

# Reading Referees' Association

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<b>South Chiltern Minor League</b>	Mike Overton

# READING REFEREE

Editor - Brian Palmer

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Assistant Editor - John Moore

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## *Editorial*

A daunting responsibility – the first editorial, not only of a new century, but of a new millennium. Don't get too many chances like that in a lifetime!

Inevitably you are tempted to look back over what has happened in the last century – a 1000 years is a bit too long – and then look forward as far as your imagination takes you.

Well, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw football move from the beginnings of professionalism to a high level of commercialism, with all the anticipated benefits and disadvantages. Undreamed of levels of skill and fitness, excitement and drama but at a cost. The cost of nastiness, petulance and out-and-out cheating and so the loss of that Corinthian purity of 'gentlemanly conduct', which really did exist once. Before the days even of referees, though I rush to add that our arrival didn't *cause* the problem. We exist because the problem is there.

The future? My crystal ball is pretty cloudy. Technology and commercialism are going to continue to be huge influences at one level. What intrigues me is what will happen to football at the grass-roots. How is it going to be for the next generations? Will the popular appeal remain? Will there really be two different games? And so on. What will it all mean for referees?

Every good wish for the New Millennium. However it develops, enjoy it.

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# NOVEMBER

## Monthly Meeting

A better attendance this month with nearly 50 members present. Chairman Derek Reigate opened the meeting with a minute's silence for former member Keith Dade who had recently died of cancer.

The General Secretary Martin Albury gave a graphic account of the County 5-a-side competition in which he had taken part (report on page 10). We had also come third in the County Quiz after having been winners for three years in succession.

A collection was made for the McMillan Fund in memory of Peter Pittaway. £50 would be added by the society.

### *Training*

The present course was at the examination stage, with 25 candidates still in contention. Already 23 others had indicated interest in the course to start in January. There was further discussion of ways to cope with the many young candidates and the need to recruit more examiners in any case.

### *Reading Football League*

A club reported by the referee for not supplying flags as per rule had been fined. A clarification about club's 'providing refreshments' would be provided after a club had claimed that having them 'available for payment' met the requirement of the rule.

### *Reading Sunday League*

The meeting had been inquorate but informal discussion had taken place about access to pitches by ambulances in the case of accidents (after the locked gate incident at King's Meadow). Stuart Gentle reported a similar problem at Sol Joel's.



## PROBLEM SPOT



Malcolm Garstang told of a recent problem he had had with club assistant referees. Usual pre-match instructions with special attention to offside. One assistant who appeared competent started to get more and more stick from the spectators and Malcolm began to wonder about him. The other one seemed to raising his flag more and more, and too frequently. Nearly half-time and Malcolm was very uneasy. What should he have done?

Various suggestions: talk to the club secretary; talk to the club assistant, try starting with the two assistants running with their own forward line.

Malcolm in fact talked first to a Sunday League official who happened to be there and got support for the decision that had resulted in a goal. He did then ask the assistants to check their own forwards in the second half and he had no further trouble. Stephen Green pointed out how this ploy made good sense now that the offside Law had been changed.

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**Guest Speaker** was Tony Rock of the Army FA, Major in the Royal Signals. A career soldier who started refereeing 'late' at the age of 30. He claimed to have 'done nothing' for four years then he took off and reached contributory level in three years. A posting to Germany cut off his progress. He had also played semi-pro football and is an FA Coach. Chairman of the Army Referees' Committee for the last three years.

He announced that it was going to be an interactive session, not a talk, on 'Aspects of Refereeing'. He structured the whole thing around his task of building a barbecue and using the various materials and processes to make his points.

For example, the DIY manual = the LOAF. A little test of two questions which many of us got wrong. (Modesty prevents me from saying who got both right). The point was that we have to keep up to date on Law.

Our material = the players. They have to be moulded/manipulated. Not possible with some – too solid.

[Video clip of Graham Poll man-handling players. Not to be taught but it worked for him].

Bonding = cement & sand. Must get consistency. Maximum attainable is for those 90 minutes. Use of common sense in application of Laws leads to *inconsistency*. Danger of fixation on technical aspects and letting physical foul play go by. Must sort out players set on serious foul play.

[Video clips of inconsistent use of red and yellow cards in penalty situations]

The game is different at different levels and so handling it is different.

One aspect of offensive language little discussed is the variation of 'normal' language between different areas e.g. outside London.

Drill. You must have a good system for recording what happens, especially with the higher number of cards and reports. Too many wrong players have been sent off.

Lunch box = referee/assistant co-operation.

Here Tony put forward a view he expected to be controversial. On the pitch board he displayed the areas he thought referees wanted or did not want help from their assistant: The penalty area and the ten yards or so beyond were marked in red and were the referee's alone; the area immediately outside the red area was yellow and could be shared; beyond that it was all green and there was full co-operation.

The plumb-line = offside. Tony contends that, in spite of the Law change, the advantage is still given to the defence.

Finally, the sand paper indicates that there are always rough edges to be worked upon and smoothed out.

The Chairman's vote of thanks was heartily endorsed. Tony had succeeded involving everyone, had stimulated some good exchanges and lived up to his reputation of being 'challenging'.

# DECEMBER

## Monthly Meeting

Always the meeting with a difference. An attractive and impressive display of prizes, the Grand Draw as the focal point of the meeting and some forty colleagues to share the occasion and a drink with.

Chairman Derek Reigate had his skates on again and the business moved swiftly on.

The Secretary reported on the County RA Quiz (details on page 15) in which our member, Neil Haddock, had the highest individual score.

### *Reading Football League*

Reports received from referees had been acted upon.

Welcome packs were given to new referees and included a membership application form for the RA.

The League was keen to be informed of any instance where referees were asked not to send a disciplinary report in to the County FA. The County FA and RA should also be informed.

The danger presented by fenced-off cricket pitches, reported by referees, was accepted as real. Referees were asked to remove the stakes considered hazardous. If the situation could not be made safe, the match should not take place and the circumstances should be reported to the league.

Martin Shearn reminded colleagues not to leave kit in the Coley Park changing room, but not for the usual reason – because you get locked out. It was reported that the RFL is to provide a key for referees.

The second half was about light snacks, liquid refreshment and the Grand Draw. Of course there were some winners and losers as ever, but the evening was its usual success and a very suitable way to celebrate our last of the Millennium.

# THE GRAND CHRISTMAS DRAW

Once again a great success thanks to organiser Brian Wratten, who rushes to thank others:

“Yes! It’s all over for another year, and as usual, you came up trumps. As usual too, we had the frenzied last minute telephone calls – nearly 100 in all – reminding members that we would still be pleased to receive their contributions, even if the deadline date had long since passed. It seems to be an established pattern that some 60-70% of the income arrives during the week immediately before the draw! But arrive it did, so once again my thanks go to everyone involved. To those who, despite the customary moans and groans, managed to sell (or should it be buy?) so many draw tickets; to Richard Highfield and Neil Isham for their generous donations of prizes; to my colleagues on the Committee for their support in making those phone calls and for their assistance at the draw; and to my wife for her invaluable help in procuring prizes, answering phone calls, providing refreshments and – let it not be forgotten – preparing and folding some 5,000+ draw ticket stubs.

As a result of all these efforts the Reading RA finances benefited to the tune of £637, which although about 10% down on the past two years, was still an excellent achievement. So, again, my grateful thanks for your sterling efforts and support.”

580	B. WHITE	5759	D. GARDEN
1251	Mrs. C. M. WHEELER	11334	ALLISON SMITH (BT)
5734	MELVIN - COUNTY TRUCKS	800	R. BUSHNELL
4919	S. LEACH	1353	P. STREAM
4924	S. HIGGINS	10754	ALUMINIUM TOWER
2415	K. PRINCE	9959	M. ROWLEY
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10797	ALUMINIUM TOWER	11346	DAVID SMITH (BT)
9956	M. ROWLEY	11556	T. WALTON
4578	Mrs. MUMFORD	10713	ALUMINIUM TOWER
2488	G. WYLIE	4303	K. DAVIES
889	T. DILLOWAY	2704	HELEN CHILD
5588	J. FREEMAN	6711	CAROL HILEY
7294	N. ISHAM	2404	F. WELLS

Well done, the winners. And again our sincere thanks to Brian Wratten for a superbly organised and successful event.

# SOME QUOTES OF 1999

from *The Times*, 31/12/99

Becks is an intelligent person. It's just that he hardly says anything  
**Dwight Yorke** *on his Manchester United team-mate, David Beckham*

I accept I made a serious error of judgment in an interview which caused misunderstanding and pain to a number of people.

**Glenn Hoddle**, *former England football coach*

If his theory is correct, he is in for real problems in the next life. He will probably be doomed to come back as Glenn Hoddle.

**Tony Banks**, *who was Minister for Sport at the time of Hoddle's remarks*

I am ruling myself out of the running here and now. I have started something at Fulham and I want to finish it. I have made a commitment and I will remain loyal.

**Kevin Keegan**, *shortly before resigning as Fulham manager to take up the role of England head coach*

We worked really hard for the opportunity to get in the driving seat. Now we've got to drive.

**Kevin Keegan** *between England's 2-0 win over Scotland at Hampden and their 1-0 defeat at Wembley.*

I cannot start it all again, but I would if I could.

**Kate Hoey**, *Minister for Sport, on plans to rebuild Wembley stadium*

I looked around and saw the cup being carried down to the pitch with Bayern Munich colours on it. Two minutes later I had it in my own hands and it was ours.

**David Beckham**, *on Manchester United's victory in the European Cup Final with two last-minute goals*

If we draw them again, do we get to keep them?

**Kevin Keegan**, *after England were drawn against Germany for the Euro 2000 finals and the 2002 World Cup qualifying round.*



I am trying to find a replacement for our broken telly so that we can watch them on video, and I've still got the shirts to wash yet.

**Peter Fox**, *Exeter City manager, two days before the visit of Everton*

They've got a big lad up front. What's his name? Heskey, is it?

**Mark Jones**, *Hereford goalkeeper and full-time dairy farmer*

No-one can explain what happens in the FA Cup, but it's been happening to West Ham for 30-odd years.

**Harry Redknapp**, *on yet another shock defeat, 1-0 at Tranmere Rovers*

"Bloody Hell"

*Opening words of a report from the **Hereford United** scout on their opponents, Leicester City*

"Football. Bloody Hell"

**Sir Alex Ferguson**

# Catherine Wheel Advert

## **MPs ABROAD SEE RED**

The card business is catching. It was recently reported by Reuters (so it must be true) that the Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, Jonathan Hunt, has introduced a system of soccer-style yellow and red cards. The aim was to keep unruly MPs in line at the first meeting of the new parliamentary session.

What seems lacking now is information on what actually happened. Was anybody actually cautioned or dismissed? What are the sanctions and so on. We watch this development with interest. Could it make it all less boring? Doubtful.

## **COUNTY RA 5-A-SIDE**

Well, we didn't quite win it this year, but it was really tight – every game won by the odd goal. We were probably the oldest team (average age 40!): Martin Albury, Keith Davies, Mark McAdden, Steve McMahan and Mark Surtees - and no subs.

Reading started brightly against Bracknell, but could not find a way past their goalkeeper. Mark, in our goal, performed miracles keeping Bracknell at bay until they squeezed a shot from an acute angle past him at the near post with just a couple of minutes left. 0–1 to Bracknell..

Against Slough, we came out winners by the odd goal in five. Steve McMahan scored twice and Mark McAdden got the other. Mark also missed two penalties!

We were all very tired by the time of our third game – we were the only team without subs.. Again we started well, Mark McAdden scoring (from 30 yards he reckoned. Ha! ha!) The score was still 1 – 1 late in the second half.. Martin hit the post but then Wycombe scored and we just couldn't get the equaliser.

Wycombe ended up winners of the competition on goals scored.

Thanks to all the “lads” who played for us. It was extremely tiring, but equally as enjoyable and we look forward to next year's competition to be hosted by Wycombe.

*Martin Albury*

# Avon Food Services Advert

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# WHEN DOES 'ADVICE' BECOME 'INTERPRETATION'

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asks Dick Sawdon Smith

The Laws of Football are a mess. I've said it before and I will say it again: the re-writing of the laws in 1997 was done badly and carelessly. Now many of our members were surprised and not a little angry to find out at our December meeting that there is another, one might say a companion, book to the Laws of Association Football (LOAF). This book published by the F.A. is entitled 'Advice on the Application (note these words) of the Laws of the Game.

All new referees on registration are given this book, but older members who qualified years ago claim never to have seen it. The advice given on the application of the laws cannot be seen as interpretations of course, but some come pretty close, and some are even additions. Here's a silly little illustration. Law 4, Players Equipment in LOAF says 'if thermal undershorts are worn, they are (must be) the same main colour as the shorts'. In its 'advice' on this law, the F.A. say that as well as being the same colour, they must not extend beyond the top of the knee.'

Now the uninitiated might say, 'Well if that's what the F.A. say it must be law.' and yet in the front of the Advice booklet the F.A. reminds us that 'The International F.A. Board consists of the four British Associations and F.I.F.A.. No alterations to the Laws of the Game may be made by any Association until they have been passed by the Board. The idea of course is to ensure that the game is played to the same set of laws wherever in the world it is played. We have to ask if this addition to the laws is not in fact an alteration. If this is what the International Board meant to say, why didn't they put it in LOAF? If not, what authority does the F.A. have to give this instruction to their referees? The answer clearly is none.

O.K., so that is a minor point, but here's another mystery that perhaps is a little more important. I address this question to our longer-serving members. A player charges an opponent fairly i.e. with the shoulder, when the ball is not within playing distance of the players concerned, and they are definitely not trying to play it. How would you penalise the player? Just take a second to make your decision before you read on. According to LOAF of 1996, you penalise with an indirect free kick. When the laws were rewritten in 1997, this clause was left out completely.

Referees everywhere, I'm sure, continued as they had always done, I know I did. But are we right, and what about the new referees? Well, they are all right of course, because it is covered in the F.A. Advice booklet, although worded a little differently. It says '...will be penalised by the award of a direct free kick if deemed careless. If reckless or committed with excessive force, the appropriate sanction will also be required'.

From that we must take it that, unless the charge is careless, reckless or with excessive force (it wouldn't then be a fair charge anyway), we still award an indirect free kick. But it isn't very clear is it? Do the other national associations give their referees the same advice, and has it been passed by the International F.A. Board? If so why doesn't it still appear in LOAF?

I could go on endlessly with examples but two things are clear in my mind. If we are to have two books on the Laws of the Game, every referee must know there are two, and must have both. But better still, there should only be one book, and all interpretations, whether wrapped up as 'advice on the application of the laws' or not, should clearly emanate from one source only, the International F.A. Board.

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## **NATIONAL RA CALLS IN THE CONSULTANTS**

Conference 1999 passed a notice of motion from the Erewash Valley society charging the RA to bring proposals for re-structuring the Association to Conference 2001. Council, acting on a suggestion from Reading, undertook to appoint a team of management consultants to take the process forward. The team of five consultants subsequently selected includes Brian Palmer (Team Leader) and Brian Wratten from the Reading RA, both of whom have extensive management/consultancy experience. The other members are: Jim Haynes (Essex); Ken Upton (Derbyshire); David Williams (Guildford).

The team has undertaken to publish a note about the consultancy process, and regular reports will appear in *The Football Referee* and on our website and the national RA's.

## LAUGHS FROM THE WEBSITE

*For the benefit (I think it's benefit) of those who don't visit our website, here are a few of the funnies about referees – particularly there to amuse fans and players and persuade them we can share a joke, even against ourselves.*

I know where he should have put his flag up, and he'd have got plenty of help

**Ron Atkinson** (who else?)

Wimbledon boss, **Joe Kinnear**, landed in hot water again for criticising another referee. "I couldn't believe it when the ref gave the decision to the opposition yet again," he moaned. Video evidence later confirmed, however, that the opposing captain had indeed correctly called 'heads'.

Player: "What would you do, ref' if I called you a f\*\*\*\*\* w\*\*\*\*\*?"

Referee: "Red card and straight off!"

Player: "What would you do if I *thought* you were a f\*\*\*\*\* w\*\*\*\*\*?"

Referee: "You can *think* whatever you like."

Player: "In that case, I *think* you're a f\*\*\*\*\* w\*\*\*\*\*!"

Warhurst was sent off for foul and abusive language, but the lad swears blind he never spoke to the linesman.

**Joe Royle**

After an admittedly not very good performance, the young and inexperienced referee was heard to say apologetically: "I'm only a Class 3 . . . because there isn't a Class 4."

When the England striker was tackled in the area he appealed heatedly to the referee for a penalty. The French official, who prided himself on his command of English, replied: "No way. You sink I know nussing. Let me tell you Monsieur, about football I know bugger all"

# COUNTY RA QUIZ

As winners for the last three years, much was expected of us but, of course, we had sadly lost our captain and stalwart competitor Peter Pittaway.

I thought our team of Malcolm Garstang (captain), Tony Beckett, Neil Haddock and Derek Reigate looked a bit nervous and were feeling the pressure as things kicked off.

The first round was the numbers game. All you had to do was show a number. I felt really good on one of them – the number of duties of the referee. 20. Unfortunately the right answer is 18. Good job I wasn't in the team. Close at this stage – we were two points behind N.Berks and the previously unfancied Chiltern who were beginning to attract interest.

Second round was True/False but still more about the letter of the Laws than refereeing. A bit of crafty word-work brought the lads right into contention, just nosing out N.Berks and tying at 30 each with Chiltern.

Third round and into restarts. At last something about real refereeing. Unfortunately everyone now expects you to get the answers right and you have nowhere to hide. The lads were going well and it was still nip and tuck – N.Berks and Reading just 2 points adrift, with Chiltern beginning to show.

Last round – playing situations. Three points to go for and a lot of possibilities to consider in the 20 seconds allowed.

Chiltern with their tails well up surged to the post and ran out winners with 94. N.Berks a close second with 92, Reading a close third with 89. Third of 11 societies can't be bad. Unfortunately six weren't there, so it was third of five on the night. Reading's Neil Haddock has to be specially congratulated for his remarkable 29 out of 36 - easily the best of the night.

We were delighted for Chiltern – time they won something – and especially relieved that they have to go to the Divisional finals and host the competition next year. Congratulations to our team – the only ones courageous enough to take part.

Mike Rowley Advert

(being sent direct to  
Fericon)



# More from Moore

Over the past year I have been writing in the Reading Evening post, with Brian Palmer, a series of articles concerning refereeing and football. My problem has been that I have become so outraged by events in the Professional game that my own articles have focused more on the mindless lack of scruples of those who run and play the sport at the top level than on the job of refereeing.

However, when you read what the so-called stars get up to, is it any wonder that we, as a hard-working body of professionally-minded people (professional in mind if not money) get disillusioned.

As a referee it is important to keep your feet on the ground and not to favour one player against another outside of the laws of the game. How then does a normal human being referee these so-called international stars when they treat the rest of us with so little respect?

Over the last few weeks, Alex Ferguson, David Beckham, Dwight Yorke, Andy Cole and Stan Collymore have been in court for various offences regarding their driving. They think they are above the law of the land too. What makes me laugh is not only the contempt such people have for the law but, worse, for our intelligence. Take pleas of mitigation for example:-

*A ban would only make my client, Stan Collymore's depression worse.*

*I was being chased by a photographer in a Fiesta whilst driving my Ferrari.*

*In being caught at 121mph in a Ferrari, "Sorry. It's one of those cars".*

*Driving on the hard shoulder of the motorway because of an impending attack of diarrhoea.*

*Manchester United fined because they wouldn't admit to who was driving one of their registered cars through a speed camera.*

I have got to save one of the best for last.

*" Cole, 28. Was banned for six months after doing 65mph in a 50mph zone. He was caught at the wheel of his £150,000 Ferrari near his home. Cole's plea that he should not be banned because he was too famous to take the bus failed to impress the magistrates."*

## **ROYALS' ACADEMY – 'Core Skills' Session with Dick Sawdon Smith**

David Downes, guest speaker at our September meeting, requested the help of members in his capacity of Education and Welfare Officer for the new Academy of Reading F.C.

One Thursday morning in October, myself and two other members, Ken Clarke and Kevin Parsons, went along to the Madejski Stadium to take part in what is called the 'Core Skills Programme' This particular session, perhaps not surprisingly, was called 'Working with the Referee'.

The morning started with a video featuring David Ellery who talked about football from a referee's point of view. Following this the players were split into two groups. Ken and I took the older boys with Kevin and David Downes taking the younger age group. We had to lead group discussions based on a list of questions that had been prepared for us, and of course answer any questions on refereeing that they might have.

The type of area covered was 'respect for referees'. The factors that increased a players respect for a referee and the other way around. What contribution does a referee make to a game? We also covered questioning the referees decisions and how they should go about it. What would be the likely consequences of questioning in an unacceptable manner? We also looked at the fact that referees only have seconds to make up their minds when making their interpretations of fouls and misconduct and whether the players' actions could influence these decisions.

Afterwards, when Ken and I compared notes with Kevin and David. both groups had reacted with similar views. The objective of course is to catch the players while they are young and mould their attitudes to referees. How successful it will be when and if they get into the professional game, remains to be seen, but it is certainly worth trying.

One of our players, when asked what he thought referees brought to a game, first gave the answer 'two watches, two whistles, etc' but then said 'order'. Apparently he had had to referee one of the practice matches and the result had been chaos. Perhaps this is the real answer: to gain respect for the referee's job, all players ought to made to referee a few matches.

# FROM THE PAST

## 1971-72

With Beckenbauer, Netzer and Müller, West Germany outplayed England at Wembley in the European championships and eventually won 3-1. In the away leg England managed a 0-0 draw.

For the first time the UEFA Cup final was an all-English game. Against Wolves, Spurs took a 2-1 lead to White Hart Lane from Molyneux and ran out 3-2 winners. Mullery, back in the side at the age of 30 as captain because of the list of injuries, was paraded round the ground on the shoulders of his team-mates.

The Football League agreed that clubs should release players selected for international games with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

In March, Jack Charlton played his 600<sup>th</sup> game for Leeds.

In the final of the Watney Cup, Fourth Division Colchester beat West Brom on penalties after drawing 4-4 at the end of extra time.

Ted McDougall scored a record nine goals for Bournemouth in the first round of the FA Cup when they beat Southern League side Margate 11-0.

Of their 46 Fourth Division matches, Aldershot drew 22, to equal the record set the previous season by Tranmere Rovers.

## 1972-73

The Charlton brothers. Jack and Bobby, both retired as players after more than 600 games each for Leeds and Manchester United respectively, and took on management posts. Jack went to Middlesbrough and Bobby to Preston North End.

Bobby Moore led England to a 5-0 victory against Scotland on his 100<sup>th</sup> international appearance.

Jimmy Hill, commentator on the match between Arsenal and Liverpool at Highbury, took over as linesman when one of the officials was injured.

The FA Council finally abolished the discredited distinction between amateurs and professionals. From the start of the 1974 season all footballers, paid or not, would be referred to as 'players'.

In June, Ted Croker was appointed Secretary of the FA.

Spurs goalkeeper Pat Jennings, when presented with the Player of Year award, said: 'How could I avoid being Player of the Year being behind our defence?'

Gordon Banks, perhaps England's most famous goalkeeper ever, was forced to retire as a result of injuries received in a car crash. Shards of glass from a shattered windscreen entered his right eye. In spite of his determination to return to the game wearing contact lenses, he was finally forced to accept that he would not play again.

During the Orient v. Hull match, a spectator ran on to the pitch, got possession of the ball and scored a 'goal'. It was the only one of the match as neither team managed to score.

## **THE NEW READING RA TIE**

Have you got yours yet? Going like hot cakes. Well, warm at least.

Essential accessory for anyone, especially those on a higher league or with aspirations.

Navy with a wide (14mm) bright blue stripe and a narrow gold one, with the RRA logo. Quite elegant and nice quality polyester. Goes beautifully with or without a blazer. Superb value at £7-99.

## Guilty of a serious crime - The Football Association

The crime in question is causing death - the death of a career. If nothing else, the title probably stopped you turning the page for a moment.

In the enlightened age of the new century, we are, as a society, for ever being told what and what is not correct – ‘politically correct’ - behaviour. A few weeks ago I was travelling to London and was listening to a Radio 5 broadcast (they actually have other programmes than 6.06) about *ageism*.

This debate went on for an hour with the main thrust being that the government were bringing in regulations that forbid any employer from denying employment on the basis of age. In fact it was suggested that, if ever asked for your date of birth at an interview for a job, you should state the day and month only, When questioned on which year this applied to, one should reply ‘every year’.

So, why the heading? Because referees are the victims. Remember Clive Thomas’s protests and the quieter departure of the super-fit John Martin? Well, for me it has now become personal. At the end of last season I too was retired from all my so-called senior football as I had reached the age of 45. This was no shock as I had planned for my 'retirement' for some time and had set myself goals over the last ten years of refereeing with the impending, and now past, date of May 1999 on the horizon. What I had not realised is how much it would affect my motivation for the sport, or should I say profession, I once held so close to my heart.

I take a great interest in the progress of friends I made who are still on the circuit and, as an assessor on the Ryman League, still venture to grounds and watch senior football, but something is dreadfully missing. I still referee on Sunday mornings but it is no longer as easy to get myself excited at the prospect. One thing that has never been a problem for me personally has been enthusiasm for refereeing, that is until now, and that is the saddest part.

Before I continue I should point out one major thing. My body has not reacted kindly to the years of three or four matches a week and a troublesome ankle would have not allowed me anyway to continue for another season at

the level I had attained. The point of this article is that *age should not be the sole criterion for enforced retirement*. There are many extremely fit and capable referees who could continue for two, three or even more years. If those following in their predecessors footsteps are good enough, they will replace their older colleagues through the system of markings and assessment.

I have just returned from holiday over the Christmas period to find a letter from my County Football association giving me an appointment to referee two of the most senior sides in Oxfordshire. Of course I am delighted, but is it fair on the clubs to have a referee who has not officiated at that level for nine months? I think not. As far as the match is concerned, I know it will not be a problem for me, but the system is still all wrong.

I have noticed over my years as a referee on the Ryman League that the disease of ageism infects in many subtle ways. Local Reading colleagues I have respected and thought could have gone further become disillusioned at 40 and 41 because they see their way forward blocked: "If I can't get on the referees' panel this year I may as well pack in now" is so often heard in bars after a match. Unfortunately, I can see their point of view.

We, as referees, are honest enough to know there is a massive shortfall of referees at the highest levels of subsidiary and contributory leagues. Even those that manage the leagues know this problem exists and yet those in power at the Football Association still bury their heads.

I should add that I am certainly not putting local football down. Those who know me accept that I have always contributed to the local scene and have never turned down an appointment on local parks, questioning whether the game is beneath me. Quite the contrary. I sometimes wonder whether clubs have done something wrong to have me on their games!

I have the greatest respect for colleagues that stay out of the pyramid and give their all to the Reading Football Leagues and various youth leagues. Would those leagues ever turn away referees on the basis of age? I think not.

*John Moore*

# Knowl Hill Garage Advert

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# What's on for the Rest of this Season

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- 20 January                      Former Football League referee and ex-Reading RA member, Tom Bune, now a co-ordinator of Premiership referees, including David Ellery
- 17 February                     Mark Halsey, ex-Spurs player and Premiership referee
- 16 March                         Andrew Melrose, a member of the RFU Training Team for Referees – insights from the other code
- 20 April                         To be confirmed
- 18 May                         Annual General Meeting and your opportunity to vote on issues affecting the future of your society

## **AND FINALLY . . .**

A goalkeeper was booked after he refused to hang up on a mobile phone call in his penalty area. The goalkeeper, “a ringer” who should not even have been playing for the Chatham side, has been fined and suspended by the Kent County Football Association”.

*The Times*, 22/12/99