

27 is the Magic Trail Number

Just when you think your mechanics and court coverage is solid as a rock, you get some interesting feedback that changes your perspective on the game.

I had the opportunity to be observed by a fellow official, and his post-game commentary provided some real insight on how to improve my game with a few “tiny” steps. His feedback was ...

Pick a spot inside the 28 foot mark to start as the Trail

When in a three person crew and moving from the backcourt to frontcourt.

And that spot would be 27. Not 28. Certainly not 30 feet from the end line. His advice was clear. On 90% of the possessions down the floor, our trail crew members didn't get within the 28 foot mark.

Now, we are not talking about hovering around the division line as a habit which is sometimes noticed with some of our inexperienced (or aging) population of officials. But rather just not paying careful attention to an aggressive starting position as the Trail when you first transition down the court.

As Trail, find the 27 mark every time down!

Most courts still have the old 28 foot stripe or the new coaching box lines in place to guide you. Being on the 27 makes you step down just a bit more and become involved in the active play.

Keeping the three person “triangle” extremely tight provides many advantages to you as the Trail.

You are in a better position to see rebounding action and above the basket play.

Eye contact is easier when you are more engaged in plays.

During live-ball rotations you are just 3 steps away from moving into proper position as the Center official.

You get better (90 degree) looks at most drives toward the lane versus being straight-lined.

You look more engaged, active and athletic by getting closer to the front-court matchups.

It's easy to angle back (toward the division line) to maintain your 90 degree view of a play — or — move toward the division line if the play dictates.

Being on the “27” is not meant to be an anchor point. The Trail official should MOVE to IMPROVE as the matchups dictate. Being mobile while moving off the sideline (working the ARC) is key too.

And getting to the 27 works well in a TWO PERSON crew too! While the Trail has more area to cover in this crew being aggressive puts you in a similar advantageous position like a three-person crew.

During the first transition down-court in your next game say to yourself — 27 — and your body will magically position itself inside the hash mark to set you up for success. Well, let's hope so.