

The Men Who Wear the Stripes

In any college basketball game, there is a man that goes largely unrecognized: the referee.

If a player is performing at his peak, he stands out, and the crowd cheers him. If a referee is at his best, he is practically invisible, and the crowd ignores him.

If the player has a bad game, he sits on the bench and rests. A referee, on the other hand, can't rest, and even the smallest lapse on his part can affect the game and start thousands of fans

screaming at him.

This may not sound like an attractive job description. However, to a select few, becoming a college referee is the culmination of years of work and dedication.

There are approximately 35 referees currently working in the Pacific-10, according to Frank McIntyre, head of officials for the conference. It was not easy for them to reach that level.

"The official you see on the court for a University of Oregon game generally has 10 to 12

years of experience and apprenticeship behind him," said McIntyre. "They usually start in high school and work up through community colleges.

"Then, to become an official in the Pac-10, they must attend a try out camp where they are judged on their performance both on and off the court," he said.

During the season, a referee cannot work more than three games a week.

"There are occasionally exceptions to that, usually early in the season," said McIntyre. "An official might work a tournament and do more games, but ordinarily they can't do more than three."

Because of this, the refs are able to carry on professional lives outside of basketball.

"We have lawyers, school superintendents, executives from computer companies, teachers — people from all sorts of occupations," said McIntyre.

Once an official works his way up to the Pac-10 level, he can't rest on his laurels. His performance is constantly monitored.

After a game, each referee's performance is rated by the crew chief and by a Pac-10 observer.

The coaches also have a say in grading the officials.

"At the end of the year, the coaches rate each man's performance," said McIntyre. "From that, they figure out a top 20."

The officials also must stay in good physical condition.

"A referee typically runs about five miles three times a week," said McIntyre. "Also, if we see that one is becoming overweight, we'll get on his tail until he is back in shape."

This year the college officials have a new rule to contend with: the three-point shot. A shot made from behind the three-point line, 19 ft. 9 in. from the basket, is worth three points instead of two.

According to McIntyre, it isn't the officials who have been feeling the effects of this rule.

"It really hasn't affected the officiating at all," he said, "but it has had an effect on the playing of the game itself. It has brought a new type of player into importance: the little guy who

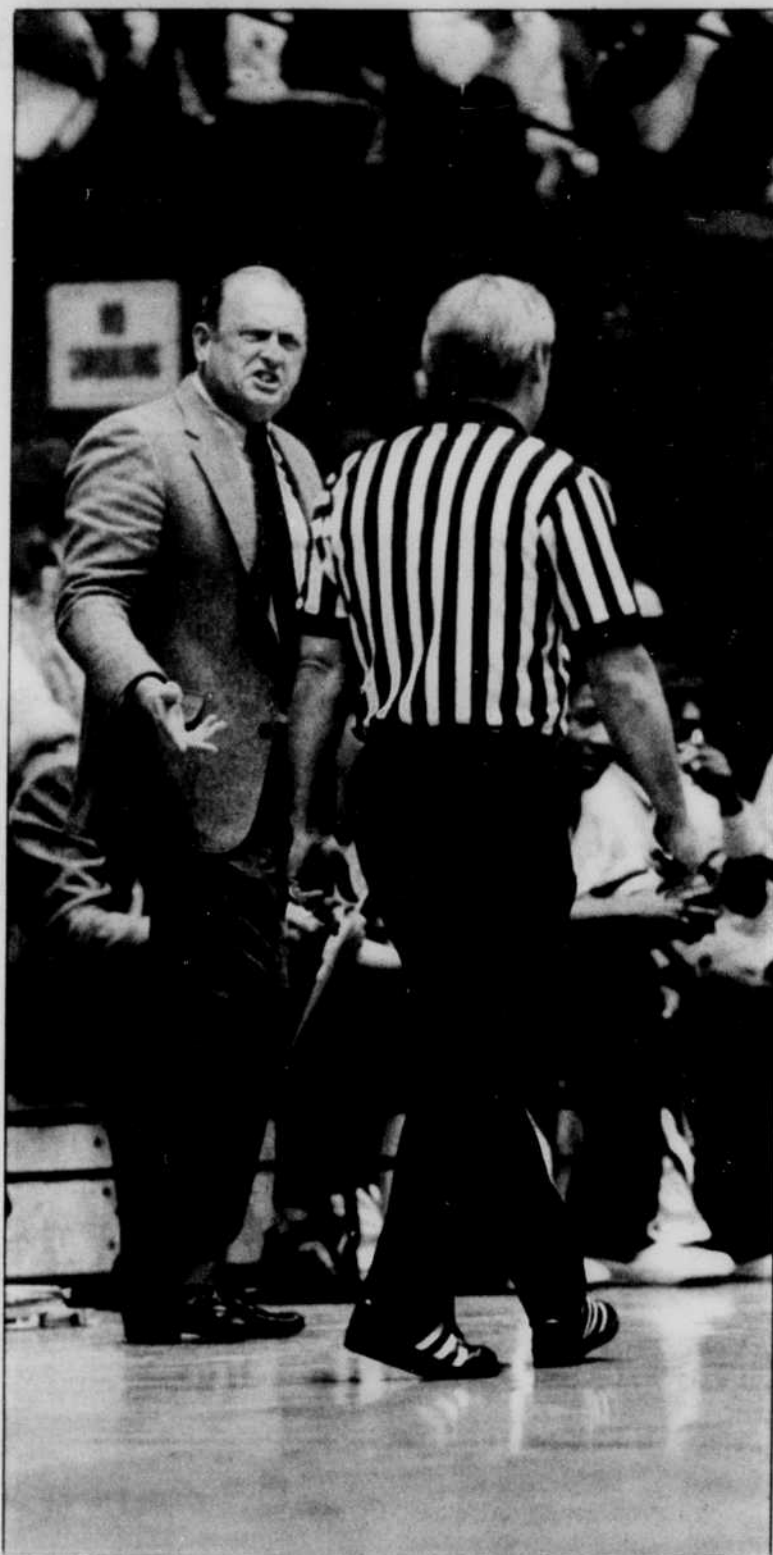


Photo by Ross Martin

can make those shots from outside.

"The one comment we've been hearing is that 19 ft. 9 in. isn't far enough."

For a good official, it makes little difference where a game is being played, according to McIntyre.

"We have people who are absolute professionals," he said. "Once that ball goes up, it doesn't matter where they are.

They call the game by the rulebook."

This is true within the Pac-10 conference itself, he said.

"We have an evenly matched, highly competitive conference," said McIntyre. "The officials will go out and check the court before the game, but there isn't anything we'll find in one arena that we won't find in another."

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