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## NBA Referees - SI Swimsuit Issue

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Two unrelated subjects receive attention here today: men in stripped shirts and women in swimsuits.

It would be difficult to find any activity in sport as futile as criticizing NBA officials. With the arrival of Shaquille O'Neal, complaining about refs has become one of the biggest growth industries in Orlando. Magic fans, sports writers and commentators, radio and TV broadcasters, Magic officials, coaches and players have all been moaning about the Shaq's treatment by the zebras. Even the Shaq has taken to occasional whining.

Believe me this is unproductive; a complete and total waste of time. NBA referees have been like this for years and they are not going to change. I have been watching NBA basketball since George Mikan was the center for the Minneapolis Lakers. I always got furious at the officials watching their phenomenal performance. They never seemed to be watching the same game as I was, and there was never any consistency to their calls.

At some point, I don't really remember when, I decided that it was foolish to expend all that energy on something that I could not control, and that was never going to change. I offer that as an approach that all Magic fans might take. When you watch a game either ignore the officials, or just laugh at them. Regard them as just part of the total scene, not part of the game.

It is more than simple incompetence that you are watching, it is studied incompetence, a learned ineptitude. These guys go to school. I just love it when some NBA toady, usually on national TV, starts talking about how good these officials really are. When that happens I double check to make sure I haven't inadvertently turned on the comedy channel.

But they do go to school, and one can only speculate on what they study. Is there, for example, some definition of "travelling" in the NBA? If you watch a game there seems to be no rule, just an occasional call at the whim of the referee. What is a foul? I would defy anyone to develop an operational definition out of the empirical evidence. It can not be done. At times a body slam is not, but the next trip up the floor a touch is called a foul. As to the three-second violation, my theory is that NBA officials learn to count to three by a circuitous route: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 3. And when is this rule

enforced? You can watch a game for long stretches, and then bam, bam, bam, three second violations are suddenly in vogue. Like suddenly one official remembers this rule and decides he must call it to meet the weekly or monthly quota.

I submit to you that such inconsistency, such non-patterned enforcement, such metaphysical definitions of the rules, can only be carried out by a carefully selected, highly trained, and sharply honed group. These are not ordinary mortals in stripped shirts, these are men of genius who have studied countless hours to achieve skill levels clearly beyond the abilities of the average fan to comprehend.

The other topic I want to mention today concerns the annual Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue which hit the stands and mailboxes across the country this week. An increasing number of women associated with sport are raising their voices in objection to this annual event. Included in this group is Dr. Linnea Smith, a psychiatrist and the wife of North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith. She has campaigned for the past two years against the Swimsuit Issue.

Dr. Smith's objections center on two facets of the practice. First, the only reason the women are there is for sex, and second, in the 1989 issue children were used in the photos. Clearly this is not pornography, but equally clearly it is titillation, as well as the objectification of women. Women are placed in the magazine as sex objects, and for no other purpose but to sell magazines. This is a clear use of women for commercial purposes. It is exploitation pure and simple.

If you couple this with the fact that we are living in a time when women's issues in sport are taking on a serious and considerably increased importance, one must ask why SI can not find increased space for the coverage of women in sport, when they can find one entire issue to devote to women in swimsuits. Is this a national magazine devoted to the coverage of Sport? Is it concerned with the major issues facing sport in the late 20th century? If it is why is more space devoted to women in swimsuits than women on the playing fields?

The answer of course lies in the marketplace. Magazines like SI are commercial products with a commercially driven editorial policy. There are not enough readers interested in women's sport, and therefore SI does not offer the coverage. Many of the SI readers are men, and are interested in women in swimsuits.

Therefore you will see more women in swimsuits than on the playing field.

But what of the argument that if the sports media began to seriously cover women's sport, the interest in it would increase? Might it happen. We will never know, unless someone, some advertiser, decides to put some money into such an idea. What if some firm like Budweiser or Nike said to SI that for every issue in the next five years they would sponsor a segment in the magazine on women's sport? And what if for one issue in February that segment displayed men in swimsuits in provocative positions? Would someone finally get the point?

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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