

VOLUME XXXV No 5

April/May 1992

EDITORIAL

During my years in the Reading RA each season has seen changes but 1991/92 has been the most dynamic in questioning old habits and practices and promising change for the better. We didn't reach the membership target set by the new Chairman for fairly obvious reasons and will go into next season with modified objectives.

What we have achieved is a number of younger members - younger in chronological age and refereeing experience - getting involved in invigorating and 'modernising' the Society. But these are only beginnings. The plans have to be developed and sustained.

What is significant is the thrust towards a more demanding professionalism in all our undertakings - as a society and as individual referees. Chairman Graham has made it quite clear that the emphasis is going to be on refereeing and in helping our members to improve their competence and further their career in refereeing. And it is up to you, our members, to make sure your needs are met.

Have a good end of season and Summer - refereeing or not. See you at the August meeting, if not on the local parks.

Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Reading RA
Unsigned items have been written by the editor

Other editors have permission to reproduce any items with appropriate acknowledgement

[Editor's address: 1 Bulmershe Ct, Earley, Reading RG6 1HX
Telephone no: (0734) 318655]

PRESIDENT'S PIECE

How Long is a Piece of String?

As many members know, my other long time membership as well as the Referees' Association is the Scout movement. I treasure my Medal of Merit for Services to Scouting in Berkshire as much as my Meritorious Award of the RA.

When I joined as a Wolf Cub in 1940, the world was of course a different place, and one of the things that was drilled into young Scouts was always to carry a knife, a piece of string and six (old) pence. Today 2 1/2 pence would be next to useless, and carrying a knife could easily be construed as having a dangerous weapon in your possession. But a piece of string still comes in useful.

That was all brought into focus at our last RA monthly meeting and the excellent display by the Army Referees' Roadshow. Get to the match early was the cry, and inspect the pitch even if the poor hardworking club secretary or any of his team haven't arrived. The question came up of what should we do if there are big holes in the nets, and someone said, as in jest, no doubt Dick has some string in his pocket. Well you see my Scout training came in good for something.

It is a question of: How far do we go? How far do we insist that everything is perfect? Is it up to us to put things right? I always felt that in the case of nets wanting a little repair then I might as well do it. Older members will recall one of our own committee men, Jack Messenger, getting into the papers when a ball went through a hole in the net and the wrong decision was made. I've therefore tried not to get caught out in the same way. You don't always get thought any more of. I remember in my Isthmian days, repairing the nets at Oxford City, when one of the two spectators in the ground at that time shouted out: "I hope you are half as keen when the match starts."

Anything greater I've normally asked for help at least, such as when I found goalposts uneven at a pitch in Newbury. At one end one post was 8 foot 6 inches high, and one post at the other

end was, believe it or not, 7 foot 6 inches. I waited until the home team turned up, but they weren't best pleased at having to pull them out and resite. "Been like that all season", they claimed.

Whether you decide to do a little repair work yourself or not, if you don't get to the ground well before kick-off, you won't have time to find out if there is any needed.

Dick Sawdon Smith

MONTHLY MEETINGS

March

An evening of business.

- The 70+ members were concerned to hear the report of unwarranted criticism of member Terry Gale in the 'Wokingham Times' (another senior member of the society, Geoff Way, had been on the line). Terry was taking legal advice. Although such occurrences were not unknown, this was considered a very serious case. It was decided to keep in touch and give Terry any support he needed; Ted Cambridge would see that the B & B FA got a copy; Kevin Parsons would inform the Chiltonian Referees' and Linesmen's Committee.

- The training course had been completed and 20 had sat the exam.

- The Reading Football League had sought referees' views through a questionnaire.

- Team/result cards were discussed again. Barry Ford would like a team card before every game. It is hoped that this will be introduced next season in the Saturday Senior and Premier Divisions but not lower down because of the anticipated problems (though it was pointed out that the system works in other places).

- Stewart Mills reported on the final position of the 5-a-side team. After an unpromising start (before he took over, of course), the team had finished a respectable 11th in the league, having won 8 and drawn 7 of their 32 matches. The highlight was their narrow defeat by Salisbury in the cup final. They look forward to a great second season.

- Pat Monaghan, on the other hand, had to report an 11-a-side loss 2-3 to his own business team. [Which side did you support

Pat?] They all enjoyed it we are assured. Theale FC would like us to field an over-30s team for a Charity match. No problem about finding enough over 30s - the question is which Theale team? Their over 60s?

Because the famous Army Roadshow was only available for the April meeting, we broke with tradition and had a preliminary discussion of rule changes to be proposed at the AGM in the context of a wider discussion about the way the Reading RA season had gone under our new management.

There was general satisfaction with the overall formula though there was a request for even more guest speakers. It was felt that participation of rank-and-file members had been made easier by the greater informality of style.

There was some concern expressed about last season's AGM when a number of nominations for the senior offices were made on the night. This was within the rules but created difficulties especially for newer members who felt under-informed. Some members had found the whole evening exciting however.

Various suggestions were made: nominations to be made in advance, possibly with nominations on the night as an exception; nominations to be accompanied by pen portraits; committee members' attendance record to be made known (as it used to be); officers to be elected only from existing committee members; a job description for committee members to be drawn up so newer members particularly would have an idea what it entailed.

At this point there was a strong and salutary plea from Frank Powell that we should not get over-constrained by rules and procedures and throw away the informality that was the strength we'd just been complimented on.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, Brian Palmer ran through the changes of rule that would be proposed. The most significant was a proposal to introduce a rule and procedure for dealing with 'a member's inappropriate behaviour'.

Under its general powers the committee can at present deal with members as it thinks fit. It was argued that a good explicit procedure would better protect the society, the committee and the individual.

In case anyone was wondering, I can assure members that the proposal to halve the subscription for members over 60 was made by one of the committee who has many years to go before benefiting. That is not to say that it will not be supported by certain others

April

An enthusiastic gathering of over 70 members was joined from the beginning of the meeting by Lieutenant Colonel Mike Crabbe, our own Peter Pittaway and the other three members of the Army Roadshow. The reason for their early arrival became clear later.

Business was short but there was an interesting discussion on the perennial and vexed question of match fees. Committee member Neil Isham had done some research into fees paid by neighbouring leagues and it was clear that the Reading Football League was well out of line (paying far less). A simple proposal would be put - that they come into line with the Reading Sunday League whose fees and expenses were much nearer the norm.

After half time it was over to the Saint and Greavsie show - Mike and Peter on video discussing a local game and complaining about the referee. Mike then interviewed a player (Bede Welsh) who was displaying his battlescars and sounding more than a bit critical about the quality of the referee (to put it mildly). Enter Peter Pittaway, now in the character of the referee - a scruffy, down-at-heel apology for a referee that is. (Not a member of the Reading RA I hasten to add!). His tale of woe was a bit different. Surprisingly, the players had got it all wrong. They always cheat, whinge, don't appreciate the poor official's problems . . .

The final character was the long-suffering club secretary (Eric Trengrove), who came on weighed down by all the gear - corner flag and post, goal nets, first aid kit, bucket etc etc. He gave a hilarious recital of his views and responsibilities.

After each character it was back to the video and Saint and Greavsie. From being basically anti-referee, as usual, our favourite commentators gradually came nearer to being on our side.

The show was rounded off with all the characters together chatting over a drink having come to a better understanding of each other's part in the game of football.

A thoroughly professional and entertaining show. Chairman Graham Stockton thanked the team and presented them all with a Reading RA tie.

[Owing to my absence from the meeting, report loosely based on the recollections of a number of committee members! Ed]

REGIONAL 5-A-SIDE COMPETITION

This year's RA tournament will be held at the **Bracknell Sports Centre on Sunday 7 June from 2 pm till 6 pm, hosted by the Bracknell RA.**

We have entered two teams alongside one from each of Aylesbury, Bracknell, Chiltern, Milton Keynes, Slough and Wycombe, so we should have a nice unfair advantage! Two pitches and plenty of action guaranteed, well controlled by Football League officials including Phil Don, Dennis Hedges and John Martin. Do come and support the lads.

AWARDS

Throughout the season diligent members mark their teams for fairness and their club linesmen for efficiency. Players and linesmen rightly value the awards and we hope they do something to show our appreciation of the help we receive as officials.

Congratulations to this year's winners and to all those who tried even if they quite make it.

The Bert Newman Fair Play Award

1. Nettlebed
2. Forest Old Boys
3. Berks County Sports

Linesman's Award

1. A. Farmiloe (Kidmore End)
2. S. Dell (Mortimer)
3. T. McDougal (Checkendon)

Alan Turner sends his thanks to our members for their excellent response in keeping him supplied with marks, and we thank Alan for keeping the record and doing the sums.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COMMITTEE

Peter Hitt is Membership Officer and hails from the West Country (that explains the funny accent). He is a Class 1 who qualified in 1981. He refereed in the Plymouth and West Devon Leagues before coming to Reading and now officiates on the Diadora, Hellenic, Allied Counties, SE Counties and the Reading Sunday League. He is a mentor, an assessor and an examiner.

Peter, why did you become a referee?

Injuries were taking longer to heal, I was getting older and I wanted to put something back into the game.

The biggest influence during your refereeing career, referee or other, and why?

Dennis Mead, Secretary of the Plymouth & District League, who persuaded me to start refereeing and actively encouraged and pushed me as far as possible.

Your most memorable game or honour as a referee, and why?

In my first season as a referee being given the middle of a Divisional Cup Final and my first game with official linesmen.

Your worst or most embarrassing moment in refereeing?

Last season at Dorking in the Diadora League falling into a large puddle on the touch line just after the game had started and being covered in mud from head to toe - and right in front of the stand.

What, if anything, would you like to change in football?

I would like to see more players actively encouraged to take the referees' course to help alleviate the constant dissent which causes many referees to stop after only a short time.

I'd also like to see less greed on the part of larger clubs which could eventually kill off several small clubs.

Other interests outside football?

Playing bowls and golf.

NURTURING PRECOCIOUS TALENT - OR CHILD ABUSE?

"Luigi Quarticelli is only 10 years old but already he is one of the hottest pieces of property in football. So hot that AC Milan have just paid £10,000 to keep him happy, moved his family into a luxury flat in Milan, with a well-paid job for father thrown in for good measure."

(The Daily Telegraph, 4/5/92).

The article goes on to describe in detail what will happen to Luigi:

"All the big Italian clubs run boarding schools for the young proteges who receive coaching at least three times a week, as well as normal schooling and £200 a month in wages. . . In Germany, Holland and Spain boys as young as six and seven are being offered money and free kit to secure their services. . . In Britain you are not allowed to offer contracts or financial incentives to youngsters under 16, though the FA are looking into relaxing these regulations."

Personally I am very sympathetic to young players. I have always refereed more than my share of youth games for two reasons: because it seemed to me adolescents were better playing organised football than not, and because they needed to learn good habits from a qualified official. And of course I liked it.

However I have become more and more concerned over the years about the increasing competitiveness and its progression down the age-groups. I used to wonder about leagues for under 13s, now it's leagues for under 8s I have to worry about! And we have more and more medical research which shows what we always suspected: that the developing body can too easily be damaged by the physical excesses of too much sport.

I guess it's all with us to stay. Perhaps the best we can do is use our influence, such as it is, to support those primary schools that encourage small-a-side games with an emphasis on skill rather than competitiveness, and to keep a cautious and critical eye on what the FA is doing vis-a-vis the professional clubs and age limits.

FOUL LANGUAGE - CURABLE OR TERMINAL?

On the grapevine I hear of comments made at a local league council meeting that swearing on pitches is "out of control", "on every pitch at Rabson's" and "overlooked by high-marked and senior referees". My question is 'Do YOU have a problem?'

Let us make no mistake, we have the power (law 5) and it is our duty (law 12) to make sure foul language is eliminated. On a personal note, I belong to the school of thought that there are two distinct forms of foul language. First, the kind that is used as a weapon by making a personal attack on an official, opponent or even a colleague. This must be punished with all the force of law 12 or the consequences may be dire. The second form, and in my opinion less serious, is that of frustration when no personal attack is present, except on oneself. I believe that this must also be punished or else it will become "out of control". However, I also believe it can be contained by immediate verbal admonishment or by the award in certain circumstances of an indirect free-kick for ungentlemanly conduct along with a verbal reprimand.

I am sure my comments will be ridiculed by some and possibly agreed with by a few, but I do not have a problem. Swearing is a social disease that is seemingly condoned on the television, in the media and, unfortunately, at work or even at home. We are then expected, and I would not disagree in principle, to stop all foul language for 90 minutes once or twice a week.

We must not allow ourselves to follow others' shortcomings at both local league or "on the box" levels, and should and must attempt to eliminate foul language from "our" parks. With a little hard work and less shirking of our responsibilities we can ALL achieve results.

A determined referee.

[Normally I expect articles to be signed but this colleague asked me to respect his anonymity. I agreed to do so, though I can assure him and any other contributor that, while colleagues may disagree with what any of us writes, ridicule is not something they go in for. In fact I think he will find he has more agreement with his thoughts than he fears. Ed]

TIME OUT

Every so often I wonder about how much time disappears, on a local park especially, when the ball is out of play. And I remember with some embarrassment, seeing a nearly-new referee doing a local 5-a-side, whose games all seemed to last longer than everyone else's. So much so, that even the players began to notice. He was stopping his watch like a basketball clock!

The following puts our game a bit into perspective.

Percentages

Here are some more stunning numbers from the fabulous Swedish figures factory, Statistics Sweden. Did you know that in the last football World Cup in Italy, scheduled 90-minute matches lasted between 90 and 110 minutes, not counting half time?

In these matches the ball was in play for between 50 and 55 minutes. In other words, nearly half a football game is stoppages. Injuries, free-kicks, throw-ins and general messing about.

Compare this with tennis. An average men's singles match lasts quite as long as a football match, but the ball is in play only half as long. In the Australian Open final, when Jim Courier beat Stefan Edberg in four sets, the match lasted 2hr 25 min and the ball was in play for 26 min 39 sec. Or in other figures, for 83 per cent of the match, Courier and Edberg were doing things other than playing tennis. What does all this mean? I ask myself.

(Thanks to Geoff Way and Simon Barnes, The Times 29/2/92)

PROMOTIONS

Congratulations to the following members who have achieved promotion this season and commiserations to the unsuccessful - there's always next season!

Class 2 to 1: G.R. Harris

Class 3 to 2: N.L. Binns, R. Burch, D.W. Newman,
G. Wallace, K.J. Wiltshire

THAT PROPOSAL FOR A NATIONAL RA THINK TANK

In our last issue I floated the idea of a new ad hoc national RA committee - a think tank.

It has raised a bit of interest, not to say controversy. And not surprisingly, I have been asked to be a bit more specific, especially by those critical of my reasons for proposing it.

One of the problems of our RA structure nationally is what I described as the 'pyramid'. Inevitably with such a structure I argued, ideas and proposals for change get filtered out and, equally inevitably, membership of our national Council, like many others, tends to be dominated by older referees, no longer active.

Some (usually older referees) like that situation and talk of people of 'experience' and 'wisdom', 'above the battle' and all that. And maybe they are. Yet the link between chronological age and wisdom can be pretty tenuous, and so-called 'n' years 'experience' can too often prove to have been one year's learning merely repeated 'n' times. The snag then is that the real experience is not only limited, it is also 'n' years out of date.

The national RA Council is also dominated by the need to do business, to support the President, to help him and the General Secretary in the running of the RA. What its members do not seem to have is either the time or the qualifications to do the thinking about the future of the RA. Or if they have, the grand plan has yet to be revealed. Are we really satisfied with the status quo? Are we doing all that we should be doing for our members and refereeing into the 21st century? Are we really satisfied with our relationship with the FA and County FAs? And so on.

What I am proposing is a group chosen specifically for a particular purpose - a 'think tank' to look into the next decade, at the changes and potential changes in football and refereeing and what we would want to achieve, to look at the shortcomings of our present organization, structures, practices and activities and anything else deemed to be relevant, before drawing up a strategic plan to be presented to National Conference in 1993.

What sort of members would be more qualified (and less disqualified) than the existing Council? Active referees certainly who better represent the majority of our members and their age profile. I would suggest 2 members under 30, 4 aged

30-39; 4 aged 40-49 and 2 aged 50-59. A group of 12 members active in junior as well as senior football.

Referees come from all walks of life, including business and the professions, and many of them, even some of the younger ones have senior and responsible posts. We must have 12 amongst our 16,000+ members who have appropriate refereeing, career and life experience, who have ideas and enthusiasms, who will belong to that future, to form a think tank.

They would not be commissioned actually to decide RA policy for the next ten years. Their brief would be to make proposals in the form of a strategic plan which would be circulated to societies for comment before the Conference 1993 where an afternoon's debate could be devoted to it.

It is often said that our committees are dominated by older referees because younger ones don't have the time etc. There's some truth in that. But this think tank would be a very limited, more intensive commitment than the usual committee appointment - say, three one-day (Sunday?) meetings and one whole weekend. Feasible, even for very active referees, if planned well in advance.

The members would be nominated by societies, and relevant parts of their CV circulated. Selection would be by a national ballot of society votes. Too expensive the critics will claim. Not necessarily - appropriate information could be circulated with some other routine communication from HQ.

In case anyone suspects I'm looking for a job on the committee, I'm afraid I have to confess that, although still active, I'll be one of those disqualified by age!

HOBSON'S CHOICE

"On balance, I'd prefer to watch most of them picketing rather than playing . . ."

Peter Corrigan discussing a possible players' strike
(Observer, 29/3/92)

THIS SEASON'S PLUMS

Congratulations to all our members who have received cup final appointments and commiserations to those of us who have not. Remember we are in the majority and there's always next year!

[Apologies, as usual, to anyone I have missed out because I have not been notified of their honour]

Berks & Bucks FA

Saturday Junior Cup: S.J. Green (line)
 Sunday Intermediate Cup: S.W. Gentle
 Sunday Junior Trophy: W.G. Penny (line)
 Sunday Youth Cup: A.W. Turner (line)

Hellenic Football League

Premier Division Challenge Cup: A.P. Wellsteed
 (reserve official)

Reading Challenge Cup

Senior Cup: P. Pittaway; K.J. Clark, S.A. Mills
 (reserve official: J.W. Moore)
 Junior Cup: G.A. Pithers, K.J. Wiltshire (lines)
 (reserve official: C.K. Pike)
 Jubilee Cup: W.G. Penny; M.S. Costello, R.P. Auger
 (reserve official: M.F.H. Shearn)

Reading Football League

Berkshire Centre Trophy
 Senior Cup: C.K. Pike; J.E. Flurry
 (reserve official: N. Isham)
 Intermediate Cup: G. Harris; R.P. Auger, D. Crossland
 Junior Cup: G. Wallace;

Reading & District Sunday League

Tilehurst Charity Cup: I.C. McNelly; G.A. Pithers
 Industrial Cup: J.W. Moore; S.A. Mills, D. Crossland
 E. Cambridge Cup: W.G. Penny; P. Verber,
 Ronald Nash Cup: F.W. Hawkins; J.B. Peacock, N.L. Binns
 Harold Lusted Shield: K. Hall; J. Machin,
 John Lusted Trophy: A.D. Awbery; R. Birch
 Treasurers' Cup: P.C. Jenkins; D.W. Newman, G.J. Alexander
 Subsidiary Cup: R.W. Maybanks; J.G.F. Ralston, M. Makepeace

Reading & District Sunday Youth League

Vic Beasley Cup: M. Bellman; A. Chapman
 Town Crier Shield: A. Chapman; G. McLay