

Referees,

I thought I would share this report from the AAU National Championships with you. It offers a perspective on what tournaments might look like this coming winter. I was not there, so I can't answer specific questions.

From Sue Mailhot, one of the organizers at AAU Championships:

Many of you have been curious regarding the procedures that were used at the AAU National Volleyball Championships. I know this was not a USA Volleyball event, but we were the only indoor championship that played this summer. Here's how it happened:

2020 AAU2 After Action Report

Well, we made it through 2020 AAUs. At the final count there were 272 girls teams, 48 boys teams, 12 championship staff members, 12 officials staff members and 66 referees. We did not know what to expect when we got there, but each day became easier as we worked our way through new procedures. Not one participant was turned away because of a high temperature. Every participant (players, coaches, chaperones, referees, AAU staff, convention center staff) who entered the convention center was temperature checked and then given a daily wristband to show that the temperature was checked. There were sanitizing stations everywhere, including one at each court. All participants used the stations frequently.

Only referees who wanted to be at the tournament registered. After the dates changed and further safety precautions were sent out by the AAU National office, over 250 referees registered for the 75 available slots. It was noted before the final selections were made that daily match counts would be very low (because the number of courts in use at any one time and there was only one wave on a court). Referees were also informed that:

- if you are not a good follower, it might be best if you stayed home this year.
- if you cannot be self-sufficient without veering out of your lane, you should consider staying home.
- if you need further explanation of the procedures already given, this event might not be for you this year.

Referees were very well informed of what was expected if they were chosen. Personal preferences and opinions needed to be left at home. Prior to arriving in Orlando, we did not know what to expect. We could have been canceled right before it all started, procedures might have changed from one minute to the next, we just did not know what would happen. Referees needed to be flexible and make adjustments quickly. After the original 75 referees were selected, more specific instructions were shared.

Transportation for the referees was not provided this year to eliminate a large number of people being in a small space for an extended period of time. Each referee was responsible for getting themselves from the hotel to the convention center. Parking passes were provided for every car each day. Starting and ending times varied greatly. AAU Marketing did a great job of giving the public a great idea of what was happening. Each match was streamed live by Baller TV.

Referees were expected to buy their own electronic whistle and bring extra batteries. It was recommended that they bring two different whistles, in case the batteries ran out in the middle of a match or if a whistle on a court that was close to them sounded similar. The Tandem whistle seemed to be the loudest. The mini Fox-40 had the least sound. The mini Fox-40 batteries (LR44/L1154 watch battery) only lasted about 13 matches. The 'Fish' whistle used 4 of the 1154 batteries and lasted for 31 matches. The 'Fish' also has an on/off button. The 'Sport' whistle has 3 sounds and lasted for 31 matches. The regular Fox-40 uses a 9-volt battery (a name brand battery lasted at least 4 days - 16 matches).

It took referees a couple of matches to figure out which hand to hold the e-whistle. Most kept the e-whistle on a lanyard, so their hands were free to signal. Many put the e-whistle in their non-beckoning hand for service and then used their dominant hand to whistle the end of the play, allowing the whistle to drop to the lanyard and then had both hands free to signal. Some also found a way to secure the whistle to stand in front of them, so their hands were free at all time, but close enough to use the whistle when necessary. Each person had to experiment to find what worked best for them. It was noted that the 'sound' needed to be pointed towards the participants for the best results. And the button could be held longer for a louder, longer sound.

Each person who participated in this event did so of their own free will. No one was forced to come. There were several who made last-minute decisions to stay home and that choice was honored without malice or penalty. It was understood that everyone needed to make their own personal choice, and no one was faulted for that choice. While it was reported that Florida had daily positive cases of 12,000+ to 15,000+, in reality, the number of positive cases in the Orlando area were 200 - 500. Traffic was very light in the entire city (compared to recent years during this timeframe). There was a mandatory mask requirement in the city, so everyone had to wear a mask at the grocery store, the hotel, the gas station, restaurants, etc. If you chose to eat in a restaurant, tables were social distanced and there were often very few actually eating in. Lots of takeout and drive throughs.

Officials were checked in individually. Two tables were placed side by side to create a further barrier from close contact to the office staff. Hands were sanitized (we used the 'good' stuff - Sunshine and Lemons from Bath & Body) coming into the room and when they exited. The officials VIK packages were laid out in a manner so that none of them touched. Each referee only touched their own bag. To complete the required paperwork, each referee was given a sanitized pen that was either thrown away after, re-sanitized or was given to the referee to take with them. A limited number of staff persons filled the bags with the correct items.

Referees and staff had a separate entrance to enter the facility. A general waiver of liability was signed by each participant before their temperature was checked. 100 degrees was the 'magic number'. The referees and staff were given the same band each day.

Team rosters could have up to 15 players, 5 coaches and 10 chaperones. The teams had a certain procedure to follow. Temperature checks were

conducted outside of the convention center. No matter what time a team arrived, they were assigned a specific check-in line. All rostered members had to enter at the same time. If you were not there when the team entered, you were denied entry for that day. Each team was allowed 10 chaperones per day. The chaperones could change each day as long as their name was on the roster. A new roster was used each day. Once the team had been temperature checked and bands handed out, the entire group was allowed to enter the convention center. The group needed to enter the courts together. There were multiple security guards checking for the wristbands. No one was allowed to exit through the entrance doors. All participants entered through the North doors and exited through the South doors. Teams were allowed to bring coolers with them.

Each day, 8 - 14 courts started any specific hour, starting at 8:00 am with the last group entering to start those courts at 1:00 pm. The first courts started playing on the south side, so teams from the south side exited first. Only a single pool (6 matches) was played on any court. There were 66 total courts set up for the first 4-day session with a maximum number of 45 courts ever playing at one time. Courts were set up in a zig-zag pattern (if all courts were laid down, every other court was removed). There were 2 rows of chairs set around each court with the chairs being spaced apart from each other and the rows were alternated. No netting (to prevent balls from rolling) were set-up. Occasionally a game ball got away and traveled far but was quickly rescued by some fast running dad (I mean, chaperone).

Game balls were sanitized before each match. The balls were rolled under a UV sanitizing light. The light was supposed to be used to sanitize the courts each night, but the convention center had a company that came in to fog the entire facility. The fog sanitized the chairs, tables, referee stands, flip charts and courts. There was no residue left on any items. No liquid products were used on the game balls so as to the protect the ball covering and so the ball was not wet when being used.

After each match, the referee returned the used game ball and pens/pencils back to the championship desk and picked up newly sanitized items to be used for the next match.

Only one referee was used for each match. A rostered adult from the officiating team was required to be the R2. AAU provided each team with mechanical hand whistles. Each referee brought their own electronic whistle(s). Prior to the start of the first match on any court, the referee took all the scoresheets, lineup sheet and libero tracking sheet for that court/pool. Scores were mobile entered by each referee after each match.

Referees were instructed to conduct the coin toss in this manner: Once the 2 captains were called, each participant should extend their arms, so that everyone was approx. 6 feet from each other. Everyone wore masks the entire time. The coin toss was conducted in the regular manner. If a deciding set was necessary, the R1 got off the stand and conducted the coin toss in the same way. Upon returning to the table to inform the scorer of the decision, the referee sanitized their hands.

There were two 6' tables set end-to-end for the scoring table. The scorer sat at one end, the libero tracker sat in the middle and the 'flipper' sat at the other end. Between each match, the referee sanitized the tables, using the spray provided by the tournament. (The

original spray was a strong bleach, but was changed after the first day as the spray was bleaching clothing items.) Referees also wiped down the referee stand between each match. All officiating team members wore masks for the duration of the match. Line judges wore masks. Flags were not used.

Referees were instructed to use hand sanitizer upon arrival at the scoring table and when they left the table. If they had to approach the table during the match, they also had to sanitize twice (arrival and exit). Many players sanitized once they left the court and before they re-entered a game. Although some players wore masks while playing, most did not.

All participants on the bench needed to wear a mask unless they were on the court. Most liberos put their mask back on when they came out of the game, even if their time at the bench was minimal. Spectators (chaperones) mostly spaced themselves out and were instructed to wear masks the entire time. Referees had the authority to request assistance from the coach if chaperones did not understand the necessity of the mask. Most cooperated, but as with anything, some felt the need to 'do it their way' and not follow the required instructions.

Individual bottles of water were provided to the referees and staff. Water fountains were not available, nor were water filling stations. The convention center had plenty of custodial staff on duty throughout the day who sanitized frequently. The person who came to the referee offices to empty the trash, also took a few minutes to spray the entire area with a sanitizing spray.

Lead referees and staff members each had their own radio and earpieces. Each radio was sanitized prior to starting the day and at the conclusion of each day.

Sanitizing, sanitizing, sanitizing and wearing a mask consistently was the key to everything. I guess we could find out in a couple of weeks that things might be different, but . . . I sure hope not.

Hope everyone is well!

Brian Hemelgarn
OVR Referees Chair