



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE



How Can Coaches Help Players Handle Bad Calls?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"The back story is, in the 7A playoff semi final, Fenwick HS is leading 10-7. with 4 seconds remaining in the game on fourth down on Fenwick's own 15 yard line, the QB takes the snap, steps back, as the clock goes to zero, he throws the ball down field. The scoreboard shows no time on the clock, Fenwick celebrates. The ref flags the play and calls intentional grounding. Puts the ball on Fenwick's 5 yard line. Awards the opponent, Plainfield North, an untimed play. They kick a field goal, tie the game and win in overtime. The IHSA comes out and says that per rule, the untimed play should of have never been given and Fenwick should have won in regulation, 10-7, to advance to the State Championship. However, they then say that protests are not allowed and the game stands as Plainfield North is the winner.

Our question to each other was, if the shoe was on the other foot, if Fenwick was the team that won on this play that should never have happened, not a bad call during the game, what would we think the Fenwick coach should do? Take the win and go to the championship under the heading bad calls happen?"

PCA Response by Nick Bizzieri, Partnership Manager for Positive Coaching Alliance-Chicago

Nick played offensive line at Joliet Catholic Academy and Millikin University and has served as offensive line coach for Bartlett High School and St. Patrick High School

Positive Coaching Alliance in its workshops, books, and online resources for youth and high school sports coaches, parents, student-athletes, officials and administrators emphasizes that all participants honor the game by respecting its rules and officials. In this difficult situation, it's important to note that though the game officials ruled erroneously, presumably they did not do so out of a lack of respect for the rules. In this instance, there were subsequent rules and policies set forth by the Illinois High School Association; these rules were correctly applied after the contest.

Barry Mano, president of the National Association of Sports Officials and a PCA National Advisory Board member, recently wrote on a Positive Coaching Alliance blog (not in consideration of the Fenwick-Plainfield North game) a reminder about how the public may view sports officials: "The critical dimension is not to say that officials are fallible. The critical dimension is for youth and high school sports leaders to get their constituents to buy into the belief that officials matter in the same way that the judges in our legal system matter."

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Handling bad calls, continued

The officials in this case honored the game by serving this difficult function. The impact of this rule misapplication is magnified because it occurred at the end of the game, but it's important to note that the officials did not fail to honor the game by working with integrity to allow the teams to compete in a safe and fair contest.

From a coaching perspective, it would be excruciating to look at my players, who have worked diligently to get to that very moment, and see them suffer from an erroneous on-field ruling. While it doesn't make losing any easier, this is an incredible opportunity to teach the student-athletes how to process life's disappointments, regardless of what causes those disappointments. Now that Judge Kathleen Kennedy has ruled against Fenwick, another opportunity for life lessons exists at Plainfield North, which may decide to move forward as the winner or to forfeit their win and send Fenwick downstate.

To read more questions and answers like this, or to submit your own question to the Ask PCA blog, visit:

www.positivecoach.org/our-tools/ask-pca