACC Commissioner in charge of officiating.

"A lot of money has been spent on the game, on coaches and on players, but not on officiating. It's lagging behind because of the lack of attention."

Neve, an advocate of adding a third official to college basketball courts, said the quality of officiating is below par across the country, not just in the ACC.

"If we're talking about just doing things in the ACC, it isn't going to do much good. It's just a drop in the bucket. Improvements need to be made nationally," he said.

Neve made his comments from his Greensboro office, after speaking on the subject to the Raleigh Sports Club. He said adding the third official in ACC games would be a deterrent to fouling.

"But the big objection is that we'll be hurting ourselves if we use three for conference play and then get in the NCAA playoffs where they'll have two," he said.

The ACC would likely wait and see what other conferences do before taking action on the third referee proposal, Neve said. The Big Ten currently uses three officials in its conference contests.

Although noting that there will be criticism as long as there are basketball officials, Neve said more money would allow the conference to film basketball games as coaches do, with an eye toward improving officials' performance.

He said the conference would also like to establish tryout and training camps for referees, and revise its fee schedule. "Ours is the only place where a beginner can go in and earn as much as a 10-year veteran," Neve said in an interview. The ACC pays officials $120 a game.

"Younger officials are needed, but the problem is in recruiting them," he said. "We need to recruit coaches and ex-players. But they've been around. They want no part of it."

Russell apparently prefers to treat the players as objects of scorn, rather than as young men playing a tough game.

At one time Wednesday night, a moving pick was called on UVa. The Virginia player with the ball, Garland Jefferson, shot the ball at the basket and headed to the opposite end of the floor along with the other nine players.

Russell turned to Jefferson and said, "Go get the ball." Jefferson, a mere freshmen player before a lot of friends and family, did as he was told.

Better that he should have ignored Russell and continued down the floor, but that might have cost him a technical.

I object strenuously to the way Russell walks around on the floor like a bantam rooster waiting to be challenged. He does not look, he prefers to stare with malice.

Russell obviously does not like to have his authority challenged. Unfortunately, Hartman got caught up in the same trend Wednesday night and the result was four technical fouls, one on Holland and three on UVa players.

You and I both know that coaches often deserve technicals. There have been few called this year, I presume because of the severe two-shot penalty. Certainly Holland is not blameless. He probably complains more to officials than any other ACC coach.

But I suggest to you that no coach is going to draw a technical foul when his team is shooting a two-shot foul, and coaches know when the technicals are coming. That's when Holland was hit with his "T".

I would also make a guess that at least two of the three UVa players who drew technicals did not swear at the officials. Admittedly they expressed unhappiness at the calls, but that happens all the time and no technicals are called.

It is up to you to decide if John Russell is a competent official. But I'll inform you of one thing. Unless Russell changes his on-court attitude, he'll ruin every game he works. Personally, I hope I don't seem him officiate again.

Sincerely,