

READING REFEREE

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Editorial

Well, we got there finally. The last issue of the magazine was dressed in the long-promised new cover. And it has received unanimous acclaim. The credit goes not to me but to my designer and my assistant editor, Stephen Green and John Moore respectively. Now we have to try to make the contents just as good

Funny old season really. I have had the impression of increasingly bad press for referees, just when I was beginning to feel we were getting better understood. Typical was a piece in the *Times* recently (25 April) in which three incidents at Ibrox formed the basis of an article by Kevin McCarra, purporting to show how referees favour Rangers on their home ground. Right or wrong, the fact that it was written by a serious journalist indicates the importance of referees' decisions at the highest levels and is evidence of the public's concern. And that concern percolates down to the actions of those of us on the local parks.

Then there was/is the England team and change of manager and, apart from the football, the issue of the cancelled/postponed Berlin fixture. We can only wish Tel well - and hope.

On the National Referees' Association front, there has been a year devoted to discussing our future - to culminate in a full debate at the annual conference which, for the first time in 15 years, I am unable to attend (for family reasons). So I will miss all the fun. I just hope those with creative ideas prevail.

All the best for the Summer - refereeing or not. See you in August if not at some small-a-side competition (affiliated of course!).

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MARCH MONTHLY MEETING

In the absence of Stephen Green, Derek Reigate, Vice-Chairman, took the Chair. He revealed that, in order to give the deal with Reading FC maximum publicity, he would be presenting a giant-size cheque to Mike Lewis, Reading Chairman, before the match against Bristol City on Easter Saturday.

Hon Secretary Pat Monaghan reported that

- National RA was discontinuing Refkit supplies
- Bracknell RA had invited us to an 11-a-side competition on Good Friday

Treasurer Neil Isham delighted the meeting with the announcement of an expected surplus of around £500.

Graeme McLay confirmed that the Dinner and Dance was booked for 11 June - venue the Royals Rendezvous Club and tickets at the much reduced price of £14 each - only 70 would be available (next month)

The report by a member at last month's meeting about a referee not sending in reports had been followed up by the Senior Training Officer. In effect the referee had received advice and a warning and the outcome was considered satisfactory by all concerned.

Andy Awbery had accompanied a colleague to a personal hearing at which the offender had got off because of the poor quality of the referee's report. Andy stressed the importance of report writing and the fact that senior colleagues, committee members are always willing to help. Thought is also being given to some form of manual of guidance going beyond what is available at present.

Amongst items from the County RA it was reported that

- the County FA now required foul and/or abusive language to be written as part of the report, not on a separate sheet. [In effect, the B & B is coming into line with other FAs at last. Ed]
- Stuart Gentle has been recommended for the 10-year Meritorious Service Certificate. Congratulations to Stuart.
- Coloured kit - in spite of previous statements by the FA - is to be allowed for a further two seasons because of contractual obligations to the sponsors.

Bracknell RA were thanked for having provided seven examiners to help us out with our 37 trainees.

THE PROBLEM SPOT

Ray Emmans presented two problems he had encountered earlier in the season.

Near the end of the game with the score at 0-0, the keeper took a short goalkick. Before the ball left the area, a defender ran in to prevent an attacker getting to it, picked it up and threw it to the keeper. What should the correct action have been? Ray got it half right - he gave the goal kick (the ball was not in play) but he should also have cautioned the player (time-wasting/ungentlemanly conduct).

The second incident was during an FA Vase game. Indirect free kick awarded for offside and the defender lay down and headed the ball back to his keeper. This was clearly an attempt to circumvent the change of Law, so caution and have the kick taken properly.

The Guest Speaker was Paul Hardie. Paul is in the RAF, an ex-Football League linesman and an FA Referee Training Instructor. His aim was to get us all involved and so he gave us each a set of cards - red, yellow and white (= the whistle) - to ensure that we were. The stimulus was a series of clips from the FA training films, and we had to re-act as if in charge.

Unfortunately, the computerised big screen malfunctioned and the ordinary TV screen left a lot to be desired. Also, some of the incidents were familiar, and others just too fast to be decently judged. It was not all disappointment, however, because it was shown clearly how important 'in the opinion of the referee' really is. We usually had a fair consensus of responses but by no means unanimity, and it wasn't always the most experienced who disagreed with the least. In fact, there were some quite intriguing partnerships in agreement and disagreement!

APRIL MONTHLY MEETING

Thanks to the injection of recently successful candidates, an attendance of about 80. The new referees were welcomed and presented with certificates by the Reading RA President, Brian Palmer.

It was reported that:

- membership had closed at 148.
- Dinner and Dance tickets were available at £14-00 each. Saturday 11 June at the Royals Rendezvous Club.
- A horse racing evening was planned for September (details later).

Peter Pittaway raised the question of filling in Sunday League cards - whether all the team's names had to be entered before the referee received it. The

frequently-mentioned ambiguity seems to persist???? (any help John??)

Keith Simmons, of the Sunday League, had been following up our repeated complaint about fixtures being given via the *Evening Post* on the Thursday prior to the games. He was hopeful that notification next season would be in advance by post. He complimented the 'excellent' Reading RA officials who had taken charge of the two recent cup finals.

The Chairman reported that nominations for all officers had been received according to rule at least 28 days prior to the AGM in May. In partnership with Life Member George Mills, he had made appointments for the forthcoming Royals Cup Competition and they had managed to involve 48 different members as officials.

Referees were requested for the Woodley (Men's) 6-a-side on 22 May (John Billings) and the Westwood (Youth) 5-a-side on 12 June (John Moore).

In the Good Friday RA 11-a-side Knockout Football Competition, our team - the *Whistlers* - had beaten Bracknell B 8-0 but lost 0-1 to Woking.

THE PROBLEM SPOT

Martin Shearn confessed to persistent problems with a particular and well-known local player who continually niggled at the referee. Martin was aware of the danger of victimising and prejudging and also of the opposite - of being too lenient. There seemed to be a consensus that the player had to be dealt with - on every occasion if necessary. 'Ungentlemanly Conduct' is the catch-all category to remember.

The Guest Speaker was John Baker, FA Staff Referee Instructor, i.e. the trainer of instructors. He had chosen 'Confrontation' as his theme.

John sees confrontation as a major cause of referee wastage - many officials can't cope with the face-to-face, which the referee *has* to win. Avoid confrontation if you can, though it won't always be possible. Establish your position and groundrules. Part of man-management is to understand that players get upset, disgruntled.

All sorts of possible causes: the way the team is playing; their position in the league; the way that player is playing - being beaten by his marker; the score; the crowd's attitude; the weather - tackles hurt more in cold weather; playing surface and conditions - heavy pitches lead to fatigue; loss of players through injury; sending-off; a grudge from a previous game; general resentment of authority; the match officials
These are all possible reasons why players get upset, not excuses.

What can we do as referees? Our first job is to recognise. Then not just to punish, but to *remould*. Your personal preparation is of great importance.

Set an example - be in control of yourself first. Show authority and self-control; do not show anxiety or annoyance. Remember people are defensive.

Your approach to the player needs to be appropriate. No one way - learn from every confrontation. Approach the player calmly, take your time, don't get too close (don't 'invade his personal space'). Be flexible, ready to use a different technique, e.g. like not answering.

How do you get the message across? People are poor listeners, we all have selective hearing. Don't go into a crowd of players. Spectators always make the problem worse. Move to the player and get him with you to neutral ground. No-one likes being told off, so don't belittle.

What shall I say? Different words, different styles of speaking can have different effects. For example, an aggressive, bullying style is likely to lead to confrontation, while a suggesting, appealing style may appear like weakness and lead to no action at all. Need to be between the two.

Your manner is the key - 'It's not what you do but the way that you do it' to quote the old song. Remember that's how we judge a player's dissent. During a season you might deal with 1300 different players. Always remain calm, but vary your approach according to the player and circumstances. Don't develop one dead-end attitude. For example, you have to send a player off and he refuses to go. What next? You know you can't restart with him there, so you can only abandon the game. Don't close your options. Don't threaten that if he isn't off in so many seconds etc. Why not an audible general comment to no-one in particular that the game will have to be abandoned etc.

3 important qualities

- be firm but not dogmatic
- be human but still in control
- be prepared to explain and to listen

Don't punish and forget: punish and remember. Look for causes of grievances, of reactions. Try to spot grievances early. Remember faces, distinguishing features. Watch for persistent infringement: crafty players spread their mischief and tend to get away with it. Worse, it's often against the same player (who may retaliate).

What do you actually say to players? Referees are different, just as players are different. Whatever words you use, try to take the heat out of the situation. Take a deep breath. Be simple, be courteous. Register surprise for example. Don't belittle.

To sum up: confrontation follows players getting upset. We have to deal with it. Try to *remould* the attitude of the player. Don't be proud either of sending off or not

sending off. Do your job. Act; get credibility. Choose your words; use reasonable, acceptable, understandable words - and do what you say you will do.

John ended in a bit of a scamper with the clock against him. He had packed an enormous amount into his talk and members at all levels were able to appreciate and benefit from the quality of his advice.

PROBLEMS IN OUR GAME

After six years refereeing at local level, coupled with two years running the line on more senior leagues, it is apparent to me that, unlike most other sports, football has not moved with the times.

Society has changed. Unlike a few years ago when authority went almost unchallenged, it is now the norm for people to question most laws or law enforcement personnel. And as referees, we need to enforce the laws of the game. Yet I believe the football authorities now give us as much chance of controlling certain parts of our game as the bull has of winning a bull fight.

Changes in the laws over the past few years that have not cured or helped the problems we have in our game.

Here are one or two of my thoughts on the game we love.

1 Dissent

.

Name me a referee who does not have trouble or who can keep this problem under control without great effort.

Well, think of all the ways we try to deal with it. Most of us try to use our man-management skills: talking and the odd indirect free kick on the local park sometimes work. After trying all these, we normally have to resort to the book and the cards. This might work for that match but, when we take the field for the next match, we have to go through the same old routine again.

How does Rugby, probably one of the most physical and some times violent games in the world, avoid the problem of dissent? The answer is that the Rugby referee has a very simple remedy: i.e any dissent after giving a decision, and he just picks the ball up and marches ten yards forward. The referee does not normally even have to speak to the player concerned. Perhaps this is just too simple a solution, but introduce it and I would almost guarantee that life on the local parks would be a lot happier.

Some people ask, "What happens if the ball is then carried into the penalty-area?" Well, if the kick was direct, I would treat it just as a direct kick anywhere on the park, not as a penalty kick. The same would apply with an indirect kick.

2 *Advantage.*

Why do we play it? If we get it right nobody ever notices - we have to tell the player concerned because he thinks we just missed the incident. If we get it wrong, back we go to problem number one, dissent.

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to shout "advantage being played", then wait five to ten seconds to see if the advantage was an advantage or a disadvantage to the offended team.

Far too simple to even think about? I believe it would keep the match moving and help the players and the referees to enjoy the game more.

3. *Stopping an obvious goal scoring opportunity* (the "professional foul")

The one we all love. Two minutes left in the semi-final of a cup, a player clean through and with only the keeper to beat. The keeper races out and brings him down five yards outside the penalty-area. OK, you send the goalkeeper off, but the offending side now set-up an eight man wall and stop the team having much chance of scoring. The offending team then go on to win the match.

Did we really give that goal scoring opportunity back? No. Why not give the team the same opportunity as they had originally: a free kick from where the offence took place? Then make all the out-field players start from a position ten yards behind the ball. This would at least give back the goal-scoring opportunity the team had in the first place. We could also finish the game with all the players on the pitch by just cautioning the player concerned. If the offence was inside the penalty-area, we really have no problem: a penalty still gives the one-on-one situation we had in the first place

Another situation: this time the ball is about to enter the net when a defender deliberately handles on the line. I believe we should have the power to award a penalty goal as in some other sports. Sometimes the player on the line acts in an instinctive manner and the awaed of the goal, coupled with a caution, would be a far more appropriate decision.

4 *Offside*

This, in my opinion, is the most difficult law to change and possibly from a lineman's point of view, the most difficult to get right.

Consider horse racing. There are a number of runners all moving in the same direction towards a finishing line that never moves.. The stewards, acting as the equivalent of a linesman, then have the simple task of picking the first horse over the line. The same goes for many other sports: athletics, motor racing, speedway and so

on. In all these sports the camera is the only way of getting the right answer. Imagine the problem if the finishing line moving up and down the track by some fifty yards and the competitors setting off in both directions to run to that line!

Well, this is the problem our poor linesman has. Yet all too often the official comes in for tremendous flak from television and fans for getting the decision wrong.

Perhaps in the top professional and international games, where so much normally depends on these matches, we should use television replays to get it right. After all players use this type of evidence to prove referees wrong, very seldom do clubs use it to say the referee was right. With modern technology and communications there must be a way. Perhaps video replays should be tried

My hobby is watching television, and of course sport on TV - in my opinion the two go hand in hand. I was one of the lucky few who had satellite television well before "Sky" came on the scene and have watched thousands of hours of sport from all round the world. Television has affected sport at all levels.

Now Sky is making big profits every week and pouring thousands of pounds into sport. They cover sport from every conceivable angle and pick up almost all the mistakes that players and officials make.

Going back some six years, I can remember watching an Italian match and in the half-time report they were analysing an off-side decision. Amazingly, they fed the still frame into a computer and turned the picture into a graphic form. The computer then drew two lines across the pitch and measured just how far this player was off-side when he scored a goal. The measurement was 0.3 of a meter (approximately a foot). Let's hope Sky does not go this far.

At the lower levels of the game, I certainly can't see any way of making the law simpler without tipping the balance to either the defending or attacking teams. Perhaps it would be best to leave it alone.

Andy Awbery

AN APOLOGY

I inadvertently (but consistently and frequently) deprived friend and Guest Speaker, Bill Cleere, of one of his "e's" in our last issue. Apologies, Bill.

CHECK YOUR RIDGES?

In this era of scientific and technological progress, virtually every facet of life has changed beyond recognition, as new materials and designs have been introduced.

Now, according to a recent article in the *New Scientist*, scientists have turned their attention towards sport and in particular to the humble football boot.

Although the upper part of boots has developed since the early days, for more than a century the design of the soles, with studs or bars, has remained the same. Recently though, an Australian scientist, David Miers, has redesigned the protruding bits to reduce the risk of knee injuries - many of which are attributed to turning on studded boots - while retaining the non-skid qualities the player needs.

Focusing upon the ball of the foot, which provides the springboard for players as they change direction, he tested over 100 prototypes, before settling on a design with six parallel ridges running at an angle across the ball of the foot, and crossed ridges on the heel.

The advantage claimed for this new design is that, unlike studs which cut through grass giving good forward but little sideways traction, the ridges improve sideways movement which is frequently required in football.

When a player plants his left foot to provide a springboard to turn right, the slanted ridges push the player into the turn, even though the boot is pointing straight ahead.

[diagram]

Miers also claims that the boots are more comfortable because their soles are made of rubber, preventing the problems of studs being felt by the foot on hard surfaces.

Players of both Aston Villa and Sheffield United, who are currently experimenting with the boots in training, say they are more comfortable, give better grip, allow the wearers to turn better and even run faster. However, at a cost of £69 per pair from Blades Football Boots, Liverpool, it may be some time yet before referees at Palmer Park are routinely asking players: 'Can I check your ridges?'

Adrian Lomas

[Thanks Adrian. This is a worrying article, however, because it raises two serious questions: How will the bad boys in future stud their opponents if their weapon is merely a rubber sole with benign slanting ridges? And as if that wasn't bad enough: What will Martin Shearn talk about at Monthly Meetings if studs have disappeared? (Don't worry Martin, I jest: it will take a long time, if it ever happens). Ed]

MORE ABOUT BOOTS AND RIDGES

Just after I had received Adrian's article on ridges *underneath* football boots, I was being told by Craig Johnston (the ex-Liverpool striker) on TV (BBC 1 QED, 56 April) that ridges *on top of the boot* were the answer - not for running/turning traction but for power and control.

Craig told the history of footballing footwear and highlighted the shortcomings of even the most modern boots. After many experiments (some of which looked pretty unlikely to succeed - and didn't), he came up with an allegedly brilliant solution which is being marketed by Adidas. Unfortunately, his romantic dream of a cheap, ultra-effective boot to help youngsters develop their skills has ended up with a top-of-the-range job which, at £120 a pair, only the high earning professionals will be able to afford. Let's just hope there will be good and cheap imitations later. [I don't think they have ridges underneath, even at that price, Adrian. Ed]