

Federation slam dunks leave appeal for Olympic referee

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“I’d like to referee either of the Olympic gold medal matches,” Federation member and international basketball referee James Boyer said. “That would be unbelievable.”

James departed Sydney on 24 June, having been selected in March to referee basketball matches at the Tokyo Olympics, beginning 24 July.

While James is usually the one adjudicating on rules, he recently called upon Federation to help him appeal the Department’s decision to reject his application to access paid special leave while refereeing at the Olympics.

“I applied in 2018 for special leave for refereeing the Commonwealth Games but was not successful and just left it, taking long service leave instead,” James, the sport and physical activity coordinator for the School Sport Unit, said.

“When I was unsuccessful this time I thought it was worth contacting Federation because I saw conflict between the policies for teachers and other members of the public service,” James said.



The union advocated on James’s behalf, the result being that the Department has granted him 20 days of special leave, in line with athletes and coaches.

“I can’t speak more highly of what Federation did for me,” James said.

“I’m proud that we pursued it and hope that other teachers who aspire to go to the Olympics as a referee in the future will be supported by the Department in the same way.”

And now for the challenge ahead, his first experience of refereeing at the Olympics.

"I'm ready, I've been preparing my whole life," James said.

"I'm the sum of all my experiences; I've refereed a lot of basketball.

"Yes, it's the Olympics, but the courts are the same size, the ring is the same size, the ball is the same size. It's still basketball."

James played basketball in high school but said he was never going to make it to the top as a player. "I thought it might be possible as a referee and here I am."

He began refereeing under 8s and under 10 matches at a local level and now referees for the NBL. He has been an international basketball referee since 2014.

"I've had a lot of great experiences doing this; I've refereed a China versus South Korea game that was watched by 60 million people," James said. "I refereed an Australia versus USA game in front of a live audience of 50,000 people. That was cool."