

I'm going to go out on a limb and tell they NBA they are creating huge problems for themselves by not having an official with a direct line of communication to the ABC broadcasters.

Hubie Brown and Al Michaels are fun, informative and entertaining broadcasters. Hubie knows the game. He knows it well. His insights reflect those of a coach who has turned a team around and fought the playoff wars. Al adds color and continuity and does a good job of it.

Al doesn't pretend to know the rules. Hubie however, knows some rules, but unfortunately gets a bunch of them wrong.

When he does, it hurts the NBA because it gives fans an incorrect understanding of what the rules actually are. Why is this a problem? Well if a fan thinks a rule is enforced one way, when in actuality it is enforced completely the opposite, that fan is going to think the refs aren't doing their jobs. He or she is going to get very mad everytime that "missed call" goes against his/her team and that can only hurt the impression the fan has of the NBA and our officials.

Let me give you the prime example, the block charge rule and the "restricted area" around the basket. For some reason, Hubie and pretty much everyone else thinks that if a defensive player is inside the circle near the basket, that no matter what happens, if there is contact, it's a block – a foul on the defender. Wrongo cupcake.

[There are multiple scenarios where the defender can be standing inside the circle. He can be right underneath the basket for that matter, and it can be a charge.](#)

1. The circle only applies to a 2ndary defender. If Ben Wallace runs over the guy who is actively guarding him, it doesn't matter if it's at midcourt or right under the basket, it's a charge. On the other hand if Ben gets by his defender, and Bowen slides over to try to take a charge, and he is in the circle, it doesn't matter if he is set and has been waiting there for 10 minutes. It's a block.

2. UNLESS, and this is a very important exception that NO ANNOUNCER or media person, and most coaches and players don't seem to understand:

[From NBA.Com](#) – EXCEPTION: Any player may be legally positioned within the "restricted area" if the offensive player receives the ball within the Lower Defensive Box.

Which means if a player starts his drive near the baseline, and runs over a guy in the restricted area, whether it's the primary or 2ndary defender, it's a charge. The player can point to the floor all he wants, but it's a charge.

That's the rules.

I don't expect every announcer to have the rulebook and case studies memorized. That's for geeks like me. I do expect the NBA to recognize the issue and offer what would be a very simple fix.

It could be handled in 1 of 2 ways. Someone who is watching the game from the NBA office could be available by phone, or better yet, there is now a backup official at every game in the event one of the officials is injured. (We had this happen in our Suns series. Steve Javie pulled a hammy and Jess Kersey was there to jump for the 2nd half). Why not get the backup official a game feed and a telephone. Allow a single ABC producer of the game to call him with questions and allow him to explain what happened in situations or to correct the announcers if there is a problem.

I would also offer the media access to the coaches website. This website offers examples of plays for various rules so that teams can see examples of how various rules will be called. There isn't anything very proprietary and it's very well done and easy to use.

It can only make the broadcast better. So why not do it?

And while I'm on the topic of officials let me add some color to an old truism about refs...They are only human.

Yes they are. They aren't perfect and some are going to be better at their jobs than others. That's just the way it is. But what I think many inside the game, and fans don't understand, is that they do their jobs in much the same way we all try to do our jobs. They recognize their strengths and play to them.

No two refs would or could ever call a game exactly the same way. As much as the league really works hard to make sure that all rules are enforced equally and evenly from game to game, it's just impossible.

Officials can only call what they see. The reality is that the game moves so fast, officials have to focus on areas where they can see, digest and react to what is happening. Some are able to see more of the court, some less. Some are able to see everything that happens on the ball, some have to focus primarily on the defender to look for contact.

I also think, and this is my opinion, that some refs place more of an emphasis on controlling the game, while others just try to call the game as it occurs. What I mean by this is that some officials are able to add the context of the game when making calls. What I DON'T mean by that is that they will call the playoffs differently than they will regular season games.

What I do mean is that they will try to take into account what is going on and try to make sure that the game doesn't become overly physical. When Joe Johnson got hurt in that horrific fall, Dick Bavetta called a flagrant foul on Jerry Stackhouse. It wasn't a flagrant foul. I'm sure Dick knew it wasn't. The extra possession given to the Suns could have cost the Mavs the game. But, Dick understood as well as anyone that if the Suns felt like it was a dirty play, the physical contact in the game could have escalated and maybe got out of control. He used context to make the call and did the right thing.

Across a playoff series, when you have officials geared towards calling strictly by the book, you might get a game with 40 free throws per team. When you have those geared towards flow, you might get 15 free throws per team.

Although I prefer the by the rule book approach, neither is right or wrong. Each official has their approach to doing their job, just as all of us do. Once an official gets to the level of doing the NBA Finals, it's been reinforced to them over the many years they have officiated, that it's the correct way for them to work. That's why they are in the Finals.

The point of this is twofold:

First, the league needs to do a better job communicating to fans and media about the nature of the job and things as simple as offering explanations in realtime during the playoffs and especially during the Finals. I think it will make watching the games all the more enjoyable.

2nd, because of the nature of the game, officiating a playoff series "The right way" may look different game to game. That some officials' abilities may match up better with one team's style of play than another.

That's not a problem, it's just a reality. The more fans and media understand that, the more we can appreciate what we are watching in this great Finals matchup between the Spurs and the Pistons.

And to answer the question I keep on getting....

I'm rooting for...the series to go 7 games. For obvious reasons!