



by Chantal Julien

A WOMAN ON THE REFEREEING WORLD

Chantal Julien, the first FIBA female referee, has been a French Men's professional league referee since 1995, and a FIBA international referee since 1997. She officiated one Olympic Women's final, one FIBA Women's World final, one FIBA Women's Junior World Championships, one FIBA European Women's Junior and two Women's Championships, three FIBA Asian Junior and Senior Women's and one Asian Men's Championships, one Final Four Women's Euroleague, and one FIBA Men's European Championship. She also received the 2005 Italian Oscar of Basketball, special FIBA Award.

MY BASKETBALL HISTORY

My father was a division one player for many years. He started bringing me to his games at the tender age of four years old. It was he who inspired in me a passion for the game of basketball. I went on to play for eight years in the first division in France, and then decided in 1993 to switch to refereeing in order to remain involved in high-performance basketball.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF REFEREEING

Refereeing at the highest level of basketball (World Championships and Olympic Games) brings with it an incredible sense of satisfaction. Though we don't win a medal for our efforts, the reward for being involved as an official in such an event is invaluable. To be offered the opportunity to referee the best players in the world is a great honor, and to have had the chance to officiate the final game at these competitions has represented for me a proof of confidence in my abilities that I cherish.

Though the rewards are many, there are also "downs" from time to time that come with high-performance refereeing. Many examples can be found in games where one makes more errors in judgement than one would like; in games where players, coaches or spectators get out of hand;

and in games where conflicts arise and sometimes even a fight erupts. Besides tough times that come with the actual responsibility of a game, there are also those times when an assignment that you are hoping for is eventually not offered.

REFEREEING MEN'S COMPETITION - A MUST TO IMPROVE

Refereeing a men's game is different than a women's game. The satisfaction is the same; however, the approach required to date has not been. Since starting to referee internationally in 1997, I have also been officiating at the Pro A level (first division) in France, the highest level of men's basketball in my country. I attribute much of my improvement as a referee to this involvement. Whether one referees male or female athletes, one must respect both games. I have found the female game to be more technical and tactical, and it is a pleasure to see the richness of the game grow, particularly at the higher levels and as the women's game evolves. Physically, the men's game sees more contact and more play in the air (plays at the rim or when the ball is in the air). Decision-making must therefore be faster because there is less time available to make a judgement. Women's basketball has been closing the gap for some time now with regard to the physical aspect of play; female players block, fight for position in the key, and dunk. More and more, the approach is similar. The criteria used for refereeing, however, have always been and remain the same.

It is still a challenge to be on the floor with men. Some players have never been refereed by a woman and assume that I will be weaker, slower, and more error-prone than my male counterparts. It also seems that a mistake made by a woman is worse than one committed by a man. I seem to constantly have to prove that I merit my place on the floor. I have to deal

with chauvinism often. When I referee a women's game, it is easier to establish a respectful rapport and exchange with both players and coaches alike.

The keys to success at the higher levels of officiating in both women's and men's games are to have a strong character, to face players and coaches directly, not to show doubt or fear, and to work hard for respect. It is important to establish a good relationship with players and coaches by demonstrating your understanding of the game, and your appreciation for the flow of the game. There is also no shame in recognizing one's mistakes; this simply shows honesty.

THE SACRIFICES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

A career as a high performance referee does not come without sacrifice at both professional and personal levels. I am a physical education teacher in the city of Mandelieu-la-Napoule. The city awards a special status to those involved in high level sport; in my case, a replacement teacher is assigned for me whenever I need to leave to referee in Europe or internationally. The teacher is hired to teach the curriculum that I have planned.

On the personal front, it is hard to reconcile life on the road as a referee and a normal family life. I spend every weekend travelling in France during the regular season and two games a month elsewhere in Europe as well. Time must also be invested in preparation and professional development. To be effective as a referee requires dedication and goal setting. To stay current and sharp one needs to watch video, study rules, and train to stay in shape. To progress, one must stay humble and spend time in critical reflection after every game. A good referee is one that makes the least mistakes, not the one that believes he or she makes none!