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### “Oops! I thought It Was My Call!”

You have probably witnessed a situation in the two official system where, during a play at the blue line, one official makes a beautiful washout signal and says “OK!” just as the other official blows the whistle and yells “Off-side!” Immediately the Boo Birds get vocal and the officials get a bit red in the face. How does such a thing happen? Answer: By mistake! Shouldn’t only one official be responsible for calls at the blue line? Answer: Yes, indeed!

Let’s look at how simultaneous, double coverage of a blue line occurs. Typically, it occurs when play stagnates near the blue line. If we look closely at the actual and relative position of the officials when this happens we will notice that both are about 3 – 5 metres from the blue line and, as per the HCOP Officiating Manual, the officials have maintained a diagonal relationship. Note, however, that the blue line is “bracketed” between the two officials. Since no one is directly AT the blue line, each official tries to cover the blue line from afar. Oops! The stage is set for another simultaneous, double coverage of the blue line gaff.

Ideally, at any one moment, only one official is responsible for calls at the blue line. If we avoid simultaneous, double coverage we will eliminate situations such as the one we saw at the start of this article.

We know that simultaneous, double coverage of a blue line is not a good thing, and we know how it happens. Now let’s look at how to prevent it from happening. It’s actually quite simple. When play stagnates near the blue line, you must read the play then either:

1. Make a positive move towards the line and take up a position AT the blue line. This will indicate to your partner that you are taking responsibility for the line (at which time your partner should move away from the line or, as a minimum, not signal or call off-side at that moment), or
2. Make a positive move away from the blue line. This will indicate to your partner that you ARE NOT taking responsibility for the line (at which time your partner should move into position AT the blue line). Once you cue your partner that you are not taking responsibility for the line, don’t signal or call off-side until your partner gives up responsibility of that line.

The bottom line is that officials must avoid “bracketing” the blue line. The first official that recognizes that this is happening should make an obvious move towards or away from the blue line. An alert partner will use this as a cue to adjust their position to avoid simultaneous, double coverage of a blue line. Say, “Bye Bye”, Boo Birds!

