



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

An important part of officiating is good communication. An official communicates with participants and others in a range of ways, which include:

- **voice** – communicating decisions/rulings
- **whistle** – communicating to participants
- **indications/signals** – communicating a decision non-verbally
- **body language** – communicating a feeling/emotion.

There are times when the official needs to take an assertive approach to a situation, for example, when the game is getting 'hot', or when a participant is questioning a decision in a demonstrative manner. At other times, the official will use a less assertive and calmer approach, for example, when the competition is being conducted in a good spirit.

'Voice' is used by the official in a range of settings:

- Introductions to participants, coaches and others prior to the competition.
- Explaining a breach of the rules/laws to participants during the competition.
- Announcing the score in tennis, squash, beach volleyball, badminton, etc. during the competition.
- Relating an account of an incident to a judiciary/tribunal after a competition.

Often the 'whistle' is used to intervene within the competition:

- In team sports, to award a penalty or penalise an infringement.
- To end a period of play.
- To indicate the number of laps left in a distance race.
- To call athletes up to the starting blocks.

'Indications/signals' are used to convey a message to participants, coaches and spectators at sporting competitions:

- A flag/indication is used when the ball goes out of the field of play.
- A flag is displayed as a safety measure at motor sports.
- Indications are used to communicate the status of the batter in baseball/softball.
- A flag is used in athletics to indicate a foul in long jump competition.

As a general rule, communication will be most effective for everyone when the official uses more than one method of communication to convey a message, for example, a verbal and a visual signal (flag).

The strongest influence on the outcome of all communication is the ability to listen effectively. When the official listens effectively he or she can respond appropriately. Listening is the ability to receive, attend to, interpret and respond to verbal messages and other cues, like body language, in ways that are appropriate to the purpose. Listening enables the official to put meaning to the sounds they hear.

When participants or coaches approach an official with a problem or query, it provides an opportunity to engage in discussion and seek a greater understanding of each other's position, views and understandings.

Participants and coaches want officials that communicate confidently and decisively. This shows a person in control of themselves and the competition.

An important task of many officials is to complete a report after the competition. These written and oral communications provide messages, instructions, information and feedback to a wide range of people in the sporting environment.

A confident and decisive verbal communication style involves an official:

- using a clear voice
- using appropriately chosen words
- using a firm manner
- looking at the person
- using sufficient strength of voice to convey the message so that participants are able to hear the decision.

