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EDITORIAL

Hope you had a super festive season and that 1987 proves a good year for you.

The new year seems to be starting with some signs that things in the soccer world may be looking up. Higher attendances at Football League games overall and some decline in nonsense. I welcome and would echo Graham Kelly's view (see p.9) that we need some change and experimentation with the Laws. FIFA (or rather the International Board) is notoriously difficult to shift. Maybe if we all made it a New Year resolution something would happen.

In the Reading society I feel we are just settling into our new venue, though the committee is always exploring ways to make the meetings more attractive to our members. Only **you** have to tell us. We had some good feedback in November from one member - let's have some more. And while I'm on that theme, what about comments on the magazine? I accept, as I've said before, that I will end up doing most of the work of producing it. But, even if you don't want to write for me, I hope you read what I produce. So tell me what you think.

And while we're on ideas, have we really exhausted all the possible ways of recruiting and keeping referees? There is something of a national panic and my plea for more women won't solve the problem overnight (if ever). We are doing better than most societies in terms of recruitment but that is pretty cold comfort. Hand on heart: what have you done personally since the beginning of the season to recruit even one referee? Another New Year resolution?

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NOVEMBER MEETING

The evening it all came together.

More than seventy members present (including most from the last course and a few of our old stalwarts who had only just got round to re-joining). The special bar was open at last. And former Football League referee, Alf Rogers (called in at the last minute because Colin Downey had had to cry off owing to bereavement) did us proud.

Several important items of business. From David Keen a number of suggestions for improving meetings and service to members. Would an earlier starting time be preferred? Should minutes and other information be circulated on a regular basis? Agreed that more could be done to keep members informed if they were unable to attend meetings. The starting time merited further discussion.

The chairman mentioned a letter from the Middlesex Border league asking us to recommend six linesmen, and opened up a discussion about the desirability of new(ish) referees becoming involved at the expense of local leagues and their own development. On balance members seemed to feel the advantages outweighed the disadvantages, though the referees concerned needed to watch that they were not pushed to do too many lines at the expense of local middles.

We heard yet again of a member having to wait in a hotel corridor prior to a personal hearing (which on this occasion started over 20 minutes late as well). The meeting decided to support his stand to refuse to accept such conditions. In spite of the assurance of the County representative that it would not happen again, the secretary was instructed to inform the County RA of our decision.

After half time, Guest Speaker Alf Rogers took the floor. It was to be about 'participation'. About practical refereeing and that meant lining as well. He started by referring to the 'excellent' Manual of Guidance, pointing out how many qualities you are expected to have at the various levels.

But what we were really in for was a practical session on lining. He produced 3 flags (old style Umbro I noticed) and three class 3's from the audience. They had to give signals for e.g.

offside, far side, and than face (constructive) criticism. Difficult one was "Ref, I want to speak to you", and, curiously, when indicating the indirect free kick they all forget to give the direction.

The next sequence was Brian Papworth instructing his neutral linesmen (feeder league). Always artificial in front of spectators and especially difficult when you didn't know it was going to happen. He did a very good job, very fully. Only omissions anyone spotted were recording/time-keeping and senior linesman. Then, poor Richard Highfield who had expected to be instructing neutral linesmen discovered they were to be club linesmen after all. There was little criticism of the content of what he said but it was felt (and he agreed) that a bit of simplification, especially of language, would have helped. Finally, the most impressive bit was the return of the three class 3's instructed by Brian who had been sent away to write down what they remembered - they had remembered almost every word. The proof of the pudding . . . Alf kept things going, always emphasizing the constructive side of criticism.

A meeting in which everyone had felt involved and learned something, and a good social occasion. Difficult to tear yourself away.

DECEMBER MEETING

Not our usual monthly event of course. At the Christmas meeting the stress is all on relaxation and informal refereeing chat. Nearly 80 members turned up for the Grand Christmas Draw and more than a score of prizes, thanks to the generosity of members as well as the kitty. (Winners list published separately - I'm not on it this year). The prospect of a free drink and bangers and chips and beans and a roll may have had something to do with the turn-out too. . . .

The Chairman didn't hang about with the business - it was despatched quickly and decently to leave time for the fun. We were delighted to welcome a colleague from down under to share it with us. Colin Morris, a senior New Zealand referee, had come all the way from Christchurch to visit friends in England and obviously enjoyed the company of refereeing colleagues over here. [He did promise me an article and will be reminded when he receives a copy of this magazine! Ed]

After the draw, with Vice-Chairman Bernie Young acting as MC, members took their places to be served their supper by the committee (though the cooking this year was in the hands of the resident professionals).

Good nosh and a splendid way to conclude our year.

AN INTERESTING POINT OF LAW (as well)

Poor David Axcell was carried off unconscious after a free-for-all in the Charlton penalty area after Norwich City's fiercely disputed equaliser at Carrow Road on the first Saturday of the New Year. After a visit to hospital he said he didn't know what had happened. But Charlton's captain Mark Aizlewood admitted he grabbed Mr Axcell's arm before the referee fell heavily to the ground. Charlton's manager claimed that stand-in referee Pat Healey admitted the ball had not crossed the line, **but he could not change the original decision.** Leaving aside the ethics of what Pat Healey is alleged to have said - what about that 'original decision'?

Could it have been changed?

POACHER TURNED GAMEKEEPER?

[or the thoughts of Mike Borland from his hospital bed]

BP Well, you're looking OK and the nurses seem to have got to know you. They reckon you're proving quite frisky.

MB Not surprising - I've been in here that often recently. I'm the latest model of bionic man.

BP The bad news is I'm going to write all this down for the magazine in case you don't make the next meeting

Let's talk about your refereeing, Mike. When did you start?

MB 73/74 season. 12 years ago. Still remember the first game. At Rabson's, Combination, Division 4. I've never lost that feeling of pride in the uniform. And what happens? After 20 minutes a player just walks off. I know what to do don't I? Leaving the field without permission. Caution. Looking back I know it was silly. He only had a bit of muck in his eye, didn't he . . .

BP You did develop a reputation for managing without the book.

MB Well that's not what refereeing's about, is it.

BP Does the big, outgoing personality help?

MB It's a great advantage. My job is selling. You've got to make your point and make it quick. Just like refereeing. I'm always talking to the players. Into the dressing-room before the game - it was George Mills who got me into that - find your lads,

chat them up. Use any excuse. It's all about communication. You're somebody real, a character.

BP What got you into refereeing?

MB I played but wasn't that good. I should have started a lot earlier. I wanted to stay in local football. I wasn't interested in higher leagues. And I've never regretted it.

BP What about that season we all thought you would get your 1 and you didn't.

MB I was shattered. I felt good and I knew it was going well. But two poor assessments. They came through the door, without signatures. I never saw anyone at the games. I tried not to let it get to me, but that's not the way to do it.

BP We'll come back to assessment now you've changed sides! What about the next season?

MB Magic. I got my 1 with no problem. Peppard v. Ascot. I gave a penalty after 58 seconds, looked up and saw John Lambden. At the end he said, 'superb'. I knew I would be OK.

BP Do you remember that line I ran for you in a different game with Ascot. The other side of Basingstoke somewhere?

MB I'll never forget it. Your face. Ball goes out of play your side. A super flourish of the flag into the air and a piece of red cloth flies gracefully away into the distance. And I'm thinking 'What the hell is he going to do next?'

BP You know, I can't remember what I did next. Freudian. I should never have accepted your flag without checking it first! Nice to have some funnies to look back on after - how many operations now?

MB Only seven I think. It's all down to the same thing - hereditary arthritis. My eye troubles - the cataracts - started in 1980 and I didn't really get both eyes right until January 1983. But I kept doing some refereeing in-between. And got good reports and a share of finals as well.

BP And then your first hip played up didn't it?

MB Yes. June 1985 I knew I had to have a replacement. I thought that was really it for refereeing. So I joined the RA committee and agreed to become an assessor. That was a turn-up really because I had said a few things about assessing . . .

BP A bit like the poacher turning gamekeeper. How are you finding it?

MB Well I haven't changed. Let's say we had a good discussion at the first assessors' meeting. You've got to be honest. Why do assessors hide? We've all heard stories about the man behind the tree. Why shouldn't you go up to the referee before the game and tell him you're there. Encourage him. Isn't it fairer that he knows what's happening. Well it seems to pay off for me and the ones I've assessed seem to appreciate it. I even had one guy I had to lay into because he accepted blatant dissent four times. In another game they'd have torn him apart. I don't say he liked it, but I think he appreciated the frankness.

BP Mike, I've kept off the future but I know you well enough to guess you've got it plotted out. I suppose refereeing with two artificial hips is out.

MB I thought it was with one, but I managed to get in about a dozen games. I haven't to be stupid but the specialist says, if all goes well (and I do heal quick) I can have a bit of a run out. I hope it won't upset the Sunday League who gave me that marvellous send-off, but I fancy doing a few young lads' games in the South Chiltern. I can't bear the thought of giving up. I love it.

BP Thanks Mike. I hope you'll agree to this being published when it's written up. All the best.

[Mike is now at home and making excellent progress. Ed]

DID YOU SEE IT?

Another Sunday and Sweet FA (Channel 4, 30 Dec)

("A gentle comedy about playing the game of life")

The opening moments with the middle-aged, bald-headed character trying in vain to get two children to move out of his way was a clear warning. He was bound to be the referee.

Jack Rosenthal is no mean writer but Jim might have provided better insights - unless everybody thinks referees are really like that.

There were some good lines: "Seen who's reffin'? Lord Longford". (At least he didn't have the glasses). "Same for both sides - he's blind in both eyes." And the setting (a piece of rough open field with the chimneys in the background), the players, the managers and the spectators - old Sam and the girls - were near enough the real thing to be credible. But Mr Armistead, the referee. Did he get anything right?

To be fair he resisted the blandishments from each side before the match with commendable firmness - and thereafter got it all wrong. He lectured at length and allowed abuse in return; he had linesmen with handkerchiefs for flags and he consistently blew the whistle for goalkicks; he was talked out of two sendings-off and into restarting the game he shouldn't have abandoned in the first place. Then, with the score at 0-0, he headed the winning goal! Poetic and refereeing licence as well as poetic justice. (At least he wasn't wearing an RA or a County badge.) But did the unsuspecting public realise he was a caricature?

Andrew Graham-Dixon, writing in *The Independent*, thought the programme 'an ironic paean to the misguided idealism of Sunday amateur league football players. . . . David Swift gave a splendid performance as the archetypal amateur referee with hidden depths, a hero sheepish and blustering by turns. Out of this unlikely material, Rosenthal managed to conjure an oddly touching moral parable about the displaced quest of his hero for justice in life's unfair game.'

Hero? Yes, as far as the play was concerned, but I couldn't help noticing his incompetence as a referee. However, to be positive - I wish I had got it on video. In spite of my numerous reservations about Mr Armistead, the play was very watchable and had some of the flavour of the park on a Sunday. It would make an excellent training film - in the negative sense of what not to do - and as long it carried an official RA Health Warning!

HYPOTHERMIA

No, it isn't just an old persons' problem - make sure you've read that article in the December 'Football Referee':

Winter Beckons.

FOOTBALL 1987

[For the beginning of the new year The Times 'invited four leaders of the game to present their appraisal of its virtues and its vices'. These views on the laws were part of the contribution of Graham Kelly, secretary of the Football League]

'I would like to see the world governing bodies adopting a much more flexible approach in 1987 and succeeding years to the laws of the game. Football has to move with the times. While I accept it is a world game of 158 nations and everyone must play to the same laws, there is ample scope in the many professional and semi-professional competitions for properly conducted experiments within the laws of the game.

For example, alterations in the offside law must be tested. I don't know what the precise effects of the various changes would be, whether it would be best to ban offside from a goalkeeper's clearance, offside from a free kick, or offside when receiving the ball from your own half of the field of play.

Tests should take place in competitive matches and the International Football Association Board must play a far greater role in the technical development of the game if we are to prosper and compete with other forms of entertainment. And it should be open to countries to issue limited interpretations of the laws so as to control better the destiny of the game.

If we cannot give the simplest instructions to our referees, who are, in effect, certainly on a Saturday afternoon our own employees, what hope do we ever have of achieving the holy grail of consistency in refereeing?'

[You may not agree entirely with Graham Kelly, but what laws would **you** modify if you had the chance? I would like to devote a bit of each future edition to "The Law change I would make". It will only work if you tell me/write it down. Ed]

THE LOST YEAR

I really had expected somebody to notice but they haven't said anything.

In my first editorial of the season I commented on the fact that it was Volume 30 this year. Then when I copied an extract from Volume 5 I noticed to my horror that it was from Aug/Sept 1962. So Volume 30 should have been **next** season. (Still with me?) Yes, I have checked through the whole archive. I discovered that during one particular season the volume number did change - upwards by one. Before my time as editor fortunately. So we can celebrate our 30th year next year as well as this because I'm not going to change the numbering again . .

RAMEMREC

Not so much gobbledygook as the key to the Reading RA database - my computer file name for the Reading **RA Membership Record**.

Why have the membership record stored on a computer disc? For a number of reasons. Try three.

Ease of access to the information is the most obvious. With information about 133 members - 133 'records' - there is a lot of

material to look at or 'interrogate'. Just imagine for instance trying to find out by hand how many active class 1, 2 and 3 referees we have in the various age groups, or how many are available for schoolboy matches on Saturday mornings or six-a-sides in the summer. Queries like these can be dealt with sometimes in seconds, at most in very few minutes.

The second and a vital other reason for computer assistance is that you can then print out whatever information you need from the database (always assuming you have a printer of course!). This means, for instance, in real life that the Trades Union Club receives a fully up-to-date list of members before each monthly meeting in strict compliance with the licensing laws. Such a list can contain whatever information is appropriate for the purpose. For example, it is important for the organiser of the coaching scheme to have details of the leagues his coaches are involved in as well as their address and telephone number.

A third and crucial advantage of a computer record is that it is easy to alter and update. This year's record can be 'rolled on' to next year with a minimum of effort, and any new lists automatically incorporate the modifications. And for the historians, the electronic archive is retained in a minute part of two computer discs (good housekeeping demands at least one back-up copy).

Snags? The computer has no special insights and is best treated as a very fast operating simpleton. The database can only produce what it contains and according to the way it has been set up; the information has to be provided by the members and it has to be put in manually. What comes out is only as accurate as what went in. (And, of course, you have got to have a computer and printer and someone to use them!)

Just for fun I have produced a few sample statistics with the very minimum of effort.

At present (i.e. as at the last meeting) we have 133 members of whom 109 are active. Of the 109 active, 30 are Class 1, 24 Class 2, 52 Class 3, and 3 'Youth'. The age bands of the various Classes are as follows:

Age	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
25 and under	1	4	6	11
26 - 30	1	1	8	10
31 - 35	3	5	11	19

36 - 40	8	7	16	31
41 - 45	7	2	7	16
46 - 50	6	3	2	11
Over 50	4	2	2	8
Totals	30	24	52	106

Interpretation? The profile is much as you might expect with the largest group of members between 35 and 40. Disappointing that we have only two Class 1s aged 30 or under and only 24 members in total (including the three 'Youth') in that age group. Nice, though, to see eight over 50s still active.

Of all our members 102 qualified in Reading. 62 of the active referees qualified within the last 5 years, 14 between 6 and 10 years ago, 33 pre-1977. Could there be a 7-year itch in refereeing too? More members referee in the local Saturday leagues than in the Sunday league (62 against 53); 39 are willing to referee Saturday morning school matches and 37 are approachable for games at half-terms (Kevin has been given a list!); 42 are involved in our coaching scheme, helping other referees; the largest concentration of referees (46) is in the Tilehurst and Calcot (RG3 postcode) area. (Could there be something in the West Reading air?)

Finally, at our last meeting 51 of our members verified their own computer printout and the fact is recorded in a new 'field' - VERIFIED - followed by the date. (The other 82 can see me at a future meeting!)

FAIR PLAY AND LINESMAN'S AWARDS

Keep sending your forms to Ben Gater or give them to Derek Reigate at the meeting.

CHRISTMAS DRAW

They've done it again. Gus (with just a bit of support from 'er indoors), has run another excellent draw and made a profit of about £150 which nicely financed the December meeting/party! (and then some). Ivan (got it right again Ivan) McNelly outdid himself and beat his last year's incredible sales record. A mere 250 books were not enough. He had to sell 291 books this year just in case anyone was getting near. Remarkable Ivan. Even I am running out of adjectives

IT'S A MAN'S GAME

[In my November editorial I was bemoaning the lack of female officials. This article by Janet Walmsley was published in the South Bedfordshire 'Whistler' at the end of last season after it had appeared in 'The London Referee'. Acknowledgements to all three]

When I was asked to write about being a 'Woman Ref', I wasn't sure where to begin. I'll try to be fair in my analysis of the differences.

Beginning with the confirmation phone call from the club (it's often their first experience of a Lady Ref) they usually lean over backwards to be helpful and polite, with lengthy instructions and often offer to pick me up from the nearest station when I have no transport. The worry of Changing Facilities bothers them and it's almost an apology from the start, until I inform them I always go to the games kitted out (minus boots - inappropriate for walking along roads or riding motor-bikes) although two years ago if you happened to be in Dulwich one wet Sunday morning, you might have seen me wandering around looking for my game. I checked in an hour before the k.o., a fellow Ref conferred with my teams and as we went onto the common I discovered they were not mine! 'Oh, you can still do us, we'll pay you'. I should have taken it because I still didn't find my lost flock and gave up looking at midday.

On arrival for games at large parks one is often propositioned by clubs, 'Are you our Ref?', 'Can you do our game, we'll pay £20 if you do ours'. I've even been walking with my teams and they've tried to grab me for their game, but usually I've been saved by a glib tongued player, 'No, you can't have her she's ours.' I wonder if he lived to regret it!

I always warn the captains at the start of play about foul and abusive language.

If it is necessary I have dismissed club linesmen; the most amusing occasion was at an Anglo/Italian game in Regents Park with the whole of the London Italian community seemingly present. Without asking first, a little old man with one of the clubs took the flag from the appointed youngster who was assisting me quite well, although he couldn't speak English. Then, whilst he was waving the flag madly and loudly cursing the opposition, I ran over and relieved him of his services and the flag to the cheers of the spectators.

On a different occasion when signaling direction, a player kissed my outstretched hand. Players have been known to change

their shorts rather than their shirts when substituting; I try not to let it distract my concentration.

I must be the most knocked out Ref around because the ball has found the target with me on several occasions, knocked out before the KO when I was lining, and during the game when a boy miskicked it full into my face and I went out like a light. No-one knew what to do. If I'd been one of the boys it might have been 'Tip the bucket over him'. I've carried bruises everywhere from being hit by miskicked balls and I'd advise all women Refs to pad their bras, even if they think they don't need padding! The sponge man's been my friend on several occasions, mind you he always gets his leg pulled by the team. I like to think one's sense of humour is one's saviour; only using it when appropriate, not normally talking to players, I do respond if they chat; hoping I'm sharpwitted enough to make the right remark. I've been called a disgrace to womanhood by the mother of a boy I sent off for violent conduct.

I once heard before a game (whilst sitting in an adjacent loo - you're lucky if there is one) 'She's a bastard is this one, you'll have to watch her.' I thought 'Oh my God! Do they mean me?' Yet I went out and had a smashing game.

If changing facilities for Refs exist I use them, finding that the younger Refs don't mind sharing, although initially it shocks the older ones as on one occasion at Blackheath, one 'old 'un' didn't realise I was there, (I was quiet for once!) and he did his usual strip. I don't know if he later suffered a heart complaint but his colleagues said 'We'll never let him live this down, especially with his wife!'

Yes, there can be fun and in my opinion it should only be a serious business when players flout the Laws of the Game and Refs fail in their duties. I always send my reports in having been asked on a couple of instances, 'Are you sending your reports in?' I hope I always to retain my feminine qualities whilst doing a 'man's' job. Admittedly fitness is a problem for me. I train regularly and am aware of my failings - all I can say lads is "I'm still trying".

[And we now have three female colleagues in the society - Ed]

CHANGING TIMES AND DISTANCES

Whilst I was officiating a youth game, at the start of play the ball didn't travel its full circumference. Before the restart I mention '28 inches please'. The boys all looked strangely at me. I immediately replied 'That's 700mm in your estimation'. The lad kicked the ball and it went over 700mm before being touched

again. Which one could you remember? 28 inches for the adults and 700mm for the boys.

P.S. It should be 710mm really.

Alan Turner

[Which reminds me. Question: When can you allow a corner flag of less than 5ft? Answer: All the time, because 1.50m is 4ft 11.1ins. Ed]

KIT WARDROBE

Any discarded but decent kit? To Ken Ives please.

SOCIAL EVENTS

A long time ago now but the theatre visit at the end of November was 'a great success'. Odd stories about nocturnal fun on the way back too . . . What could they mean?

Ice skating Wow! Just look at that advert. What more can I say?

Dinner & Dance: Friday March 6. There may be a couple of tickets left. See Steve Green, but now.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

January 15 Alan Robinson, (just ex-) Football League and FIFA referee and tireless worker for the RA

February 19 Open meeting

March 19 Keith Hackett, Football League and FIFA referee

NO COMMENT

Southampton hadn't even switched on the immersion heater when Manchester United's 22-year-old Irish midfielder Liam O'Brien was turning on the taps for the earliest bath in football League history - another record for that great old club. He was sent off in only 90 seconds after a tackle on, of all people, fullback 'Mark The Man' Dennis which was so late that the ball was 10 yards away by the time it arrived.

The tackle was also so high that for once Dennis was more shinned against than shinning - though he found the unaccustomed

role of injured innocent so intolerable that he reverted to type within 25 minutes. He, too, then went into Colin Downey's book for presenting his well-known imitation of a combine harvester on United's winger Jesper Olsen

Frank McGhee, *The Observer*, 4/1/87

. . O'Brien the 22-year-old from Shamrock Rovers in only his third match, was dismissed after a wild tackle on Southampton's hard man Mark Dennis. United's manager Ferguson said of O'Brien's dismissal: 'It was a bad decision - incredible. But I don't want to say too much. Liam did not say a word to the referee and physical is something that could not be used in any description of the boy.'

. . Referee Colin Downey revealed that the dismissal had been for "serious foul play"

James Mossop, *Sunday Express*, 4/1/87