

Gross Misconducts: To use or not to use

When we are the target of verbal abuse, we have the option of assessing a minor, misconduct, game misconduct, or gross misconduct (Rule 9.2 Hockey Canada). Generally, the referee may start by assessing a minor and increase higher level penalties (to misconduct, game misconduct, or gross). However, the referee may assess whatever penalty is appropriate; she does not need to start with a minor nor does she need to follow an order.

One of these penalties, the Gross Misconduct, is attached to the following description in the Hockey Canada Rule book: "...guidelines for judgement are difficult to describe..." (Situation 1 Rule 9.2a). Confusing and vague as this may be, there is a time and a place for gross misconducts, but those instances should not be over used.

When should I use the gross misconduct? First, I want to draw your attention to Rule 9.2f and situation 4, Rule 6.1a (Hockey Canada). These two situations are black and white for the use of a Gross Misconduct. First, if a person uses comments related to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or language towards another game participant then the referee should assess a gross misconduct (9.2f). Second, a gross misconduct should be assessed any player who responds to verbal harassment by going into the stands to get a spectator (Situation 4, 6.1a).

The gray area of gross misconduct is "make a travesty of the game" (4.7b) and "...at the discretion of the Referee, a gross misconduct penalty may be assessed for any infraction to any player or team official..." (Rule 9.2f). So what is a travesty and what is not a travesty? Given the vague nature of both this statements, let us compare a game misconduct to a gross misconduct.

1) Game Misconduct: this penalty is for any verbal abuse that requires the abuser to be ejected from the game. For example "go @\$% yourself, ref" may deserve a game misconduct but not a gross misconduct. Similarly, "You are so terrible, you must be getting paid by the other team..." may also deserve a game misconduct, but not a gross misconduct. Depending on the circumstance, these may also deserve a minor or a misconduct but not a Gross.

2) Gross Misconduct: this penalty is for the absolute extreme examples of verbal abuse; when used properly, this penalty is seldom used. If you do call this penalty then the abuser's act should be equivalent in severity to pursuing a spectator or using derogatory terms (based on ethnicity, religion, etc.) to another person. These behaviors should leave your mouth gaping open and thinking "did that really just happen?" If you are doubting your use of a gross misconduct, then you should use a game misconduct and give extensive details for the president to review.