

**EDITORIAL**

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## **MONTHLY MEETINGS**

### **January**

It has happened again. In spite of the protest the officers made after the last meeting, the Trades Union Club had managed to triple book the large meeting room - with the result that we were squashed into the main lounge area. Better than the other side but not much. An alternative venue is being sought and suggestions from members are requested. It isn't easy to get the facilities we want in a convenient place on a guaranteed regular basis at a reasonable price.

Among the business items it was reported that the Council hadn't made all the improvements promised to Christchurch changing rooms. The disgusting state of the so-called referees' room at Woodford Park was also commented on. That would be followed up too.

As part of the continuing effort to stamp out ill-discipline, the meeting had been held with the Reading leagues. The result was a draft agreed statement promising firm action by all concerned to be finalised by our Press Officer and sent to the press. Ted Cambridge announced the formation of the Reading Football Alliance - a new trouble shooting body comprising the local leagues and competitions. It would meet every two or three months to discuss problems and propose solutions.

The business ended with a discussion of the FA charge and sentence on Alan Robinson, the national RA PRO. The crime of which he had been found guilty was telling the truth about players' cheating. The actual indictment was changed from 'bringing the game into disrepute' to 'improper behaviour'. Members were gravely concerned at the FA's action and determination to suppress freedom of speech. It was agreed that the Reading RA would give Alan every support and the press Officer was deputed to contact him to see how best his case could be assisted. Appropriate action would then be taken by the Chairman.

The Guest Speaker was not unknown to members - it was our own David Keen, FA Assessor and former Football League linesman.

David chose to talk about 'match control'. These would be his 'afterthoughts' - things that had happened and he had thought about later.

He started by stressing the importance of doing things off the field properly: honour your commitments - if the date hasn't been closed, you are available; be prepared; check your reports; check your competition rules; be correct about fees and expenses (neither under nor overcharge).

Lining. Do you brief club linesmen fully? See them at half time? Again at full time?

When you are a neutral linesman. Remember you're there to assist the referee. Maintain eye contact. Run outside the line; chase all balls back to the keeper. Never go to get the ball. Substitutes: one off first (stop the watch). Run round to indicate a corner, then go to position by goal area line, then back to offside position. Stay opposite the 18 yard line for the goalkeeper's kick from hand. Help with fouls, time. Keep your flag pitch-side, unfurled. Use it as an extension of your arm. Hold the signal long enough. (David demonstrated signals for penalty and substitution. Stressed the need for practice especially with new design of flags). Always carry your own flags.

Let the referee know if you see something wrong. Tell him if you are inexperienced as a linesman. Remember dissent to a referee is dissent; to a linesman it's ungentlemanly conduct.

When you are in the middle and have to deal with a player, meet him halfway. Don't point a finger. Make sure the player faces you. If he won't, caution after the second time of asking. If he gives a name you don't believe, get him to spell it and accept it. Not your problem. Put down details of any first half cautions at half time. Use flat hand signals; check your whistle; run backwards when necessary; insist on the right place for free kicks. How do you get 10 yards? David paces backwards from the ball.

Positioning? With neutral linesmen, don't both stay on the goal line at a corner. Change your position, move after the whistle. At penalties? Conventional position. If goal is questioned, say for offside, move towards your linesman to cover him. Players tend to back off. Ask whether any subs on at beginning of second half. Take no chances with injuries. If he's lying still, stop the game. You've got to be fit to be in position. Alters angle of view.

Refereeing problems are largely of our own making. Be consistent with yourself. Deal with jewellery. Foul language must be dealt with even if you decide not to send off. If they swear at you, they're off. Don't rush off after the players; avoid confrontation.

Are there different standards on the Football League? Or is it that senior referees have already earned respect? Maintain your own standard. Go out and enjoy yourself. Don't look for trouble, but don't turn your back on it either.

Afterthoughts? They become your preparation for your next game.

In spite of the background noise and distraction David kept his audience of over 60 members interested to the end and was warmly thanked for his contribution.

## **February**

To the relief of 60+ in attendance, we were back in the big hall. The business included reference to the Alan Robinson affair. and to the Chairman's letter to the RA President written after the Press Officer had contacted Alan. The letter was read out and met with members' approval. It was reconfirmed that further action would be considered if Alan's appeal against the FA's verdict proved unsuccessful.

Other items:

- the society has been informed by national RA that the referee could be held responsible on the grounds of negligence if, for example, a player was injured by a corner flag shorter than the statutory 5 ft minimum. The legal position has not been tested but we are advised to do our job properly in respect of the pitch and the appurtenances.

- in the context of the local leagues' determination to deal vigorously with indiscipline, Ted Cambridge reported that the Sunday League had suspended a player (from the league).

- the disgusting state of changing facilities at Woodford Park was being taken up by the Secretary.

- details of National Conference (weekend of the 23/24th June at Scarborough) were announced.

- a proposal to change the venue of our meetings to Reading FC would be brought to the AGM.

- Brian Papworth, Referees' Appointments Secretary for the Reading Football League, will be giving up the job at the end of the season. One or more successors will be sought from the RA. Anyone interested to see Brian.

- in the County RA Quiz Reading had come joint second, 3 points adrift, with old rivals Wycombe winning yet again. John Lambden, not given to exaggeration, reckons we wuz robbed. Something about 'ambiguous wording' which cost us the victory. And Uncle George set the questions . . . Congratulations anyway to Graham Stockton, Steve Green, John Lambden and Ivan McNelly.

- Ivan finally got his RA tie for all his good work selling a record number of books of raffle tickets for the Christmas Draw and Brian Palmer, Ian Pletcher and Bill Wallace had (unexpectedly) been sent

a tie and badge each by the Berkshire Association of Boys' Clubs for refereeing their recent 5-a-side competition.

Guest Speaker, Keith Cooper, has been on the Football League for 12 years, the last three in the middle. In his rich West Country accent he made it clear he was going to challenge us and he did. His theme was 'Does the punishment fit the crime?' but it turned out to be more than that.

Keith gave us a succession of incidents and asked us what we would do. The first was a player calling the referee an idiot to his face - within a few inches in fact (he demonstrated). What would we do? Well, we split three ways - sending off or a caution or a strong word. Which suited the crime? What about our inconsistency?

Keith took on the persona of the newly qualified referee and kept asking questions, offering alternative scenarios and encouraging responses from his audience.

Another incident. The player just outside the penalty area tripped from behind with only the keeper to beat. Caution and free kick? Send off for serious foul play? Can a trip be serious foul play? Does the punishment fit the crime?

Keith stressed the problem for players if the tolerance of referees is widely different while accepting that there will always be differences. He believes that some changes of law are necessary to make the punishment better fit the crime.

In response to questions, Keith said he would welcome the 10 yard rule (from rugby) for dissent but explained how Law changes are made and why it is so difficult to get them to happen. He would favour offside being offside with no qualifying clauses; linesmen being called 'assistant referees' though he thinks some British linesmen are 'over-active'. He agreed that FIFA should appoint linesmen as well as referees for the World Cup.

As a speaker Keith was certainly different. It was ding-dong discussion rather than a set-piece lecture and everyone was kept awake, involved and interested. It was also refreshing to have a senior referee who didn't just talk about himself. Maybe it's because Keith makes sure he does a match on the local park when he has a weekend free from the Football League.

**QUICKTIP**

To judge the correct height of the corner flag all you have to do is to know how far 5 feet comes up on you. (With me it's my bottom shirt button; with George it's eye-level!) All you do then is pass close by and unobtrusively observe.

Letter re Alan Robinson to Peter Willis

Statistics re membership

Andy Perlejewski

73 year old (cutting)