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EDITORIAL

And so another season draws to its close, but with the Football League play-offs still to be decided as we go to press. I am still not sure whether it's the best possible system, but it does keep the interest up. Get the right or wrong last half dozen results and you're in the play-offs at the other end of the table. Team of the year? Oldham? Not Reading.

Refereeing seems to have come in for less public criticism this season, perhaps because the game itself has had plenty. The problem of wastage of referees continues though, and for a variety of reasons - including the venue - we have lost members ourselves. Individual referees and even the Referees' Association still seem unable to get the full and positive support from everyone involved in the management of the game - County FAs, National FA, Football League - though local leagues are proving much more understanding. Maybe independence from the FA has to be the solution as I hinted in the last issue. Before the 21st century?

The 'closed' season means no active refereeing for some, 5-a-sides and 6-a-sides for others. Whatever you choose, have a good Summer and rejoin us on August 16th, refreshed and fit and ready for the new season!

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PRESIDENT'S PIECE

Personal Standards

Although business commitments have kept me from a number of meetings this year, I have enjoyed those that I have attended. It seemed to me that your committee arranged a programme that was varied, interesting and at times challenging, all of which I think an RA meeting should be.

I also found it intriguing how one speaker unintentionally linked with another. Early in the season Peter Molyneux asked us to say how far 10 yards was and then measured it with a length of string. Though generally we were not too bad, most of us were a yard or two short. David Keen, when he gave us his reflections on his refereeing career, also mentioned the question of 10 yards at free kicks. He too said he measured it out at those 'wall' situations in front of goal. Not of course with a length of string but by pacing it out, walking backwards from the ball. The players would generally, with a little encouragement, move back with him the full 10 yards. I was heartened by this as I've always measured out the 10 yards but felt that perhaps I was a little old-fashioned when I see Football League referees trying, mainly unsuccessfully, to usher players back whilst still standing over the ball.

The main part of David's talk dealt with standards, personal standards. He had often felt disappointed when he had had to take action which was clearly the result of other referees' ignoring simple duties. One small example he quoted was the removal or at least the taping of jewellery worn by players which could injure others during the game, and which they had not been asked to do previously.

Later in the season our speaker was an old friend of mine, Roy Merryweather, who has been a successful football manager, first in local football with Peppard and then with Wokingham Town in non-league football. This is the level which for many of us is the highest we can aspire to, so what he had to say was likely to be of importance to many members.

He had been standing at the back of the hall during the business part of our meeting and had not been too impressed with

some of the 'petty complaints' that were aired. Referees' meetings he felt should be aimed at improving refereeing standards. Indeed he referred to standards in his talk making particular reference to David Keen. He said that he and his players sometimes groaned when they saw David's name on the list to referee at Wokingham. Nevertheless they appreciated his refereeing because he always insisted on the highest standards and you knew where you were with him. Roy wished he could say the same of some other officials that had refereed at Finchampstead Road.

I hope you have had an enjoyable season. I certainly have. After refereeing for almost 40 years I could be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing new, but I did achieve a first this season by temporarily suspending a match because of the wind and noise of a helicopter which hovered overhead before landing on the next pitch to pick up some passengers!

The new season will be on us all too soon, so before pitching headlong into it, perhaps we should consider whether our personal standards are high enough and how we can improve them.

Have a good summer.

Dick Sawdon Smith

AWARDS

Alan Turner, who runs the Fair Play and Linesman's Awards on behalf of the Reading RA, thanks the 62 referees who contributed marks. This season the games covered were in excess of 1000. Thanks from us to Alan for his work in administering the scheme which is highly valued by clubs and club linesmen, and congratulations to all the winners.

The Bert Newman Fair Play Award

1. Old Presentonians)
2. Cookham Dean) Reading Football League
3. Reading University)

Linesman's Award

This year, for the first time ever, the award is shared three ways - the following ended up with identical points:

- (J. Fisher (Fairmile)
- (P. Larrea (Mortimer)

(M. Pinfield (Compton)

GOING UP

Congratulations to Peter Hitt, John Moore and Alan Wellstead who will be officiating on the Vauxhall Opel League next season. (Don't forget the fitness test, lads, on June 9th!)

MONTHLY MEETINGS

March

Of course by now we are not surprised when we are pushed out of the large hall by a double booking, but with over 80 in attendance the lounge area was full to over-flowing. The direct result was a proposal from the Chairman, carried with only two against, that we should change our venue to the Reading FC Supporters' Club and start with the April meeting.

Amongst the correspondence was another complaint from a member about his treatment when attending a disciplinary hearing. The Secretary will write to the Berks & Bucks yet again.

The Chairman read out Alan Robinson's letter of thanks for our support and the Press Officer reported a telephone call from Alan the night after his appeal to the FA had been turned down. Peter Willis, the national RA President, had given him good support at the hearing but Alan's solicitor was only allowed to observe.

It was agreed that a letter should be written to the General Secretary of the RA urging action. Now that the matter was no longer sub judice there could be no excuse for silence.

The training team was able to report that all 22 members of the latest course had been successful and most of them were present to receive their Manual from the Chairman

There was a long discussion about reports. The request by leagues that they should receive reports had led to confusion for some members. John Lambden explained that disciplinary reports must go to the Berks and Bucks, not leagues. Reports on league matters, like late starts, poor facilities etc go to the league. However, Brian Papworth asked that referees also report 'bad attitudes' to the leagues. If in doubt, ask one of your RA officers.

The Guest Speaker was local team manager, Roy Merryweather, who has been in charge of Wokingham Town FC. for some 14 years and is well-known to many members.

Roy started by talking briefly of his 37 years in soccer, from Reading Schools through to 300 games with North Berks. After a serious road accident he ended up with Wokingham Town as goalkeeper. His management started at Peppard. He took over at Wokingham as manager in 1975 and there have been many developments. The turnover, for example, has gone from £17,000 to half a million.

Roy doesn't have disputes with referees but still has strong views. We should have professional referees, paid a lot, full-time. Everything in soccer is more professional now, refereeing must be so too. That would give greater consistency. He believes players who have been involved at senior levels should go straight into refereeing senior games. They couldn't be expected to do local football. He realised that would be hard on the 'local lads'.

What Roy deplores is the referees who don't do the job and deal properly with foul play and difficult players. (It was clear he did not apply the same standards to dissent and foul or abusive language. Ed) He welcomed referees like David Keen because the players knew where they stood, even if he didn't always like the Laws to be properly enforced. Referees should be good man-managers.

Players, managers and referees should have more contact, try to understand each other. He can't understand the attitude in the Football League. He is willing to invite referees, not just one, to his coaching meetings.

In a reply to a question, he was not able to say how many of his players would be interested in becoming referees even if paid the £75 or £100 a match he was quoting. It was also pointed out from the floor that the FA scheme to recruit ex-Football League players with accelerated promotion had apparently been abandoned for lack of uptake.

Roy came across as critical of the performance of some referees, but appreciative of the best. His faith in the recruitment of ex-senior players as a solution, by increasing fees, was not shared by many if any in the meeting.

An interesting and somewhat provocative talk which left no doubt of a (typical?) manager's view of referees.

April

The first meeting in our new venue - the Royals' Rendezvous. And first impressions seemed to be good. A smaller and cosier room which housed the 60 or so members present quite comfortably and with room to spare! We have a written contract and guarantee too - a considerable relief after the unreliability of the Trades Union Club.

Among the correspondence members heard that the player reported by John Machin to the Berks & Bucks for head-butting had been suspended for 84 days. The bad news was that the suspension was from 2 April - 24 June! This is a problem we thought the County FA had got a grip on but clearly not. The Sunday League has taken proper action however and suspended the player until January. The matter will be taken up with the B & B because they have suspended other players in similar circumstances from 2 September.

Members agreed to a proposal from the Reading Football League that presentations to referees for service to the league could be made at the RA AGM on 17 May.

It was announced that for lack of support the Dinner/ Dance had had to be cancelled for the first time ever. A number of reasons were suggested, including the economic situation, but the unreliability and unattractiveness of the Trades Union Club had been quoted by a lot of members. It was agreed that a different time might be explored for the future, given the many end of season events.

David Keen reminded members aspiring to higher leagues to be prepared for fitness tests. The Vauxhall League date was 9 June for example.

After half time Steve Green of the training team introduced a discussion of 'Ungentlemanly Conduct'. After exploring meanings of the words and suggesting that UC was the most difficult of the cautionable offences (as well as the most common), he tried to discern differences.

Do referees always caution (whatever the Chart says)? Clearly not. He offered a distinction between the 'physical' eg the very heavy late tackle, when you would caution first time, and the 'technical', when you might well caution (eg deliberate handball) or might not (eg changing the goalkeeper without notification).

Members were then split into groups to discuss a selection of incidents, all forms of Ungentlemanly Conduct but in different circumstances and of different levels of effect on the game. There was some difference of treatment suggested by different members depending on interpretation of the incident. More important perhaps we would caution in only a proportion of the cases.

Steve concluded that, as in other cases in refereeing, things were not black and white. Treatment of apparently similar incidents might be different and rightly so. The Chairman and John Lambden thanked and congratulated Steve on his first and excellent presentation. Certainly the members were fully involved and had an instructive session on an important refereeing problem.

PROMOTION - REMINDER

Every year, it seems, we have a problem with application for promotions. The system is clear but inflexible. When (re)applying for registration with the County, referees seeking promotion are required - and it states it quite clearly on the membership form - to write in for Form R.3 and submit it in duplicate. The snag is you get no reminder and no second chance in practice. APPLY NOW IF YOU WISH TO BE ASSESSED NEXT SEASON.

DROPPING THE BALL

Seems easy enough, yet there are at least two distinct and quite different methods of achieving that sort of re-start. You even hear some referees talk about 'a bounce-up' - frowned upon by you and me of course (and training officers everywhere I shouldn't wonder).

The Law is clear: when you need a neutral re-start eg after an accidental stoppage when neither side should be penalised, the referee 'drops the ball'. But does he? My observations suggest that the older and/or more experienced the referee, the more likely he is **not** to drop the ball. He is likely to use an alternative method - a firm two-handed downward propulsion of the ball (a 'bounce-up').

The 'correct' method is of course to balance the ball on one hand and at the given moment to withdraw the hand smartly and the ball drops between the players (usually one from each side though the Law is silent on that bit). Why don't we all do that then?

One of the things you learn quickly (though good trainers warn you in advance) is to keep out of the way. The players naturally lunge for the ball and woe betide you if you are still around (or bending forward so that the ball has less distance to fall!)

And what happens? The ball is frequently played before it touches the ground. I always remind the players that it must touch the ground first and I soon learned to drop it while I'm still talking and have their attention. Usually it works. The second time the player plays it too early I tell him I will caution him next time. I've never had to.

In a recent 5-a-side with drop-ball restarts, I had so much trouble, I switched to the two-handed technique. It certainly worked. Was I bending the Laws or invoking Law 18? Isn't this yet another case when the referee needs to use discretion? Maybe those Football League referees who 'give a bounce-up' have read the Chart after all.

FROM THE PRESS

from Richard Highfield

The Guardian
23/3/90

Stockport Express Advertiser
21/4/90

The Guardian
31/3/90

OUR RETIRING CHAIRMAN - Bernie Young

Well, hardly. In one sense Bernie could never be retiring, but the fact is his three years of Chairmanship are over. The Committee have certainly enjoyed his Chairmanship and I'm sure all the members have too. Direct but willing to listen, firm when necessary but with underlying good humour, that's Bernie. He's had the problems of the venue and his own ill-health to contend with but he's succeeded. Thanks Bern. All the best.

PROMOTIONS

Hot from the press are the end of season promotions. Congratulations to all, but special congratulations to a record four colleagues who have gone from 3 to 2 to 1 in successive seasons. Andrew Awbery, Michael Bellman, John Billins and Colin Pike. (Gordon Crutchfield won't mind me saying it's taken him a little longer. Cheers Gordon!)

Class 2 to 1: A.D. Awbery, M. Bellman, J.A. Billins,
G. Crutchfield, J. Davison, C.K. Pike,
P. Willis

Class 3 to 2: A.D. Butler, S.L. Carvell, N. Isham,
A.J. Jordan, W.G. Penny, E. Saleh,
G.D. Webster

THE WORLD CUP

This seems the moment to speculate just a little, but yet again the football is taking second place to the anticipated nonsense of the English 'fans' (especially after Bank Holiday at Bournemouth). There was a time when we would have been speculating about things like players, team selection, possible winners and all that.

In spite of England's excellent recent record of lack of defeats, no-one seems to have too much confidence in their prospects. Is this the fear that if they are expected to do well, they can be relied upon to do badly? The 'don't tempt fate theory? Or is it plain, unvarnished realism? It remains

difficult to relate the sheer excitement and quality of quite a few English league games with the lack-lustre performances we seem to produce at international level. Do our players lack the individual skills or is it tactics, or yet again is it temperament? Maybe it's none of these and they will surprise us all

It was disappointing from our point of view to have only one of our FIFA referees selected. I guess we'll watch them all with critical interest. I just hope I don't suffer my usual pain as I watch the linesmen.

THE PLUM TREE

As usual a number of our members have been rewarded with plum appointments to cup and shield finals. Congratulations to them all and commiserations to any disappointed. Special congratulations to Les Carr on his B & B Senior Cup appointment and to John Moore on his hat-trick of cup final middles.

The following are those of which I have been notified; referee named first. I normally miss somebody out so apologies in advance!

Berks & Bucks FA

Senior Cup: L. Carr
Saturday Intermediate Cup: P.C. Monaghan (line)
Minor U15 Cup: S.W. Gentle

Chiltonian League

Reserve Cup: P.J. Hanlon

Reading Challenge Cup

Senior Cup: C.K. Pike (line)
Junior Cup: M.D. Albury, N. Isham (lines)
Jubilee Cup: J.W. Moore; G.D. Webster

Reading Football League

Senior Cup: J.W. Moore; P.R.B. Taylor, C.K. Pike
Intermediate Cup: C.A. Connon; A.D. Awbery, W.G. Penny
Junior Cup: N. Isham; G.D. Webster, K. Arlett

Reading & District Sunday League

Tilehurst Charity Cup: J.W. Moore; P. Jenkins, M. Bellman
Industrial Cup: G. Stockton
E Cambridge Cup: K. Hall; W. Wallace, W. Penny
Ronald Nash Cup: K.J. Dade; S.L. Carvell, E. Saleh
Harold Lusted Shield: P.R. Hitt; A.J. Jordan
John Lusted Trophy: A.P. Wellsteed; P. Willis, A.D. Butler
Treasurers Cup: A.D. Awbery; R.G. Allen, W.T. Francis
Subsidiary Cup: N. Wrey; K.R. Byfield

Reading and District Youth League

Vic Beasley Cup: M. Bellman; S.R. Goulding, R.G. Allen
Town Crier Shield: S.R. Goulding, M.E. Barnett, A. Chapman