

In my first column I stated that I would proceed directly to a foundational discussion of officiating, one that would include some basic mechanics issues as well as some widely accepted philosophical ones. When I wrote that, I had every intention of following through with that plan. Then Big Monday happened. After watching the recaps of the ending of Georgetown-Villanova, I had what I considered to be some solid ideas, and I set out to develop them in a column. After I had finished, I considered some of the hazards of stepping out in such a big way in only my second column, given the expectations I had set. But I felt strongly that I could make a significant contribution, so I decided to risk the possibility of a perceived bait-and-switch and submit the column. I'm very glad I took the risk; I'm also thankful to J&B for being willing to take it with me. I have taken tremendous benefit from the many and varied responses. Your feedback has forced me to clarify my thinking on many of the ideas I teased in the first piece, and I feel that today's edition will be a step in a very positive direction.

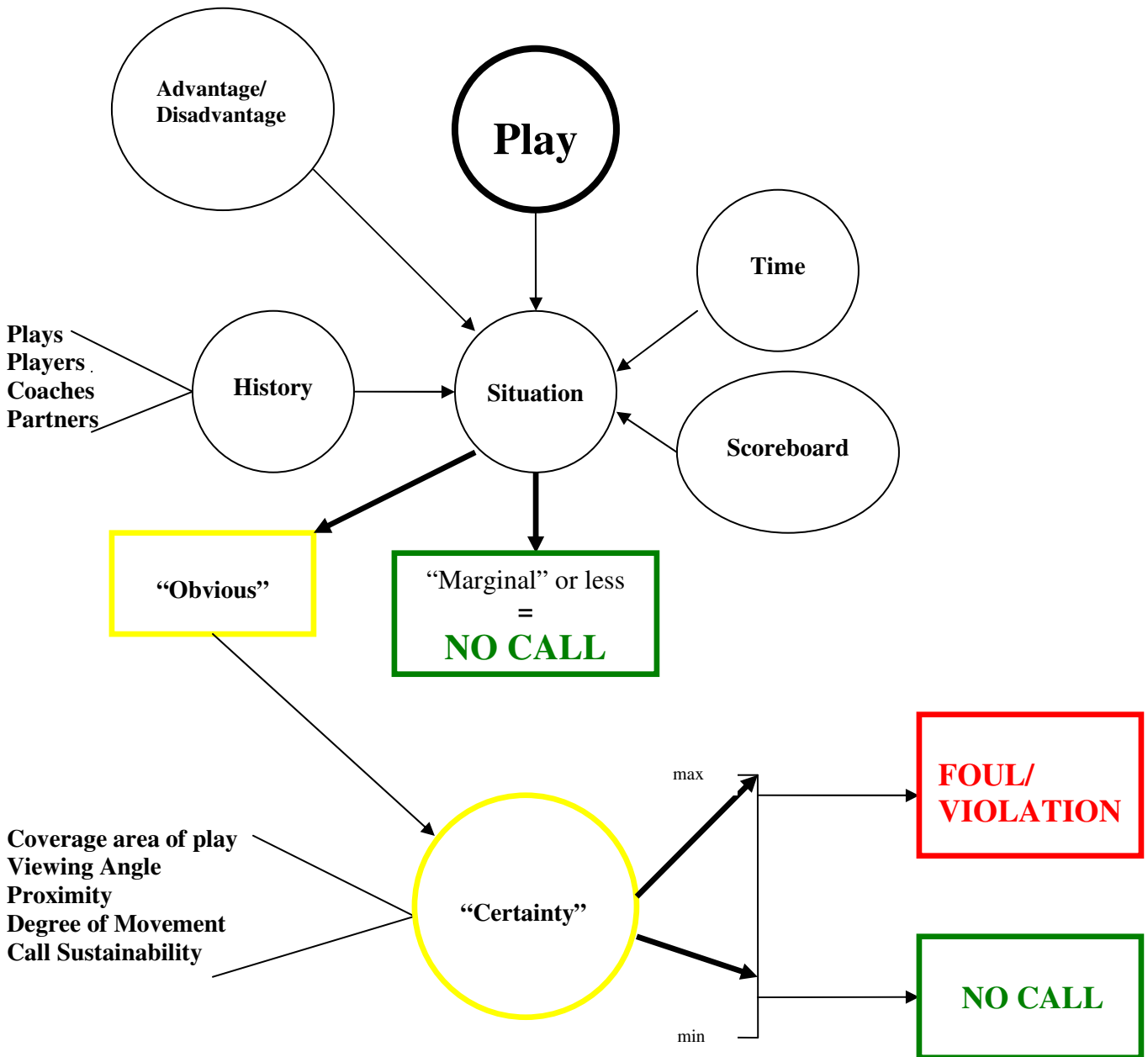
One thing I understand much more clearly than I did B.GV. is the degree to which the actual decision-making process of officials remains a mystery. While many fans know a great deal (more than most commentators) about the game's rules and understand that they allow the officials certain discretionary authority, the reasoning behind certain exercises of that discretion is not nearly so widely understood. Some discretion/judgment plays are so clear that no real consideration need be given to how an official arrived at his decision. But when lots of elements are brought to bear on a single, tough play, the official's thinking can seem mystical, almost random; or worse, partisan.

Almost all of the misplaced outrage over GU-VU is related to this lack of understanding of the official's thinking process. There are certainly some cases in which the disconnect is rooted in a lack of rules knowledge (or just a very strong distaste for a particular rule), but I have perceived most of the criticism to be a result of a lack of awareness of the ways that officials put together information. Some observers have failed to consider certain factors vital to a complete analysis, while others have simply overestimated the latitude officials are granted in certain situations.

In thinking about how best to try to explain referees' decision-making, I have developed what I consider a reasonable schema—a mental model—of the process that officials go through, and the elements that factor into to their analysis, when judging plays. The model incorporates some aspects of a decision tree, but is not designed to provide an exhaustive list of circumstance(s)→result possibilities.

I have tried to flesh out a clear model. I hope its flow as well as the elements/categories will be clear to even the most casual of fans. Later columns will be devoted to analyzing in detail different elements and forks in the schema. Next time I am going to discuss what I consider to be the two most important “categories” in the official's thought process, both implied if not expressed in the diagram. If I have executed well, there shouldn't be too much mystery. I encourage you to follow up by considering why these mental pivots are what they are. In discussing these issues next time, I will be able to transition directly to an idea that seems to have generated a great deal of interest lately: decision-making late in close games.

# DECISION SCHEMA FOR BASKETBALL OFFICIALS



The Playcaller appreciates all of the feedback from the first two columns, both directly and on the Boards. He can be reached at [theplaycaller@gmail.com](mailto:theplaycaller@gmail.com).