

VOLUME XXXVI No 4

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**EDITORIAL**

Some months are better than others - for referees and for editors of referees' magazines. You will find that this issue is full of contributions from members. So it is a good month for this editor and for all our readers. You don't have to agree with all they have written, any more than you have to agree with what I write. In fact it's more fun if you don't. The point is that, like good referees, they have committed themselves - in this case to paper. Thanks lads.

Something else good to report out of the awfulness of the recent Manchester City v. Spurs match with its renewal of spectator nonsense. We were privileged to see referee honesty and stark courage after the very threatening nastiness.

How many referees (our President or Martin Shearn will tell you - and they'll say it's not many) would have instantly awarded that penalty against the home team, immediately after the pitch invasion predominantly by home team spectators? And what a sharp and sad irony that it was the same referee, Ray Lewis, who was also in the middle at Hillsborough on the day of that real catastrophe. He certainly deserves to be kept on the league list - we need referees of that integrity and stature.

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## **PRESIDENT'S PIECE**

### **Avoiding the Flak**

Almost as if to prove the comment I made in the last issue of the Reading Referee about the power of television, Graham Brewer came along to our January meeting with a collection of match incidents on video. Everyone was instantly involved.

There was one particularly intriguing incident where the goalkeeper lost the ball and an attacker in close proximity stuck out a foot and put the ball in the back of the net. The referee, however, awarded a free kick, presumably for an offence against the goalkeeper. After viewing it a number of times, most members felt that no offence had been committed and that the goal should have been allowed to stand. However, there was also a general consensus that, had they been refereeing, they would have taken the same action as the referee. As one member put it: 'You would get less flak'. In other words, players would be less likely to protest than if you had allowed the goal.

It reminded me of the time I allowed the goal when the ball had bounced over the line after accidentally hitting an attacker's arm. I doubt whether even the scorer would have complained had I awarded a free kick but, as you can imagine, the defenders certainly did. So should I have taken the easy way out and saved myself the hassle?

So how far do you take this? The week after our last meeting, whilst running the line, I flagged for two offsides which raised shouts of derision from the small gathering in the stand as well as raised arms of protest from the players. On both occasions, by the time the offending players had received the ball the defenders had retreated behind them. I would have received less 'flak' had I kept my flag down.

I doubt whether any of us can hold our hands to our heart and say that we have never given a decision that was technically incorrect but that was more acceptable. However, it seems to me to be a dangerous concept to be accepted as part of

refereeing. After all, isn't that part of what we are paid for, to take 'the flak'?

Dick Sawdon Smith

## **MONTHLY MEETINGS**

### **January**

About 70 members, including Brian Wrattton, a fellow referee from New Jersey, USA, and an unusual start to the first meeting of the new year. Our Guest Speaker had asked to speak first on account of another engagement. It certainly seemed to make no difference, either to the quality of the presentation or to the lively participation of the members.

The format was simple. Graham Brewer, a Diadora League referee, a Referee Instructor via the RAF and a member of the High Wycombe training team had brought along a series of videoed match incidents - fouls(?) - which we were to watch and comment upon. He issued red and yellow cards to each small group, so that action could be simulated when appropriate.

The TV images were small, the action quick (and the replay didn't often help), the camera angle not the best and we had no knowledge of the context and temperature of the game etc etc. So we had plenty of excuses for coming to different, even 'incorrect' conclusions. That was the point of the exercise - not the answers, but the discussion of the possibilities, the reasons for whatever decision. A lot of lessons to transfer to your own critical appraisal of your own performance. Some good points of Law too, which not everyone would have got right!

Graham seemed impressed by the number present and the near unanimity of our responses which, unfortunately for him, made the discussion less combative than it might have been! There were two surprising divergences - for me, and I suspect for most others - the Vinnie Jones head butt/nearly head butt incident, for which not everyone used a red card; and the goalkeeper's punt upfield caught by a defender just in his own half. There the red card was the better mistake, but some members, apparently, would just have given the kick. Graham

was quite fierce about the need to stamp on that sort of blatant misdemeanour with the severest sanction allowed - the yellow card for ungentlemanly conduct as no clear goal-scoring chance was destroyed (and would always be unlikely in that position).

Graham was thanked warmly by the Chairman and members, and presented with a tankard - and tie. (How many left now Kevin?).

The main items of business after half-time were:

- the Membership Officer's continuing success story: the total now stands at 165.

- the new Training Course had just started with 25 members and a few more were expected.

- the editor drew members' attention to the possibilities for those in business to advertise in the magazine to our mutual benefit.

- the Reading Football League had arranged a First Aid course as promised to be held on the 22nd and 23rd February. Referees most welcome.

- Phil Lewis spoke about the meeting of Parks Users and specifically mentioned the problem of dogs fouling pitches. Action to be taken might include banning them totally from the parks or something slightly less draconian. He made the determination of the parks administrators quite clear. They have even found (again) the door to the Christchurch Meadow changing-room and intend to do something (unspecified) with it.

- the Whistlers had played four more games with mixed results: won one, lost one, drawn two. They were holding their ninth position with a certain tenacity.

- Reference was made to the successful Christmas Draw (reported in our last issue), and to an enjoyable Christmas Disco attended by some 50 members and partners;

- The Dinner and Dance to take place on Saturday 22 May at the Ramada Hotel this year was also announced.

- Martin Shearn, a bit quiet of late about studs (since the change of Law) reported a new and worrying trend - the prevalence of 3/8 inch aluminium studs which become dangerous. What is our policy to be? The Chairman promised that the committee would give the matter its attention.

The meeting concluded with (I thought) a record number of requests for officials for 'extra' games, and the raffle.

## **February**

As often seems to happen in mid-Winter, even if the weather's not severe, a less good attendance - only 50+. Lack of a guest speaker might not have helped.

Sad news to start with and a minute's silence to mark the passing of Mike Dixon, well-known local footballer and referee, at the age of only 49. Then happier news: a letter from (Anglo)American visitor of last month, Brian Wrattton, saying howe much he had enjoyed his visit and that, on his return to England in a few months time, he would be joining the Reading RA.

A referee visitor this month, who will be with us until the end of the academic year, was Neil Pike (no relation to Colin), a student from Manchester Metropolitan University on his industrial placement with Honeywell. He is already refereeing regularly on Sundays and pleased to have found us.

Various items of business and report:

- Kevin Parsons, Supplies Officer, had a new RA referee's strip on display and announced a forthcoming sale (of other items).

- The Secretary announced that he had forms for the National RA Conference - in Liverpool, 18-20 June.

- He also has details of the USA Cup - a large-scale youth competition in the US at which we are invited to officiate by courtesy of the Hull RA. It is well paid and good fun. Drawback? You pay your own expenses. Details again from Pat Monaghan.

- This year the Reading 5s will be on Saturday 10 July, possibly at two venues and with an international flavour.

They are looking for an organiser to replace Pat. See him if you are interested.

- Membership stands at 164 (after a recount!).
- Whistlers 5-a-side concluded their season with dignity and honour but no Honours. Mid-table (9th of 16); won 12 and lost 11 with 7 drawn, but most significantly, Terry Fallon scored 26 of the 52 goals (with Stephen Green, our Senior Training Officer supporting well with 10). Good progress over the two seasons of Stewart Mills' management and he now hopes to pass the mantle of greatness over. Don't all rush, but see him as soon as possible. Meantime there are the various RA 5-a-sides to come: regional in March; Berks & Bucks on 16 May and, hopefully, nationals on 18 May.

The Reading 5-a-side league needs referees for next season. Even Martin Deacon can't do it all on his own. See John Waters.

- Whistlers 11-a-side (who always wait for the better weather) are coming out of hibernation. By the time you read this they will have played their 3 March game, but they plan more matches and are always on the look-out for new talent - or even new lack-of-talent so long as it's still warm. See Pat Monaghan.
- Tickets are now available for the Dinner and Dance - 22 May, Ramada Hotel, 7-00 for 7-30 p.m., tickets @ £20-00 each from Graeme McLay (pay by instalments if you wish)

Among matters arising from the local leagues, the problem of the change of law on studs was raised again and one of our members (no prize for guessing who) produced a lethal example. The Chairman promised further exploration but pointed out National RAs present unwillingness to seek a change. As always, left to the referee.

- An incident highlighting the potential danger of spongeing a cut and then contaminating the water in the trainer's bucket was also mentioned.
- The Reading Sunday Youth League could do with more referees for its U/17 and U/18 games.
- Reading Sunday League General Secretary, Ted Cambridge has changed his address to 32 Harrington Close, Lower Earley, Reading RG6 3BU. Tel: 263934.

The second half was a training session in which Chairman Graham Stockton continued, in effect, where Graham Brewer left off last month.

Ten incidents on video which we, in our groups of six or so, had to judge. As before, a very interesting amount of consensus and divergence of opinion, but the most important part was the discussion and reasoning behind the action being suggested. Funny how that table containing some of the most experienced referees seemed to keep getting it wrong but, as the Chairman reassured us, there was room for difference of opinion (though different claims about what was actually in the Laws were a bit worrying).

No matter in the end - we are all wonderful referees in the sanctity of the Reading Rendezvous Club. Graham was so right to keep on saying - 'Yes, but what would you actually do on the local park on Saturday?'

A good evening with participation - and it didn't even cost a tie.

#### **BERKS AND BUCKS RA QUIZ**

What can we say? We failed narrowly again to take the coveted title. This year, last year's winners, Aylesbury, hosted the contest and North Berks won it. Nice for it to go round. That's two years High Wycombe have failed to win. Our team of Stephen Green, Graeme McLay, Graham Stockton and Ian Williamson performed valiantly according to Vice-Chairman Derek Reigate (who can afford to be generous as he just managed not to get selected), but we came 3rd, only 4 points behind the winners. New blood sought for next season's team.

#### **CONSISTENCY**

The question of 'consistency' comes up quite regularly. And everybody uses the word as though they know what it means.

The trouble is 'consistency' has a different inter-pretation according to the person asking for it. When spectators and managers and players demand consistency they usually just want their opponents to be penalised for offences they have been penalised for. They don't mind inconsistency, of course, if

the referee penalises an opponent for an offence he's missed with one of their players.

When a referee is talking about consistency it's usually something else. The referee means applying the Laws correctly and without fear or favour, but if a referee does just that and is actually doing his job properly. ironically he is bound to appear inconsistent.

The obvious sort of example is the 'handball', especially in the penalty area. At one end he gives a penalty - he saw it as intentional; at the other end he doesn't, he saw it as accidental. But in the second case, if the ball falls nicely for the defender, both sides as well as managers and spectators are likely to think him inconsistent. [I wrote this before I received the President's Piece. Ed] Use of advantage is another example where a referee will use his discretion differently according to the nature of the game and will again appear inconsistent to the uninitiated and partisan.

In fact we should expect a number of consistencies from the referee, not just one.

- consistency in knowledge of the laws - no good being vague on some and really good on others
- consistency in judging intent
- consistency in being unbiassed and uninfluenced by players, managers and spectators - to our discredit, the statistics show convincingly that referees tend to be 'homers'.

And so on. You could add many more.

As referees are human, not all will achieve all these consistencies all the time and so there will be differences; fortunately, by the same token, the same referee can come closer to consistency. However, in a game where so much emphasis is properly placed on the opinion of the referee, there will always be differences between games and therefore apparent inconsistency.



Of course if the game were played and officiated by robots we could programme total consistency. Then there would be no argument - and no enjoyment and absolutely no point in watching.

#### **LINESMEN'S SIGNALS - A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION?**

I listened to a very interesting discussion at a recent meeting of Referees and Linesmen, concerning linesmen's signals, and I have written this piece to once again show that interpretations are not always what they appear to be.

If you, as the referee, see a linesman agitate his flag in the air and then place it across his chest when you have been unsighted, how will you interpret his signal? Hand on heart - you will either play advantage if certain circumstances arise or, in all probability, give a penalty. (I am naturally painting a picture with neutral linesmen.)

Would you give an indirect free kick to the defence? I would think not. But why not? What exactly does the flag across the chest signify?

I have always believed and have taught that this signal indicates a penal offence against an attacker within the defender's penalty area or a handball by a defender (other than the goalkeeper obviously) in the same area. Have a look at your chart some time and find out where this is written.

If we start applying unwritten laws, where will it stop?

It appears that some 15 or 20 years ago, the FA produced a memorandum that a new signal should be adopted by linesmen to assist the referee in showing whether an offence (any offence) had been committed within the penalty area or not. The flag across the chest was this signal. Before you say that it would not make any difference whether it was in or out if it was a free-kick to the defence, remember it is necessary for the referee to know in order to ascertain when the ball is in play, i.e. travelled its circumference or left the area.

Of course I am not advocating change, merely giving food for thought.

John Moore

**WHAT DO I CARE? IT'S ONLY A GAME OF FOOTBALL?**

In the "Football Referee", January 1993, Mike Gardner referred to a club manager as saying: "All this crap about jewellery, cycling shorts and ten yards at free-kicks gets on our nerves." Mike was commenting on pre-match instructions to players, in which he thought the best policy was simply to say: "Good afternoon, enjoy your game, thanks gentlemen, see you at kick-off time" It was a pity that Mike did not comment on the manager's words. After all it appears that he agreed with the manager.

So where does that leave you, the referee? Certainly the least said to players before the game with respect to how you are going to control the game, the better. When the winter weather closes in and frosty pitches abound, the "Football Referee" is full of advice on checking the pitch, and each year it is debated at our meetings. Why? Because frozen, rutted ground may injure players and you, the referee, may find yourself in trouble for allowing the game to proceed.

Does that not also apply to jewellery and footwear? Is it so difficult to ask players to remove their jewellery and at the same time check their footwear? Worried that you may upset the players? But if you do check these items, then please be firm and say: "Please change your studs/boots." Do not accept the argument that "They're not sharp" when you can see the steel insert showing through. The narrow aluminium stud, once illegal, may pass your standard, but how narrow is really acceptable, quarter of an inch? The recent Waterloo v. Harlequins rugby match showed the problem with narrow studs. Is it only in rugby football that the laws are fully enforced?

How about the player wearing spectacles? Do you ask if they are safety spectacles? Without doubt I find fewer studs need replacing now than several years ago. If it saves just one severe injury in your whole career, it will be worth it. You will never actually know, but your conscience will be clear that you have done your best for the players. BETTER BE SAFE THAN SORRY.

The other point made by the manager - ten yards at free kicks. Where does it stop, or rather start? How many players are there on each side? 11? No, not just on each side side, but on each side of the half-way line at the kick-off? It is often

10 and 12. The free kick? Well, what's one or two yards forward of the correct position? Maybe not important, but having taken the odd yard or so, how many players then re-position the ball yet another yard forward? Why worry? It's only a game of football. But it's still a game of ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL! Cycle shorts? Maybe that's being fussy, but either players change their shorts to match the cycle shorts (not against the league rules) or turn them up.

At our first meeting of the season the new law changes are discussed - the pass to the goalkeeper, the 'professional foul', encroachment at free kicks etc. Why the changes or mandates? The more the laws are flouted by players and ignored by referees, the more the administrators seem to change them. It seems that the referees' discretion is being changed to 'THOU SHALT DO THIS'. Also at our meetings the league rules are sometimes discussed. For example, 'up to five substitutes SHALL be named before the match commences; only two may be used.' No dissent from the floor is heard. Easy. Then how is it that some weeks the captain/secretary claims that: 'last week's ref didn't want them.'? If you do bother to record the names, do you check them when the substitution is made?

Oh dear, I've heard this all before!!

Martin Shearn

**D I N N E R & D A N C E**  
**D I N N E R & D A N C E**

**Saturday 22 May**

**RAMADA HOTEL**

**Tickets now available from Graeme McLay**

**Price £20 each (easy terms available)**

**RA CONFERENCE** George Mills, National RA Life Member

Once again Conference is upon us and one wonders what is achieved at these glorified AGMs. The business side seems all cut and dried; we have motions to discuss and vote on. But then what? Even if they're accepted, you can say goodbye to

them ever becoming operational, considering what's happened to successful motions in the past.

All that would seem to discourage anyone from attending Conference, but I can assure you there is a much better side and that is **comradeship**. I have made many friends over the years. I don't know the majority by name but by face and I look for them and hope to see them back again. They tell you of their ups and downs in their County and you may find yours isn't so bad after all. You still end up wishing all counties were under one roof - the RA.

The cost of going to Conference puts people off, but if you don't make the effort you will never find out what the National RA is really about and have your chance to say your piece. The RA still has a lot to achieve and it can only be done at Conference, so please make an effort to attend with definite policies to carry on and improve what has already been done.

**THINGS MOST UNLIKELY TO BE SAID . . . .**

My report should only take a couple of minutes - Pat Monaghan

I thought my picture in the paper was really flattering - Alison Chapman

I can't remember the last time I used the book - Andy Awbery

You give me fouls in your half and decide all the offsides - Graham Stockton to club linesman

I don't really like refereeing women's games - Ian Hatt

That game would be a bit tough for me - Stewart Mills

I didn't hear a word from the ref all afternoon - spectator at a match refereed by John Moore

Can you think of any more to upset your friends?

[I am going, exceptionally, to conceal the name(s) of the author(s) unless you are seriously considering libel action. Ed]

**HOLDING - A MATTER OF LAW**

At the February meeting when watching the FA film of match incidents illustrating foul play, a number of members complained about the commentary by John Motson, claiming that he was inventing laws of his own. This was when he talked of 'holding' a player with his body being penalised with a direct free kick, and not an indirect free kick for obstruction (which most of our members said they would have awarded). Ignoring the fact that John Motson was only saying what the FA had put into his script, the cry went up around the room: 'the book says holding is with the hand or arm'.

If you think that, then you should have another look for the book doesn't actually say that. It used to, but the wording was changed as long ago as 1974. The International Football Association Board, when making the change, pointed out that holding could be with the body. To make it clear, the FA said in their Memorandum published in 1985: 'Any player who intentionally impedes the progress of an opponent by physical contact, whether by use of hand, arm or any other part of the body, [my emphasis. Ed] shall be penalised by a **direct** free kick.'

Dick Sawdon Smith.

#### **FAIR PLAY AND LINESMANS AWARDS**

Alan Turner appeals for the return of your marks for both these awards as the end of the season approaches.

Remember he has to do all the collating and adding up to arrive at the winners, so please give him as much time as possible.

If you are a new referee and don't know what it's all about, see Alan and get yourself primed for next season.

#### **MONTHLY MEETINGS TO COME**

##### **April 15** OPEN MEETING

A night to discuss any issue relating to the Association prior to the AGM. Members' chance to have their say in the running of the Reading RA.

##### **May 20** ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Your second big chance - this time to vote for  
it and make it happen.