

Let's say we are watching a hypothetical basketball game. High School, college, NBA, doesn't matter. And let's say that with 10 seconds to go in the game a player throws an errant pass directly out of bounds. Rather than giving the ball to the other team, the official gives the ball to the team throwing the errant pass. When asked why, he said it was because the player throwing the pass got fouled, and he didn't want to call the foul. To add some substance, let's just say that this ref is one of the 5 most highly rated officials in his organization.

Did the ref just cheat? Did he just change the potential outcome of the game? Did he make up his own rule to push an agenda of "letting them play" at the end of the game rather than enforce the rule as written in the rule book?

Does the answer change if there are 10 seconds gone in the game rather than left in the game? If a player fouls another on a rebound, and the ball goes out of bounds off the fouled player, and the ref gives the ball to the fouled player's team, is it the same answer.

Does the answer change if a ref waits to see if the ball goes in the basket before calling or not calling a shooting foul?

My answer is the same for all. The official didn't cheat the teams, but he cheated the game. In all examples, the official completely changed the outcome of the game. That is wrong. The rule book doesn't say, "Change the rules to fit an agenda." The rulebook doesn't say to add context to the calling of all fouls. If it did, we wouldn't have rules, we would have guidelines.

Officials do the above all the time at all levels. To me, it's an unethical move. More importantly, it's insulting to all those involved in the game. Are players so stupid they won't be able to adjust if the game is called by the rules? If officials call over the back or fouls on rebounds knocked out of bounds, rebounders would be less likely to contest obvious possession rebounds, and the game would move quicker. If they contest and the foul is called, then team fouls add up quicker, maybe the player needs to come out of the game, maybe the other team goes at the player to pick up another foul. Etc., etc., etc. Same with every other foul or violation not called because of the context of the situation.

But wait: there is more. One of the reasons that I'm such a stickler for calling the game by the book is because not doing so makes poor officials out of good officials. We all know the discussion about how fast the game is, and how difficult it is to officiate as a result. What happens to the difficulty factor when before blowing the whistle for a split second decision, the official has to add context. What's the score. How many fouls or team fouls. How much time is left. Who is the player is he a rookie or not.

Then of course there is the confusion among players, coaches and fans it creates when we all try to figure out the context. Since we have no idea, we and the media invent explanations.

"He is letting them play." "Let the players decide the game." "Star treatment." "Rookie call." "Makeup call." "They never call that." "How can they miss that or not make that call, they must hate/love my team/their team." Etc., etc., etc.

The game is different for all involved because of this contextual suspension of the rules by officials. It's for the worse, not the better.

Call the rules as written and the game becomes simpler and more enjoyable for all involved.

While I'm on the topic, here are a couple things that again apply to all levels that I just can't figure out.

Why isn't the 24 sec clock or a clock on the court used to count down the 5 secs for an inbounds play? Talk about drama as the fans, players etc see the clock. There would be more violations as well with good defense rewarded.

Why is it that officials will confer and can and will take as long as they need to correct the 24 sec clock, yet won't for just about any other play or issue that arises?

Why is it that everyone says that Shaq is so hard to officiate? Just because he is big and when guys hammer him they don't impact his shot, doesn't make it not a foul. On the flipside, if he lowers his shoulder or powers through someone, it's a foul. The big guy should probably go to the foul line and foul out three times as often as he does.