

# WHEN NOT TO BE SUBTLE AS THE SECOND REFEREE

By Marcia Goodwin North

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*Robbie Orantes, Downey, Calif., shows a "big" touch signal while serving as the second referee so the first referee knows there was a touch off the block on the play. (Photo Credit: Bob Messina)*

Communication between first and second referees is essential in communicating decisions to players, coaches, assistant officials and spectators. Precisely executed, established signals indicate the referees are competent and in control of the match. Formal signals are exhibited "big" to communicate with all match participants and

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All three rulesmaking bodies – NFHS, NCAA and USAV – have dedicated sections in the rulebook listing descriptions and pictorial examples of properly executed formal signals. Knowing when to use them and applying them correctly makes for a smooth match with few problems.

There are also several “informal” signals frequently used, especially by second referees to assist the first referee during the match, and are discussed in officials’ manuals for all three rule sets. There are times in a match, however, when informal signals need to be made more prominent, so the correct call can be made by the officiating team.



The first referee has final authority and maintains general supervisory control of the teams and other officials. He or she makes the final decision concerning matters not specifically covered by the rules or where there is a discrepancy between referees and line judges. However, the role of the second referee cannot be overlooked in assisting the first referee to administer the match.

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preferably away from the court in a locker room, the officials will discuss particulars of their roles and specifically informal signals used by both referees.

Informal signals include but are not limited to:

- Set/match point • Four hits
- Identifying possible back-row player violations (including the libero and all back-row players)
- Position of setter prior to serve • Illegal hits • Ready to play
- Net fault player identification
- Antenna fault team identification
- Out (identifying the team at fault)

Other informal signals may also include head nods (yes and no), identifying back-row player violations (by arm diagonally across midsection or pointing to attack line), illegal hits out of the view of the first referee (palm up and slightly raise arm or two fingers indicating double) and down balls, especially on pancakes. To indicate a fourth contact without an intervening block, the R1 may ask the R2 during the pre-match discussion to use four fingers on the opposite shoulder. The R1 may also ask the R2 to use a discreet touch signal in front of the chest to indicate the blocking team did indeed make contact and negate the four

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R2 should not be signaling anything unless it is pertinent to the match in order to communicate with each other, players or coaches. Examples would be the R1 using the “legal back-row player contact” signal when the takeoff was behind the attack line or “ball below the height of the net” signal when a back-row setter sends the ball over the net legally.



It is important these signals be thoroughly discussed in the prematch conference between both referees. When the second referee uses a discreet, informal signal, it should be briefly held and limited to situations where the first referee might have difficulty viewing the play or is blocked. Different angles on a play present challenges and may contribute to different perspectives on what happened. Again, four eyes are better than two and both referees play an extremely vital role in administering the match.

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to communicate with the first referee. They are not accompanied by a whistle. The first referee has the option to accept the call suggested by the second referee.



All referees must understand under no circumstances should a second referee ever whistle a ballhandling violation. When a player's back is to the first referee or the play is blocked by other players, the second referee should give a discreet, or perhaps not so discreet if egregious, illegal-hit signal (palm raised or double contract), but the choice to accept or deny is solely that of the first referee.

An exception is made with a backrow player fault. If the second referee is absolutely positive a fault has occurred, either an illegal attack or block, the first referee should be given a brief time and if the R1 does not whistle, it is permissible for the R2 to whistle, signal and wait to repeat the awarded point from the first referee for the violation.

One of the formal signals often misinterpreted by the R2 as being an informal signal is the touch signal. This is not meant to suggest the R2 signals a "touch" on every contact, especially if the ball remains in play. If the ball is out of play and the "touch" on a player would alter the point awarded to a particular team, the R2 should go "big" with his or her signal by stepping out sideways and slightly forward to get the attention of the first referee, and show the touch signal on the side of the offending team. This touch is not a discreet signal and should be shown to get the attention of the first referee.

All formal signals used by referees are exhibited "big" by both referees outside the "outline" of the body so that results/violations of play are understood by all match participants, assistant officials and spectators. These signals are all shown "big" when interrupting play.

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official match. Each referee should be familiar with all signals, know when and how to use them and communicate extensively before, during and after the match.

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