

2016

An Autoethnography of Becoming an NCAA Basketball Official

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF BECOMING AN NCAA BASKETBALL OFFICIAL

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Master's Project

Submitted to the School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies
Bowling Green State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In

Sport Administration

November 30, 2016

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Acknowledgements

Now that I have completed my project there are many people I need to thank for assisting with my success in the graduate program at Bowling Green State University. First, I would like to thank Dr. Spencer, my advisor. Thank you for not only giving me guidance, but also preparing me and working endlessly with me in doing qualitative research; you really helped me throughout the process of completing this project. You have helped me gather and organize all of my ideas into this project, and have given me advice for the future that I will take with me once I leave BGSU. I would also like to thank Dr. Meek, my second reader. I had two very professional and reliable BGSU faculty members helping me with my research.

I would also like to thank the faculty members I have met over the past two years. I have learned so much from you in your areas of expertise. You have all made my learning experience special here at BGSU.

I would also like to thank my coaches that I had here at BGSU who have all inspired me to work in athletics. I had great examples of administrators and coaches who genuinely care about student-athletes and college athletics.

I would also like to thank my godfather Gerald Ewing. Thank you for always seeing potential in me; if it were not for our tight bond, I would not have the opportunity to accomplish so many great things, including this project. I can never thank you enough for your love and support.

A final thank you goes to my parents and family. Thank you for supporting me every step of the way. If it were not for you investing in my basketball skills, I would not be here today. Now I can leave Bowling Green with a master's degree and completely debt free. I could not ask for a better family.

Self-Reflection

I am approaching the final stretch of my 2nd year and the victory lap of my project. Entering graduate school, I had no idea what I wanted to do for my final project. Especially when I entered my first semester of grad school, I was still a senior captain on the women's basketball team. Unfortunately, I did not make the most of my academic opportunities during my first year because I was so wrapped up in basketball. Basketball has and always will be a part of my life. Up until last year, I thought I was going to go into coaching. I was convinced I was going to be the next Pat Summit. After conducting my first study in Dr. Berger's research methods class on the underrepresentation of women in athletics and researching the numbers in athletics, I grew discouraged. I did not think I could handle the heavy hours either, I wanted something more flexible.

When my godfather Gerald called me with literally life changing information, I realized I had found out exactly what I wanted to do with my life. Being a 22-year-old, I thought that this was the greatest day of my life and, at the time, it was. My godfather told me about all the wonders of officiating in basketball. It offers flexibility, travel opportunities, staying connected to the game, and a pay that will allow me to live comfortably. Officiating has not only allowed me to get through graduate school but it has helped me become a better person. Becoming a referee allowed me to serve as a role model to the kids, especially since I am officiating back home where I grew up playing. When I get to the Division I level, I want the student-athletes to look up to me just like the high school players do.

Working on my project has been challenging and exciting because my topic is exactly what I want to do. I have enjoyed collecting my research through my own experiences. My journal entries and notes from my camps and classes have made this experience much easier for

me. As I travel home this weekend to officiate my first games of the 2016-2017 season, I will reflect on my notes from my project to prepare me for my games. If it were not for this auto-ethnography I'm not sure if I would be the same official today. The project is a result of my growth as a young lady and an official and I am grateful for this experience.

Abstract

Officiating has become one of the best-kept secrets in sports and many former athletes have developed interest in becoming game officials. The purpose of this study is to provide information and insight to aspiring former athletes who wish to pursue an alternative career path related to athletics. This project uses auto ethnography and incorporates literature about the process of becoming an official, experiences of veteran officials, and how I began my officiating career. In writing about my experiences as a novice basketball referee, I have kept a journal/log in which I document my experiences and reflect upon officiating. In the process of recording and reflecting upon my personal experiences, I have discovered that becoming an official may not be for everyone. As a new referee, it is important to know one's mechanics, including the rules and regulations of the conference for which you officiate. Conference and referee associations will not choose anyone who is not polished in those areas. When one officiates at the NCAA level, one must adjust to the travel demands of a full-time Division I official. The literature and my experiences suggest it has been difficult to identify and retain qualified women officials. Thus, the NCAA is seeking former women players who wish to officiate basketball games. Most officials who appear on TV tend to be older white males who may or may not have played the game. Many officials end their officiating careers due to disrespect and stress they encounter. Some fans, coaches, and players make it difficult for officials to continue to officiate because of the hostility during and after games. This study is important for those who are interested in becoming officials and will hopefully spark an interest in former college women players who wish to continue a career in sport.

Introduction

Many former college athletes understand how difficult it is to walk away from one's sport once their eligibility is up. Once my NCAA basketball eligibility had expired, I felt that I was lost without basketball. Earning a scholarship and playing for 4 years is one of my major accomplishments to this day. My coaches at BGSU made it extremely hard for me to walk away from basketball after my college playing days. At BGSU, Curt Miller was the head coach, but after my freshman year. Jennifer Roos (Curt's associate head coach) became the BGSU head coach and she is still the head coach. Curt Miller was my college coach at Bowling Green State University and was hired at Indiana University after my first year. Now Curt is the General Manager and Head Coach for the Connecticut Sun. When I entered my first semester of graduate school, the realization that I would never play in another game started to take a toll on me. I knew I had to stay involved in sports somehow, somehow. I thought I wanted to enter coaching, as many former athletes do.

I always thought I wanted to coach, so why am I having these misgivings?

Flipping through articles on coaching in division I athletics, I began to have second thoughts.

There's no way I can make it in coaching, people say it's too political – 'it's all about who you know,' – that's what people have told me,

What if I don't have time for myself?

I already had a tough time being a student athlete – with injuries and long hours of practice - how would I possibly survive as a full-time (assistant) coach?

There's no room for failure... there are so many things that could possibly get me fired that are completely out of my control – players who are ineligible, failed drug tests, etc.

The odds are already against me – there aren't that many black female coaches in Division I athletics who are hired (and successful) at big-time institutions.

If I can't even picture myself being great and enjoying my job, then what are the chances of me succeeding?

Another hour passes as I continue to flip through articles, trying to find something that inspires me, but to no avail.

It's time to take a break. *Maybe I can find a college football game to watch.*

As I flip through the channels, my phone vibrates.

Hello? JAAAAZZ!!!

It's my godfather, Gerald.

My godfather and I have a genuinely strong relationship because he has been there for me the majority of my life. Gerald is now the head coach for Trinity Valley Community College down in Athens, Texas. We usually talk basketball about once a month. Gerald was my AAU coach when I was in 5th grade. Ever since then, he always seems to know when something is bothering me whether I am face to face with him or not.

"You still stuck on coaching huh?" he asked.

Guess who's been talking to my dad.

"Well, if I were you, I'd turn my attention somewhere else, somewhere you probably NEVER would have thought of before. But, you need to be open-minded and do some research."

At this point, I have no idea what he is talking about but I am willing to look into almost anything, within reason.

"Well, what is it?" I ask.

“Officiating! Let me tell you why, Jazz,” he began. “I love being a coach because I love the fact that I get to work with kids and young women but there are a lot of things that come with this job that have me thinking... ‘*Whoa, I did NOT sign up for this whatsoever.*’ And there are things that keep me up at night that shouldn’t because they are completely out of my control, but I still have to be concerned about them, and that’s probably my *least* favorite thing about my job!”

I already know some of those things that my godfather is talking about, but what is so great about officiating? And why does he think this is something I would want to do?

He continues, “If I could go back in time, I’d be a referee before I was a coach. You don’t have to deal with people for a prolonged period of time like I do. Yes, you still might have to deal with screaming mad parents, coaches, and players, but other than that, it is completely worth it. Assigners are looking for former players – especially females – to hire for games, because all you see today are older, out-of-shape-guys that may or may not have played back in the day.”

My godfather is starting to persuade me... I’m thinking, ‘wow! He really hasn’t said one thing yet that would completely dissuade me from officiating!’

He continues... “The reason I’m telling you this is because you can have an actual career with this, Jazz, and it won’t take you ten years to become well-established and move up. Not only do I think you are smart enough to be an official, but I think you’ve got the character and the personality to be a great referee and I’m not just saying that. To be a good referee, you have to get down your mechanics and understand how to report fouls, but to be a *great* referee; you have to walk the walk. You need to have tough skin, which you have. You have to be in shape and physically fit, because conference referee assigners look to see if you have the appealing

body of a referee. They won't hire you if you are overweight. And you have to be well-educated, which means most of the time, some sort of master's degree – which you will have.”

I'm thinking... I definitely need to look in to this because he is absolutely right! I possess all those qualities and I really could be good if I worked hard at it!

My godfather continues... “Another great part about being a referee that most people don't know about is the fact that it pays so well. Not that that's why you should do it, but for most games you officiate, the checks will be provided to you after the game, which is obviously pretty nice. Most high school games pay about \$50-\$65 for a game, which you'll learn early because that's most likely what you'll be doing for the first year. But once you move up and advance, JUCO/NAIA¹ will pay \$75-125, an average D II game will pay about \$200-\$250. Once you get to college, it's anywhere from \$750-\$3000 a game, which adds up over the course of the week, especially if you are doing this full-time.”

“Holy Crap! That's a huge amount of income for the week!” I start dreaming, and imagining if I actually did this and was legitimately good at it, I could really make a good living for myself.

Gerald continues, “Again, I'm not telling you this because I want you to do it for the money, but because there is an exact need for young referees and I believe that you have what it takes to become a big-time, top-tier official in Division I athletics. I will not set the bar there, the opportunities are endless. The NBA is starting to hire some female officials for games as well. And, of course, after the NCAA season, you can give Curt Miller a call and try to see if he can get you some WNBA games or even NBA D-league games, too. But let me know what you think after you give it some true and honest thought. Really dig and do your research on this, then let

¹ JUCO is short for Junior College. NAIA stands for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics

me know because I have some people you should contact and connect with that will help you get started, okay?”

“Okay! For sure, I’ll call you in a week and let you know!”

After our talk, I sit for a while, reflecting on everything my godfather said. I’m thinking...

Maybe this is it for me. Maybe I have found exactly what I want to do with my life. I know people have these stories about their path and how they got to where they are today, and they had no idea they’d be into what they are doing. So maybe this is my time.

While doing research on officiating for hours and hours all night and morning of the next day, I took notes on each level of officiating (high school, NCAA, and professional). Realizing that this was something I really wanted to do, I called my godfather back a little sooner than I thought I would.

After speaking with my godfather, I wanted to connect with my college coach, Jennifer Roos, the current Head Women’s Basketball coach for Bowling Green State University. I sent her a text explaining my new future career plans and asking for help. I wanted her to link me to any officials she knew who would be willing to mentor me and help me along my journey. Coach Roos sent me the contact information for Patti Broderick, who happens to be the head women’s basketball national NCAA assigner.

When I connected with Patti, she found a class for me right in Bowling Green! She talked to the official who would be teaching the class and gave him my contact information. The next thing I knew, I was enrolled in my first Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) basketball officiating class two weeks later. Realizing that I had found my career path, I wanted

to learn as much as I could about officiating. That would be the only way I would stand out from other aspiring officials.

I will never forget my phone conversation with Gerald – it was really an epiphany, which was something we discussed in one of my grad classes. I took away so much more than I thought I would and looking at the ‘big picture’ I learned so much from that specific phone call. I not only found something strong enough to motivate me to start my graduate project, but I found my career path! I found something that would be life-changing for me. Officiating is something I want to do well, to grow and become one of the top officials in the country. Not only is officiating helping me stay involved in the game but it has allowed me to find my purpose in life.

The purpose of this study is to explore how one becomes an NCAA Division I basketball referee. My research question asks: What is it like for a female collegiate former basketball player to become a basketball official? In my initial research, I discovered that there was not much scholarly information on becoming a basketball official. As a result, I decided that my research project would be about my journey to become an official. My hope is that by documenting the process of becoming an official, I will be able to give aspiring athletes my perspective of what it’s like for a former Division I basketball player to transition into the world of officiating.

Review of Literature

The literature review for this study examines women in athletics and gives a general overview of officiating. The literature discusses the underrepresentation of women since the passage of Title IX in athletics and coaching. In addition, men tend to have most head coaching jobs on the men's side and even a significant number of jobs on the women's side. When talking about officiating the literature will describe how to become a certified official, levels of officiating, 2-person officiating vs. 3-person officiating, and the benefits of becoming an official.

Women in Athletics

As stated earlier in my introduction, after my undergraduate academic career I was ready to start applying for coaching positions. The literature explained that coaches, administrators, teachers, faculty, all females, in sport and in general are still not receiving the same opportunities as men. Walker (2011) explained women are marginalized and receive fewer "opportunities in the workplace than their male-counterparts" (p.13) Even as administrators, women do not get the same respect in the workplace as men do.

Women are sometimes granted head coaching positions in male sport. Acosta and Carpenter (2014) say that "men's sports that are typically coached by females include sports like "tennis, swimming, track and field or those sports that are labeled 'minor' sports." (p.18) Why can't women also coach major sports teams? Especially since men can coach women, why can the roles not be reversed? Even if women did have a chance at earning a head-coaching job on the men's side, why would they take it? There is going to be an unnecessary amount of extra pressure because she's a female coach on the men's side, there are already stereotypes about women; for example, "women are perceived to require stereotypical masculine behaviors."

(Burton, 2015, p. 160) Women already are put at a disadvantage because they don't seem to fit the personality profile of a head coach.

Acosta and Carpenter (2014) explained how Title IX has improved the overall numbers for female participation at all levels. A study on athlete leadership and Title IX states, "Title IX has forced schools to implement Title IX regulations, which created more jobs and opportunities for women." (Parnter, Deranek & Michel, 2014, p. 50) Unfortunately today, especially at the college level, women have still been denied women's basketball coaching positions and instead a male coach is hired. As DeHass (2009) pointed out, "Men routinely coach women; however, women are given much less access to coaching positions in the men's game" (p. 4). In addition, Walker (2011) also said that "women represent less than 3% while men own about 97% of male sports and own half of the women's sports jobs." (para. 3). I could not imagine being completely qualified for a head coach position and then being rejected in favor of a male candidate, who could just stay on the men's side and coach men's basketball. Women deserve a fair shot at earning heading coaching jobs, but "currently, women represent 42.6% of the head coaches in women's sports while men represent 57.4% of the head coaches in women's sports. In contrast, women represent less than 3% of the head coaches in men's sports." (Walker & Bopp, 2010, para.1) These numbers are alarming to anyone. Fortunately, this is not a proven factor in officiating, which is why I am more interested in taking the referee route as opposed to coaching even though I am unsure of the obstacles in officiating. Every former athlete finds his or her way back to their sport somehow. Bower and Hums (2013) mentioned that "seventy-six percent of the women admitted to competing in athletics drove them to want to have a career in athletics after eligibility" (p. 4). Officiating just so happened to be my gateway back to my favorite sport.

An Introduction to Officiating

When searching for scholarly literature about officiating, there was very little that was readily available. According to Smith (n.d.), “Officiating high school basketball is unquestionably the most challenging, demanding but rewarding high school sport to officiate.” (para.1) Becoming a good official not only takes time, but it takes hard work. The best officials don’t become great officials over night, and it most likely took time for them to become comfortable on the court and confident to make calls. Officials start at the bottom and work their way up. How then does one become an official?

Before becoming an official, you need to know the officiating basics. For a regulation game at all levels, you will need: a referee, an umpire, a scorer, a timer and a shot-clock operator. Ellis (2003) writes that “In some cases, eight officials are used: a referee, two umpires, a shot-clock operator, two scorers and two timers.” (para. 8) This surprises spectators and aspiring officials. People only assume that the officials on the floor are the only people controlling the tempo of games. However, not all those people wear the striped shirt and have a whistle. Only the main officials (2-3) are the true referees. The other referees on the sideline still play a vital role in game play.

When certification starts, all new officials begin with 2-person mechanics. The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) website explains that two officials are on the court for 2-person mechanics (youth-junior varsity). Classes will teach you specifics on each referee position. The lead official is the official that mostly stays under the basket. Typically, the lead official will handle violations under the basket. The trail is the official that is usually near the ball-handler and monitors the backcourt and outer part of the frontcourt. (S. Alexander, personal communication, June 8, 2016). The reason why there are only two officials is the age level; you

can cover those games with just two officials (S. Alexander, personal communication, June 8, 2016)

After gaining experience with 2-person mechanics, most officials want to advance to the next level and try 3-person mechanics (varsity-professional). (Morris 2013). The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) starts by explaining how officiating 3-person mechanics works. There are 3 on court officials calling the game. When the level of competition increases, another set of eyes is needed to officiate to ensure the most accuracy, when calling the game. The trail and the lead are the same as 2-person but now there is a center official on the court as well. The center is usually, off-ball, watching from free-throw line extended in. The center also watches near the paint for elbows, grabbing, pushing, tight screens, any action inside of the paint usually located on the sideline away from lead and trail. (Morris, 2013). Knowing the names of the specific officiating positions is crucial when hoping to earn certification. An official's certification process will delay if they cannot remember positioning names on the floor.

When one enters the world of officiating, regardless of the sport, one can earn certification in whichever state he or she wishes to officiate. Most new officials start out mainly at the grade school or freshman High School level, since the pace of the game is not too fast and the flow of the game is easier to make calls. When working with the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) one has the option of either enrolling in a class nearby or self-teaching oneself. Here is a brief explanation on how to become an IHSA official

To become an IHSA official, you'll need to submit an online application and, after you've received a rule book from the IHSA, take an online, open-book rules examination. An official's first season of being licensed will include watching an online rules presentation

where officials learn rule changes and find opportunities to go to officiating clinics.

(“How to become,” 2013, para. 3)

Once someone passes the test, it is beneficial to get in shape, get on the floor, and get a feel for what it is like to be a referee.

Once one becomes an official it is their duty to stay fresh and add to their skill set. An official should not just walk out on the court and assume that if s/he know the rules s/he will be fine. In some states, one is required to pass a floor/court exam in which the official will be on the court making calls in a live game. In that way, one is able to understand how to apply the rules in a game situation and is able to gain court experience. (S. Alexander, personal communication, June 8, 2016). If you wish to get assigned games and continue to get better, you should join an official’s association. These local groups meet monthly to discuss rules, situations, tests, and provide training. Associations will host meetings, rule discussions, and opportunities to sign up for different games and events. (Ligocki, 2013) This opens the opportunity for new officials to meet veteran officials, network, and ask for games.

Once one has become a newly certified referee, it is time to prepare for the season (if one has passed before the season starts). The official then needs to reach out and ask for games. Ligocki (2013) said, “Getting games will be the trickiest part of starting out, and like in life, it depends on who you know. For basketball, there are grade school and rec leagues everywhere, and most are looking for officials.” (para. 4) But as an official moves their way up he or she will find out the earning potential gets better and better the higher the level of competition.

At the high school level, officials can make anywhere from \$30-65 for a high school game (girls and boys). Moving up to the division II level, officials can bring \$150-250 (S. Alexander, personal communication, June 8, 2016). According to Fainaru-Wada (2010), “at the

division I level a part-time official is making around \$50,000 a season.” (para. 13) That means they officiate about 40-60 games a season. Full-time NCAA division I officials in the major BCS conferences are making about \$2,000 per game and work roughly 70 games per season, all full-time referees also serve as independent contractors. (“Highest-paid, 2012).

An article covering the highest paid NBA salaries first discussed how much officials make at the WNBA level; an official’s average earnings are around \$500.00 per game for a total of \$16,000 per year. Due to the WNBA’s short season (34 games), referees have small window to officiate part -time. At the NBA level the pay is quite nice. Officials in the NBA can make \$100,000 to \$550,000 roughly for 82 game season total. Senior officials like Danny Crawford, who have been officiating the NBA for years, is getting paid much more than \$550,000 a season. This is certainly a good salary for a referee. (“What kind of,” 2015)

Summer camps are extremely important to attend. When working games, top certified officials are watching and analyzing one’s every move. In that way, one learns where to look for plays and where to properly position oneself when reading plays. Also, certified referees are there to question one’s every call but in a good way. They question calls because, in that way, one learns to refer to the rulebook when providing an explanation for calls. During gameplay, Johnson (2015) found the best way to clear the air on something with your partner is to go over to them during brief timeouts and halftime breaks so potential adjustments/corrections could be implemented. That way you avoid costly mistakes in the game. When mistakes happen, coaches become unhappy. Officials cannot go out on the court, make a questionable call, and not be able to explain yourself to a coach when they ask about it. Officials like to explain themselves by referencing the rulebook because the coach deserves an explanation and it makes officials look good when they can tell a coach exactly what went wrong and where it is located in the rulebook.

According to Burke, Joyner, Pim, and Czech (2000), officials struggle with staying focused during games and will often be “prone to fret after a game” because of calls that were questionable or uncertain. (p. 16) A good referee acknowledges mistakes, makes adjustments, and keeps on moving.

In order to be a successful referee in the basketball world, it is important to be informed and aware. O’Neil (2010) adds that, “being sharp is even more important today with the increased scrutiny on the game.” (para. 43). Once you step out on the court your job is to remain as focused as possible in order to efficiently and effectively call the game to the best of your ability. According to Burke, et al., (2000) “officials struggle with staying focused during games and will often be prone to fret after a game because of calls that were questionable or uncertain.” (para. 20). If something goes wrong, simply let it go, move on to the next play.

Getting to the college level should be a goal of all young aspiring officials. If you love what you do, why not strive to be the best? Especially if you see potential in yourself and want to move up. The ultimate goal for most young officials is the professional level (NBA) and I could see myself getting into professional ball, but mostly at the women’s level. Since the NCAA is my goal, it is important to understand the demands of being a collegiate official. One official wrote:

Most of the time, it means getting up around 4:30 or 5 a.m. to take the shuttle over to the airport, because you’re always trying to be on the first flight out. Then it's getting into my destination city mid-morning and, for me, having a second job, I try and get some work done. Then he’s on his way to the game. (“What's it like,” 2016, para. 12)

For many officials, the best thing about officiating is it reminds them of their playing days in college by being on a set routine the day before and day of a game.

For many people, once one gets into college athletics, most officials begin at smaller schools and conferences and work their way up. (G. Ewing, personal communication, October 24, 2015) The best part about working at the collegiate level is you can work for multiple conferences at the same time. In an interview with official DJ Carstensen, he talked about his experiences as an official:

You sort of prioritize the conferences, so when the late summer or fall rolls around, your number one conference -- or your top priority -- you accept games from them. Then you close out those dates with the other conferences, and then they fill in other open dates that you have, and it sort of filters down your priority list, as far as conferences go. (“What's it like,” 2016, para.8)

The conferences Carstensen worked for were “the Big Ten, the Atlantic 10, the Mid-American Conference, the Horizon League, the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference, and America East.” (“What's it like,” 2016, para.8)

The travel schedule is going to be challenging especially if someone is working 5 or 6 days out of the week. Carstensen reported, having to “drive two hours and 45 minutes through a blizzard to get to a small college game.” (“What's it like,” 2016, para. 10) Also, as you get to become an older official the traveling begins to wear on you. People do not understand the stress you experience as an official.

Case Study: Auto ethnography of Basketball Officiating

One of the most useful articles that I found was a case study about a former women's basketball player who became a basketball official. She wasn't specific on her background as a former basketball player but she wrote an auto ethnography about her experiences. She talked about her experiences on the court and her experience as a female official.

This former women's basketball student athlete had used up her eligibility for over 2 years, but she missed being involved in the game of basketball. She thought she wanted to coach a youth team, but she could not commit to attending practices and games after work. She chose officiating because it offered a more flexible commitment. She could officiate games on her schedule. (Schaeperkötter, 2016)

Schaeperkötter (2016) acknowledges that she ran into some issues when entering the world of officiating. Schaeperkötter (2016) wrote that,

she often found herself in a tough intermediate ground where she was either the same age as her officiating partners or decades younger than them. "I've officiated with those who were in college or graduate school but for the most part she was the only female and I seemed to show a genuine interest as opposed to the younger officials there." (p.7)

Schaeperkötter (2016) also discussed the need to prove herself as an official since she ran into issues with gender and age. According to the author, "On numerous occasions, I felt that those entities do not view me as a true member of the officiating community. Specifically, by being a female official, I experienced reactions that males simply did not have to deal with."

(Schaeperkötter, 2016, p.8) While I can see how this could definitely happen to most women in the officiating world, "Coaches have called me "baby girl" (April, 2015) several times. I also frequently dealt with a "Come on sir... uh, ma'am" (January, 2015; April, 2015; July, 2015) situation when a player or coach tried to dispute a call before actually looking at me." When dealing with a coach's responses or reactions to calls, I hope to remain as strong as Schaeperkötter and remain calm.

Schaeperkötter (2016) reported that at times she felt disrespected and almost threatened, as she explained:

For those reasons, when a player looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘F**k you’ (July, 2015) after he fouled out after an obvious charge call, I did not give him (and his team) another technical foul because I knew I would put myself in a precarious and dangerous situation when the second technical foul resulted in a forfeit (p. 9).

In that particular game, Schaeperkötter felt like she was being harassed by the coach because he said he was getting tired of her. She responded by saying, “I’m tired of talking to you.” The coach at one point said, “I know you are not used to reffing (*sic*) games at this level” (Schaeperkötter, 2016, p. 9). Basically, the coach was discrediting her officiating abilities by saying that she should not be officiating this game. That kind of treatment especially from coaches is common in basketball. Coaches are passionate about winning but sometimes go overboard with the officials.

After officiating over 250 games Schaeperkötter, found that in basketball, it is still not typical or acceptable for females to have a strong presence in the officiating field. With that being said, Schaeperkötter is continuing to officiate today and is interested in seeing how different females are treated on different levels in basketball (e.g. high school and college officiating). She also hopes that by continuing to officiate, she can connect with young female officials and with other collegiate and professional female officials about their officiating experiences and hopes that she has reached female officials through her autoethnography. (Schaeperkötter, 2016)

Methodology

Doing Qualitative Research as Epiphany/Autoethnography

In the introduction of this project I included my phone conversation with my godfather Gerald. This is an example of me performing an autoethnography by showing the dialogue between us. I wanted to show my emotion and excitement as he informed me about the opportunities of officiating. Immediately after our conversation, I began notetaking. I took notes on our conversation and began conducting my own research shortly after.

This project is an autoethnography that incorporates literature on the process of becoming an official, the experiences of veteran officials, literature on what officiating entails, the actual process of starting my officiating career, and findings from keeping a journal/log about my experiences from a qualitative approach. I have found this approach to be very useful. In my officiating gym bag, I keep my journal along with my whistle, shoes, shirt, and pants. Vone`che (2001) explains it as a way of writing from the retrospective viewpoint of a person interpreting his or her own past; its form and content largely depend upon the author's current preferences and opinions and part of its function is to preserve and remain faithful to the writer's personality. (Vone`che, 2001) Writing this autoethnography is exciting because this is fresh for me. Officiating basketball is a lot different than playing basketball, but I still get the same rush running up and down the court. When I get to my car after games I sit and reflect in my journal after each game. This journal allows me to rewind and analyze the game I just officiated.

Autoethnography is defined as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.” Ellis et. al., 2011, p.273) A researcher will use theories of autobiography and ethnography to conduct this type of qualitative research, just as Vone`che explained earlier.

When used “as a method, auto ethnography is both a process and product.” (Ellis, Adam, & Boucher, 2011, p. 273). The reason I chose to do an auto ethnography is because I noticed there was not a lot of information on officiating, especially at the angle I wanted to focus on. I previously wanted my study to be on the retention and recruiting of NCAA and High school officials but I did not know any veteran officials and assigners at the time who could provide me with the insight I needed. In my autoethnography, I used mapping to help me talk about my experiences in becoming a certified official. According to Markula and Silk (2011), mapping refers to research that provides a general overview of physical culture. When I map out my experiences I am providing information from my own opinion and perspective and I am also mapping what is in the literature.

When conducting my research, my journal included: notes from the phone conversation with Gerald, class notes, rules from the rule book, phone numbers and contacts of important connections made from officiating, camp notes, future camp dates, game assignments, game notes/reminders, and post-game notes. These notes allowed me to remember every detail of my officiating experience.

Findings

When going to class, camps, and game assignments not only was I applying what I have learned from the research, but I also had the chance to write about my new experiences with officiating each time. The unique path I chose when deciding to take two classes will continue to give me my own special approach on officiating. When it was time for me to earn certification, I was ready to learn. I was ready to break my player's standpoint on the game and eager to see the game from a different perspective. I played basketball for over 15 years, I was ready to start moving towards my goal, and start viewing basketball out of a new lens.

When I first got certified my experience with the OHSAA was a little different than my certification with the IHSA. The reason why I earned certification in two states is that I mainly wanted to start my officiating journey right away. My godfather Gerald suggested that Chicago might have more opportunities so after the 2016 spring semester was over, I should come home and take Steve's class. Steve's class and officials' association is located 10 minutes from my house in Chicago so it was also conveniently located.

My in-class training for the OHSAA took place at Bowling Green High School, which was very convenient for me since I usually would be coming straight from class. Seven people were enrolled and there was one other female in the class. None of the enrollees were former college players but all former high school level players. Classes were held every Wednesday night from 6-9 and ran for about 10 weeks. Usually class consisted of reviewing the reading assignment that was assigned the week before. The reading assignments were not very long, usually a few pages. The instructor (Doug) usually tested us with questions from each rule and then helped us with any questions or concerns we had. Then we would go on to the next rule,

which was located in our high school basketball rules book that we received after enrolling in the class.

Throughout the class, Doug would invite us to different local officiating opportunities. They were all optional but eventually you would need to prove yourself to Doug so that he would be confident in assigning you to officiate in real games. The opportunities were either local high school Catholic league games or Bowling Green Parks and Rec youth basketball games. Since I was already employed by Bowling Green Parks and Rec, I decided to venture out and give the Catholic league games a try on top of the youth games.

My very first game on December 9th, 2015, took place at a local church, where the gym was packed with probably 70 spectators, despite it being small and for a Catholic league game. As nervous as I was, I did really well. My partner who was an older white man probably in his 50's was really nice and complimented me on my calling performance. I didn't catch his name but he said he was a local Wood County official. He also thought I had been working at least a year but then told me what I needed to work on to get to the next level.

“As a young official you can never work on your mechanics too much.

Practice making calls in the mirror, just stand there and practice making calls.” (personal communication, November 9, 2016).

He was right; I can always get better with my mechanics. Getting in the mirror and practicing certain calls will help master calling things in games.

In the summer of 2016, I earned certification in Chicago Illinois, my hometown. There I took an officiating class through a family friend, Steve Alexander, who had officiated many of my high school basketball games. Classes began the second week in May and ended at the end of May just because it was the summer time and a heavy basketball period. This class was

marketed toward current and former athletes who wanted to start officiating. This time my class consisted of about 10 people and only one was a male (roughly in his late 20's). Out of the nine other girls, I was the oldest. Most of the girls were either juniors or seniors in high school. The purpose of the class was to recruit younger student-athletes who wanted to become officials, so I knew I had an advantage there.

Classes were all lecture classes like the first class I took in Ohio. We pretty much went rule by rule in each class, except in this class, we really flew through the rules and regulations and it was more scenario-based. Steve would give us a scenario based on the rule and we then had to decide what the call should be. He encouraged us to visualize and create the scenario in our head. I personally liked it that way because it made us all look forward to figuring out which rule we were acting out.

After the class ended and we earned our certification, it was time to head to the court. Steve offered free entrance to his officiating camp that he hosts for the Southland Officials, which is his officiating association located in the south suburbs of Chicago. The camp went from June 1st - July 23rd. Monday and Wednesday were for 3-person mechanics (boys' varsity) and Tuesday and Thursday were for 2-person mechanics (boys' JV). Two-person mechanics are for officials who are trained to officiate youth basketball- junior varsity basketball. Three-person mechanics are for officials who are trained to officiate varsity and higher, I started off just going to the 2-person because at this point I had only been officiating for roughly 7 months, so I wasn't necessarily ready for 3-person just yet, because I didn't learn the rotations well enough. Eventually I was invited to attend the boys' varsity camp. I officiated at least five games with veteran officials that I remembered having officiated my games when I was in high school. That was one of my most notable officiating memories to this day because of the high level of

competition and the individual attention I received on my officiating skills. I got to make mistakes, then learn how to correct them in the future which was a confidence booster for me.

From Steve's camp, I made a connection with my former AAU coach Sha Hopson. She is currently officiating in the Missouri Valley Conference (DI) and was invited to officiate in the NCAA Division II Final Four game as an alternate. Sha went through Steve's class 5 or 6 years ago and now is working her way up and just starting to officiate at the division I level. She is entering her 3rd year as a Division I official, and has taken me under her wing to help me with whatever I need ever since I reached out to her.

About a week after reconnecting with Sha, she invited me to another officiating camp that she was going to help with. This was a player-ref camp hosted by the coordinator of officials for the Big East, American Athletic Conference, and the Atlantic 10 conference. Her name is Debbie Williamson and she held her 1-day 3-person mechanics camp at DePaul University, located in downtown Chicago. At the camp, Debbie and local veteran Chicago basketball officials offered both a classroom session and on-court session of teaching. The in-class portion included a breakdown of officiating and its benefits. We learned about the many opportunities of officiating basketball at the high school, collegiate, and professional level. We talked about the pay at each level, what it's like to officiate part-time and full-time, and who is in charge of assigning officials at each conference at the division I level. We even reviewed some film of the 2016 NCAA Women's Basketball Final Four. We discussed some of the questionable officiating calls and argued whether or not we agreed with the calls. Debbie also provided a Potbelly sandwich lunch for us after the 3-hour classroom session, which is nice because the camps I attended did not provide lunch.

After lunch, it was time to hit the court. This would be my first official day of truly learning and applying the 3-person mechanics instead of 2-person mechanics. On top of hosting the player to ref camp, DePaul was also conveniently hosting a high school girls' varsity basketball tournament.

I made my official debut that afternoon for 3-person mechanics at the McGrath-Philips Arena at DePaul. Not only that, but I was officiating in front of people that might hire me in 2-5 years. Excited yet nervous, I nailed it! I got the rotations down; I was officiating effectively in my coverage area, and looking for the right calls. I wasn't perfect but I definitely impressed the staff at camp. I did so well that Debbie agreed to stay in contact with me and gave me all her personal information. She even tweeted a picture of me throwing my first toss to start the game and posted it on Twitter. Now that the camp is over, Debbie and I have kept in contact. She even agreed to be part of a professional interview assignment I need to complete for one of my graduate classes at BGSU. I have created great connections for myself, and I am glad I chose to attend that camp and meet some amazing people.

After attending the player to ref camp, Steve Alexander, my teacher and assigner at Southland heard about my amazing debut. He actually ended up calling me the next morning and congratulated me on such an amazing performance. He said Sha (my former AAU coach) had called him immediately after camp ended and had to tell him how well I did. Steve always knew my potential from the start. He understands how badly I want to reach the top. After performing at the "Player to Ref Camp," Steve wanted me to start coming to his camp for the 3-person mechanic nights, which means boys' varsity the rest of the summer. I also earned the opportunity to officiate some girls' varsity competitions at a local high school, Shepard High School, in the Chicagoland area. These were organized, paid, live events, not controlled camp

games. I got used to receiving feedback instantly at camps but now at these games I didn't have Steve or Sha there to guide me and tell me what to do. Before every game I re-read the rules book to make sure I was sharp and prepared. I noticed that the closer games were, the more locked in I was. The blowout games were harder to officiate just because sometimes we had to make questionable calls against the winning team. The reason for this is that usually in a blowout the losing team gets frustrated and has a difficult time finishing the game. When working, I have learned that most times officials will be more lenient toward the other team and call the game much tighter for the winning team. The officials tend to be more lenient toward the losing team.

My experiences have also taught me how to talk to coaches. An official should never call a foul and walk toward the bench of the team you called the foul on. Always walk towards the middle of the court. The reason for this is that coaches often harass referees to see if they can get inside their heads. When you get too close to coaches they then get to whisper whatever they want to you and no one else can hear it. If an official makes a call and is about fifteen feet away from the sideline near the middle of the court, the coach then has to belt out whatever they want to say to the official. In that way, everyone in the gym can hear what the coach says to the referee and then it isn't a shock to everyone when the coach receives a technical foul.

Based upon my experiences over the summer, I also learned about coverage areas (primary calling zone/what is in your area). It is frowned upon to make a call in your partner's coverage area unless; of course, they miss the call. You always give your partner a chance to make the call, especially if the ball is out of your coverage zone. Sometimes on occasion officials run into situations where either official can make the call especially in 3-person mechanics. A play can start in one referee's area and, depending on the violation or infraction;

the call can be made by the official who initially has the better angle. Most times if both officials blow their whistle and have the same call, the referee closest to the table reports the call. If officials have simultaneous whistles and have different calls, the referee who has the best angle will make the call.

In my first games of the 2016-2017 basketball season, I have learned so much already. On November 19th, 2016 I officiated an 8th grade girls pre-Thanksgiving tournament at Oak Lawn High School in Illinois. One thing I will never forget is how small the official's locker rooms were. It was so small that there was no room for a door by the toilet, and the benches in the locker room were right in front of the toilet. Luckily, I shared it with another female official who ended up officiating in the other gym. It would have been extremely awkward if I were in the middle of changing or using the bathroom.

As far as the gameplay and calling the tournament games, I performed well! I even got compliments from my partner Kevin Jones. One thing he said for me to work on was my counting. What he means by this is my closely guarded counts (for 5 seconds closely guarded violation) and my 10 seconds up the court counting (10-second violation). I was glad he gave me advice; most veteran officials normally have something for the younger officials to take away from the game they just called. He said he looked forward to officiating again with me in the future. This made me feel good about my performance.

Tuesday, November 22nd I had a girl's basketball game at one of my high school rivals' gym about 20 minutes from my home. The game I called was the freshman girls' game at TF-North High School in Calumet City. The home team was TF North and the away team was Illiana Christian. In terms of my accuracy, I believe I was more confident and had an even better performance than I did on Saturday. The games at the 8th grade tournament were 15-minute

halves with running clock and the freshman game was 7-minute quarters. The only thing I did not like about my experience was again the size of the bathroom. The school did not even have a usable locker room for the officials so we had to change clothes in the nearest restroom. The restroom stalls were so tiny that I almost couldn't fit in the stall with my referee bag. I literally had to lay my bag on the toilet seat in order to change because I had nowhere else to fit it! At halftime since we had nowhere to go, we sat in the bleachers near the scorers' table, which was strange because normally officials report to the locker room at halftime.

For the freshman game, I had a great partner whose name was Steve Hudson. He gave me encouraging feedback after each quarter as well. He told me at halftime that I called a perfect half! Not only did that make me feel good but I also believed him! I really didn't miss any calls, I was extremely sharp and focused from the start. I even asked him if I could do the toss at the beginning of the game! That's when I knew I was ready. Most times the veteran official will kind of push the younger official to do the toss for a few reasons. First, usually the younger/new official has a fear of doing the toss. Second, the younger official should practice as much as possible with initiating the toss. Third, the younger official is usually terrible at serving the toss because they don't go home and practice tossing the ball. I wanted to prove to him that I was better than what he was expecting. At the end of the game, my partner walked me to my car and told me that he would tell Steve (my main assigner and summer instructor) about how well I did.

The one thing he said I should practice is issuing timeouts. When calling time outs, first you grant the timeout to the team (timeout black) and ask the coach if they would like a full-timeout or a 30-second timeout. Then you must report the timeout to the table so the scorekeeper can keep track of how many timeouts each team has used up. After you give correct signaling

for the type of timeout you must also tell the person in charge of timing how long the timeouts are, to start the clock. That way we are not just standing and waiting for each team to come out of the huddle. After the first warning horn (the last 15 seconds), coaches should be wrapping up the timeout, the second horn means the team needs to be on the floor and ready because the other official who did not report the timeout is waiting to in-bound the ball.

With just 4 games in 4 days I have earned \$130 dollars and a nice chunk of noteworthy court experience. Every time I step on to a court, I feel less nervous because I remember what I need to work on in order to perfect my performance. The crowd at the freshman game is also what helped me lock in and get focused for the game. About one hundred people packed the small gym for a freshman game. I tend to perform well under stress. Ever since I played basketball, I think I started to perform well under stress. The crowd positively affected my performance, I can only hope as I move up that will remain the same.

Discussion

As I reflect on the process of becoming a basketball official, I tend to see similarities in things I have experienced relating back to the literature. When referring to what Schaeperkötter wrote about how being a female official meant that she experienced reactions that males did not typically encounter, I experienced such an incident. She wrote that “on numerous occasions, I felt that those entities do not view me as a true member of the officiating community. Specifically, by being a female official, I experienced reactions that males simply did not have to deal with.” (Schaeperkötter, 2016, p. 8) I can relate to that especially during the freshman game I officiated. A male spectator at the TF- North vs. Illiana Christian game questioned me. At halftime of that game, as I was waiting to in-bound the ball, a male fan asked me how old I was, and asked me how old one needs to be in order to become an official. He didn’t come off as disrespectful because when I blew my whistle to in-bound the ball he said,

“Well you’re doing a hell of a job!”

“Thank you, Glad you are enjoying the game”

I blew the whistle again and bounced it to the Illina Christian player. I was glad he said that because if not, I would have felt like he was trying to invalidate my credentials. Again, I just think this is something that he felt like he could say because he was a fan in the stands, and I am a young female official.

Comparing my findings with the literature I have learned that officiating has its pros and cons. Officiating is not for the weak of heart – one needs to have a tough layer of skin and a mind that never lets you overanalyze a situation, as mentioned in a study by Burke et. al. (2000). When officiating, it is important to remember when you have previously made a bad call during the game, but save it for after the game! In the 8th grade tournament I officiated, I didn’t make a

bad call, I just missed a call. Sometimes missing a call is worse than making the wrong call, because at least you know what the call should have been and you can give an explanation to what you thought you saw. It caused slight confusion and my partner ended up making the correct out of bounds call.

Being a former collegiate ball player allows me to have a competitive edge. As I stated earlier, I want to work at the Division I level. With the people that I have met through camps, classes, and at games, I know I can make that goal come true by continuing to work hard. Learning my mechanics and court positioning will allow me to move-up in the ranks and get invited to national camps. If I continue to work, I have a chance of being selected for Division I games in a year. Something I strive for is to earn the respect of the assigners, partners, coaches, and players.

As I mentioned in my findings I have been working with only male referees. I wish I could have worked with the other female official who I met in the locker room during the 8th grade tournament. I would like a veteran female official to really take me under her wing. I would like for her to mentor me because I have never made a connection with a female referee that could really be that crutch for me besides my AAU coach Sha, and she is already ahead of the game and hoping to live out her dream.

I do not have many comparisons to the research yet because I am at the beginning of my journey as an aspiring official. For example, when Schaeperkötter (2016) said “Coaches have called me “baby girl” several times. I also frequently dealt with a “Come on sir... uh, ma’am” (January, 2015; April, 2015; July, 2015) situation when a player or coach tried to dispute a call before actually looking at me” (p.8). For a second, I thought I was just lucky that people weren’t saying this to me. The reason why this might not have happened yet is because I’m back at

home. People recognize me from my playing days at Marian Catholic because many of the schools where I have officiated, I also played in high school basketball games. Coaches may remember me and if they do not, they remember my little sister Jerell, who is 4 years younger than I am; she played basketball at the same high school I did. People often say we look alike and get us mixed up.

As soon as I start earning games of higher levels of competition like Division II and especially Division I games, that luck I had before may completely go out the window. Even if a coach somehow does know me, they are trying to win so I am sure I will run into some of the things Schaeperkotter was saying about being a female official (name-calling, stereotypes as a female official). As I grow older into a more mature official, I hope that if I ever come across a situation like that, I will handle it properly. I will remain respectful and expect respect back from the coach. At any point in time, if I feel that a coach has disrespected me or made me feel inferior, then I would be advised to issue that coach, player, or fan a technical foul. That way also allows me to keep the game under control and effectively officiate the remainder of the game. This is what I have not only learned at camp but have seen from my partners.

Schaeperkotter (2016) once mentioned having a partner that did not look the part. He wore camouflage cargo shorts and all white casual sneakers. (Schaeperkotter, 2016) Luckily, I have had a prepared and organized partner, but I am sure I will come across a partner that might just be having a bad day. I then have to be the example and be a good partner to him or her even if he may not be the best partner to me.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this topic of officiating is not just something I love to research and read about, but it is also my new identity. I have goals to reach, and in about 2 years, I hope to be living out my dream as an NCAA college basketball official. I have made great connections throughout my process, including Debbie from the 'Player to Ref Camp,' Patti the national coordinator of officials for women's basketball, and my former college coach Curt Miller with the Connecticut Sun. I have also established an even stronger bond with my former AAU coach Sha who has done all she can to help me progress, and of course my godfather Gerald and I have kept in contact as I have started my journey.

Now that my godfather Gerald has sparked my interest in officiating, I am ready to do whatever it takes to move up the ladder and become a great NCAA basketball official. After my first games of the season, Gerald called to encourage me since he knew I was back home officiating.

"Jazz I'm trying to tell you in 1.5-2.5 years, you'll be thanking me because of how much fun you're having and how much money you will make out of this. And the best part of it all is it won't feel like a job to you Jazz because you will be good at what you do. You won't even feel like you are 'working'!" (G. Ewing, personal communication, November 23, 2016)

He continued, "Another reason why I think this will be good for you is, you are passionate about this. A lot of people say they want things in life and don't want to put the work in. I think your passion and skill-set will separate you from the rest. Keep up the good work and continue to get games. The more you officiate the more comfortable you get. Don't be afraid to ask for more games too" (Ewing, personal communication, November 23, 2016).

In the future, I would also like to become that female veteran official mentor that I have been looking for. I want to teach young females about the benefits of officiating and to push and encourage them to reach their goals and dreams. Not only will that help them but also it will continue to push me to be the best official I can be. It will require me to stay sharp and keep working on my mechanics so that I can properly train my younger officials. I hope to inspire former female athletes to become officials and make an impact on someone's life just like Gerald influenced me.

The only thing that is next for me is to go home to Chicago, finish out the rest of the officiating season. As soon as the season is over, I need to start my off-season training. During the off-season, I plan to attend at least two national officiating clinics. Sha and I will narrow down our choices as spring approaches but I could be traveling to Atlanta, North Carolina, Kentucky, or Cincinnati. The camps will be for 3-person mechanics and I hope to gain a lot of experience from attending these camps. And perhaps I will be fortunate enough to be chosen to officiate in a division I, II, or III conference for next season.

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