

The difference between a good arbiter and not the best one – episode 3

Perhaps you wonder sometimes how you may become a better arbiter. You probably know all the formal requirements to be at the top, I mean how to become the arbiter category A, or maybe you are already at the top, but what to do to maximize your chances of being selected? What makes one arbiter better than the other, assuming that they have the same level of the competence?

This time it will be about how we can learn from the experiences of other arbiters, even those who work in other disciplines. My inspiration was an article about the Polish referee in football, Szymon Marciniak, a main referee of the 2022 Champions League semi-finals. The author of the article about Szymon puts forward the thesis that “soft skills” determines if someone can climb to the top.

Relation with the players and respect

In football, the referee needs to build the relation with the players based on confidence and it is one of the key attribute of the arbiter. It is easier if the arbiter has a charisma and it is what predisposed the referee to be respected by the players. Szymon on the pitch has a certain aura around him that makes the players trust him. He has an ability to manage players' emotion. Just before the match he sometimes jokes with the players, what creates nice and more relaxed atmosphere. During the match he is capable to make a quick retort with a football sense of humour.

Management and control

Szymon has something we call “feeling of the game”, I mean he has the ability to position himself in such a way as to have the best view of the action. The football player's experience definitely helps with that and it allows him to follow and manage the match easy. He is not a sergeant on the field, he doesn't scream and he doesn't put all the players upright. This kind of management does not work well for new generations. Sure, you can yell at a player sometimes, but you can't yell all the time because it won't be effective.



Szymon Marciniak to referee UEFA Super Cup; ©Domenic Aquilina

Precision and avoiding mistakes

Back in the old days a mistake causing a scandal could end a season for a referee. Szymon does not want to make even the smallest mistakes, he wants to be as precise as possible, close to perfection. He spends a lot of time correcting small elements that are not necessary for him to referee well, but can help a little. Szymon has an ability to admit his mistakes and apologize. It is a rarity among referees. Admitting a mistake or apologizing for it is frowned upon even at the highest places and a large number of referees refuses to do so, thinking it would harm their reputation. Szymon goes against the tide, he takes responsibility for his mistakes and players appreciate it.

Text by: IA Tomasz Delega,
Chairman of ECU Arbiters Council



Photo: IA Tomasz Delega together with WGM/IA Agnieszka Brustman and FIDE VP Łukasz Turlej during the Grand Chess Tour Poland 2022

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Preparation and pressure

Szymon keeps learning and adding something new. He always considers what else could be done better by him. He doesn't hesitate to ask others for their opinion, especially his mentor. He works to improve his communication skills and the languages. He has a notebook where he writes down all the players trying to cheat the referees. He also notes down their cunning behaviour towards rivals and in the future he is able to warn the players against doing such things in advance. He likes to work on his personal mental sphere, which helps him to deal on putting a pressure on him.

Ambition under control

Szymon is very ambitious and eager for success and he often calculates: what will happen, if he goes well in this game, what he can get next time or next season. But the line between great ambition and unhealthy perfectionism is thin. He is going in the right direction, but according to his mentor there is still room for improvement.

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