

The Montel Rule

Gary Montel is a prominent basketball official in CO and has pioneered a technique that can easily be applied to other sports, particularly football. The “Montel” rule deals with unsporting conduct by coaches; he refers to it as an “accumulation technical.”

The rules specifically prohibit criticism of the officials and the use of foul language. The vast majority of coaches steer clear of those transgressions. However, some coaches have developed the skill to push the envelope to the limit through repeated and voluminous commentary. Each comment is seemingly innocuous and within the limit of the rules, but the incessant barrage eventually creates a distraction. The Montel rule allows each official to privately establish his own threshold of tolerance and when the limit is reached, a technical foul for “excessive commentary” is assessed.

In football, the foul would be declared unsportsmanlike conduct under the provisions of Rules 9-8-1b-d which prohibit commentary relating to officials. The official may or may not choose to issue a warning before calling a foul. In some cases, a warning may be appropriate and is recommended if possible, “Coach, I’ve heard enough,” or “Stop, you’ve made your point.”

Brief exclamations such as “Oh, no!” or “That wasn’t interference.” or requests like “Can you watch for holding on #65?” are acceptable. Football is a game of emotion and no attempt should be made to stifle normal reactions. Comments such as “They are holding on every play” or “If you’re not going to call holding today, just let me know” are inappropriate and are attempts to influence decisions or question judgment.

Here are some additional comments that in isolation would ordinarily be ignored. “Call it both ways” implies the officials are biased and are favoring one team over the other. “I’ll show you the film” indicates a call was incorrect. “You’ll never work here again” is a way of saying the official is not worthy and can also be construed as attempted intimidation. Any remark similar to the preceding that includes the word “you” is inappropriate and should not be tolerated.

Officials have wide discretion in giving advisements and setting limits – warnings if you will. NFHS rules specifically provide a sideline warning for the first physical violation of the team box.

In some parts of the country, officials have adopted the formal sideline warning to deal with rhetoric from the bench. While that may work, it is not part of the intent of the rule. Regardless of whether the warning is formal or informal, the Montel rule works best when the coach receives an indication that he has said too much.

The Montel rule by its nature appears to promote inconsistency because the threshold will vary not only from crew to crew but by game to game. That isn’t necessarily bad because each game is different and coaches generally behave somewhat differently from week to week. The only way to achieve thorough consistency is to enforce the letter of the conduct rules without exception. Thus, if it doesn’t directly involve the coaching of players, it shouldn’t be said. There are very few coaches who can meet that standard.