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## Technical foul calls gone wild

By Erik Brady, USA TODAY

The late Jim Valvano liked to tell banquet crowds about the time he asked a referee if he could get a technical foul for what he was thinking. The ref said no.



Technical fouls normally elicit angry reactions — and contorted faces — from coaches.

AP photos

"That's good," Valvano said. "Because I think you stink."

Valvano would wait a beat. (He understood that humor, like the backdoor cut, is all about timing.) Then he would slip in another punch line: "He gave me a technical anyway. Refs, you can't trust them."

### How to get suited for a 'T'

Direct technical fouls for unsporting conduct may be called on bench personnel for, among other things:

- Disrespectfully addressing an official

- Attempting to influence an official's decision

- Using profanity or language that is abusive, vulgar or obscene

Tom Penders found that out the hard way. The University of Houston coach blacked out when he stood up to protest a call in a game at Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) last weekend. A ref who saw him slump to his hands and knees apparently thought Penders was reacting

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- Taunting or baiting an opponent
- Objecting to an official's decision by rising from the bench or using gestures
- Inciting undesirable crowd reactions
- Using tobacco

Source: NCAA Basketball 2006 Men's and Women's Rules and Interpretations

to the call and signaled a technical foul.

The three-man crew stuck with the tech even when Penders, 60, was carried out on a stretcher, sucking oxygen. Which raises the question: Can you get a technical for dying?

Penders lets out a laugh. "For that," he says, "I think I could get thrown out of the game."

There's no I in team, but there *is* a T — at least in basketball, the only major team sport in which a breach in decorum can result in points for the other side.

The tableau is familiar in college basketball: Angry coach hollers. Official blows whistle. Crowd goes wild. Player shoots two.

Despite the antiseptic title, technical fouls are often among the game's best-remembered plays. If a dunk can be pure grace, a tech is often raw emotion — the difference between action and narrative.

Technical almost always come with a story. Ask a coach his or her favorite and take a seat. Many can spin tales taller than Yao Ming.

"The thing about the stories is they're only funny now," Lamar coach Billy Tubbs says. "They weren't funny at the time."

Penders' story wasn't. He has a heart condition and says he worried as he collapsed that the defibrillator implanted in his chest would go off. He was carried off the court 52 seconds before halftime. Doctors diagnosed dehydration and gave him fluids. He says he returned for the second half unaware a technical had been called on him — and that UAB's Squeaky Johnson had cashed in both free throws.

"I was arguing a call, and my assistant told me to be careful because I already" had a technical, Penders says. "I said, 'Are you kidding?' I had no idea. Look, I've had a lot of technicals in my career. Most of them I asked for or deserved. Not this one."

Conference USA agreed. "It appears that the crew exercised poor judgment in sustaining the technical foul," it said in a release.

UAB won 82-79, but Penders says the tech wasn't the

**Technical discussion**

**What do you think was the most memorable technical foul?**

- John Beilein: Locker room tirade
- Barbara Jacobs: Flying shoe
- Bob Knight: Chair toss
- Mike McDonald: 'Seinfeld technical
- Tom Penders: Passing out
- Billy Tubbs: Open mic
- Jim Valvano: For thinking
- Chris Webber: Timeout call

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difference in the game.

"Look, the guy made a mistake," Penders says. "He's human. I don't want to make fun of him. But you do have to wonder what he was thinking."

The story has quickly taken its place in the rich lore of the technical, where Tubbs also has an honored place. Missouri was playing at Oklahoma in 1989 during Tubbs' tenure there when — well, let him tell it.

"The officiating hadn't exactly been to my satisfaction. And the crowd didn't much like it either," Tubbs says. "Evidently some fans threw something on the floor. (Referee) Ed Hightower came over and said, 'Go to the mike and tell them not to throw anything.' And I said, 'No, I'm not going to do that.' And he motioned like if I didn't he was going to give me a technical.

"So I walked to the mike and simply said, 'Regardless of how terrible the officiating is, do not throw stuff on the floor.' "

Tubbs chuckles softly. "And, surprisingly, I got a technical for that."



AP photo  
Breaking the backboard glass — especially when caused by hanging on the rim during a dunk — can also draw a technical foul

Tubbs got the last laugh. His Sooners trailed at the time. They beat Missouri 112-105. That tech, he says, was the spark that got his team going.

"There's technical fouls where you basically ask for them," Tubbs says. "Let's say the officiating is bad and your team is playing worse. Then you get yourself a technical, and you use that as a rallying point: 'Hey,

let's not let these guys do this to us. Let's overcome this.' Sometimes that works. And sometimes it doesn't."

They are called strategic technicals, and many coaches, including Penders, believe in them. Lefty Driesell, who coached several teams, including Maryland, did not.

"I remember (the late) Al McGuire used to say he *tried* to get technicals, which I never did," Driesell says. "I tried *not* to get them. I jumped up and hollered a lot, but when they told me to sit down, I sat right down. Hey, I didn't want to give anybody any free shots."

### Flying circus

McGuire is the patron saint of the technical foul.

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Once, according to legend, he ran onto the court to protest a call and was told by a disbelieving ref that he was going to get one technical foul for every step it took him to get back to his bench.

McGuire called over two of his big men who picked him up and *carried* him back. The ref laughed so hard he didn't whistle any techs. Or so the story goes.

"I think that story has been told so many times it's a mix of truth and myth," says ESPN analyst Rick Majerus, an assistant for McGuire at Marquette.

Majerus says it was his job to know the first names of refs because McGuire didn't.

"Al needed name tags for his family," Majerus says. "And he didn't want to say, 'Hey, ref.' He wanted to say, 'Hey, Phil.' He didn't know names, but he always knew if a ref was a fireman or a cop. He thought those guys were the better guys to get.

"He thought the insurance guys or an accountant with a sharp pencil who could erase his mistakes were not the guys you wanted. He would say, 'Firemen solve problems. These other guys make them.' It was the world according to Al."

Majerus recalls trying "to save Al from himself" once when McGuire was berating an official. "He was in full serial killer mode. I put my hand on him and he turned and looked at me, all cool and collected, and said, 'I know what I'm doing.' That's when I knew there was method in his madness."

Majerus says McGuire would take a technical "if he sensed the crowd was not into the game or his players weren't. I'd say nine of every 10 he got were contrived."

Penders says 90% of his over the years have been intentional, too. "I subscribe to the Al McGuire school," he says. "Sometimes you want to take one, usually at home. It rarely makes sense on the road."

Majerus says he did not take strategic technicals when he coached Marquette, Ball State and Utah, despite his apprenticeship under the master.

"When I got them it was because I lost my emotions," Majerus says. "I never wanted to get into the calculated technical. That wasn't me. Al was a master psychologist. Most guys aren't. The coaches who tell you they take strategic technicals, most of them really don't. They get T'd up and they win and later they want to say it was strategy, when they really just lost it."

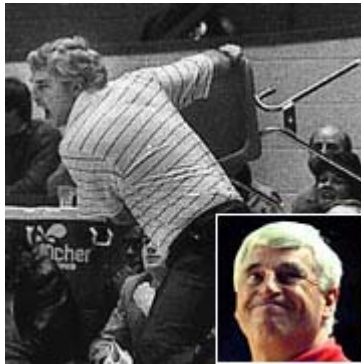
McGuire died of leukemia in 2001. Majerus says he visited often in the last weeks. They would talk about the good old days — the games, the players, even the refs.

"He always remembered guys he thought did him wrong," Majerus says. "He dropped bombs on a couple of them there at the end. Al liked to say he had Irish Alzheimer's: He forgot everything except the grudges."

### **Flying chair**

Technically, technical fouls come in two flavors. Direct technicals are called for bad behavior, such as profane language and fighting. Indirect technicals are called for technical violations, such as not reporting to the scorer's table or hanging on the rim.

Perhaps the most famous indirect technical came in the closing moments of the 1993 national championship, when Michigan forward Chris Webber called a timeout the Wolverines didn't have. They



AP photos

Bobby Knight was known for emotional outbursts, such as this chair-tossing episode in 1985, and drawing technical fouls during his days as coach at Indiana.

trailed 73-71. North Carolina won 77-71.

Perhaps the most famous direct technical came when then-Indiana coach Bob Knight threw a chair across the court to express displeasure with the refs early in a 72-63 loss against visiting Purdue in 1985.

Former ref Mickey Crowley recalls a lesser-known tech called against Knight when Knight coached the U.S. national team in an exhibition game against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Crowley says the official who called the tech asked Crowley to talk to Knight because Crowley knew him.

"Bobby says, 'Mickey, I won't say another word,' " Crowley says. "And I turn around and start to walk away and he says, 'But you've got to understand, those are communists over there. How do you guys

defend those communists?'

"I say, 'Hey, Bobby, slow down, you're going to start World War III.' And he says, 'Good. I've got 12 hostages right here.' "

Crowley, coordinator of men's basketball officials for the Ivy and Patriot leagues, says he did not call many technicals in his career. Penders says he believes the best officials call the fewest technicals.

"Sometimes a ref will make a bad call and realize it and then go looking for trouble" when a coach complains, Penders says. "The good ones don't do that. They give you a little leeway."

Hank Nichols, NCAA coordinator of men's officials, says referees don't like to call technicals. He says they are necessary and good officials use them to keep control and punish a player or coach for bad language or other bad behavior.

"I always say this: A technical foul should not be called unless it helps the game," Crowley says. "Give the coach his due. Be firm but fair. Put up the stop sign; let him know that's enough. And if he continues, there's nothing left to do but call it."

### Flying shoe

Barbara Jacobs says she was called for one technical foul in 15 seasons as coach of the Syracuse women's team. It was a doozy.

The Orange were playing at Pittsburgh in the mid-1980s when — well, let her tell it:

"I always wore high heel pumps and a nice dress or skirt for games. My guard was going down the floor and she got tripped by a defender and fell to the floor, but the official called traveling. And I tried to explain to the official that she got tripped by using a kick motion with my foot.

"And as I'm doing that my shoe flew off and it just kind of flew in the air. I remember thinking, *come back*. It was like the whole world stopped and it was flying in the air and, sure enough, it hit the official right in her butt. And she turned around and very calmly gave me a technical."

It got worse. "Then," Jacobs says, "she made me go out on the court and pick up my shoe. It was a long walk."

These days Jacobs is an assistant commissioner of the Big East in charge of women's basketball officiating. For a few years, she was the boss of Phyllis Deveney, the ref who called that technical. "We laughed about it a lot," Jacobs says. "She tells that story all the time at referee clinics."

University at Buffalo coach Reggie Witherspoon remembers coaching a game in junior college when the opposing team came out of a timeout with six players.

"We shouted at the ref, and by the time he saw it, the other team already dunked," Witherspoon says. "He called the technical but we missed both free throws. I asked the ref, 'Can't you count any faster?'"

Canisius coach Mike McDonald got a technical in an overtime loss last season at rival Niagara. He says he didn't say a word to the ref who called it: "It was a Seinfeld technical — about nothing."

West Virginia coach John Beilein says he got a technical during halftime when he was coaching Richmond in the late 1990s at William & Mary. The referees overheard him complain about them as he was talking to his assistants outside his locker room.

"Not only did I get a 'T,' " Beilein says, "but the guy blew his whistle — in the hallway."

Nichols was the one blowing whistles the night Valvano asked if he could get a technical for what he was thinking. Nichols says it is a true story — mostly.

"When Jim said, 'I think you stink,' I laughed so hard I didn't give him a technical," Nichols says. "But I guess it makes a better story to say I did."

Technical fouls often make great stories. And Penders says he hopes to tell his for many years to come.

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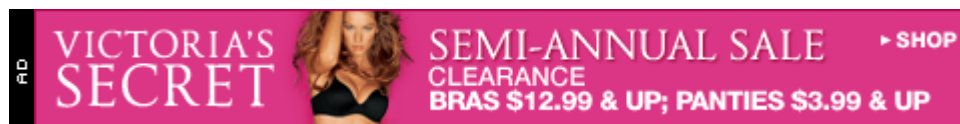
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