

Reading Referees' Association

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READING REFEREE

Editor - Brian Palmer

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Assistant Editor - John Moore

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Editorial

And so another season draws to its close. Particularly satisfying for those with cup final appointments or promotion, but also for all who have done their job and enjoyed it.

It was particularly interesting to hear the views of Leicester City Chairman, Tom Smeaton, at our April meeting. An intelligent and honest man, he recognised the impossibility of our job and didn't criticise us for our failings. Rather he suggested ways in which we might do better. Certainly something has to change, because I think this has been the worst season ever for criticism of top level officials - and that sort of lack of confidence affects attitudes right down to the local parks.

Although we often blame the FA for being conservative - and they are - it is we referees who are resisting professional referees and technological aids. I think it is time re-consider the arguments in view of the needs of the day. Welcome experiments with technological aids, evaluate them critically and accept them unashamedly if they help. As for professional referees, what difference would it make to most of us anyway?

Do have a good summer, refereeing or not. See you back in August.

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

March

Guest Speaker, Mick Pierce, had asked to open the meeting as he would be driving back to Portsmouth afterwards.

Mick started by giving us a summary of his career in refereeing so that we would know where he was coming from. He would not be delivering a lecture as he preferred to involve members and respond to their particular queries.

He started refereeing in 1967 at the age of 17. He wasn't going to make it as a footballer so he chose refereeing. His first game taught him an important lesson - between two pub sides who kicked each other to death for 90 minutes and were good mates afterwards over a pint. He is sure his 'long apprenticeship' had served him in good stead. He worried about the fast-trackers because they did not have the depth of experience that he had found so valuable. He had four years on the Combination and six in the middle on the Beezer League, followed by six years on the Football League line before nine in the middle. He has just one season to go.

Mick has had a number of overseas appointments as well as a cup final line and has enjoyed them all.

And so to the question session. Mick promised to take whatever came and to answer frankly.

What did he think of European officials? Not too much, a few individuals excepted. He thought English referees the best.

The promised ban on tackles from behind? Although he is generally against change, he felt that the changes of the last two years, including dealing with the tackle from behind, *had* helped the game.

Dermot Gallagher's suspension? The thin end of the wedge. He is being used as a scapegoat. TV is controlling the game and ruining it.

The most difficult professional player you have had to deal with? With man management, Mick has tried to avoid difficulties (but Gascoigne is 'horrible').

Is Mick really going to give up refereeing when he comes of the FL? Yes, but he will be President of the League Referees and will help youngsters.

TV replays to help referees? No use, not like cricket, the game is too fast.

To punish players? Yes, in cases of serious foul play that have been missed, but that is the thin end of the wedge.

The experiment with the 4th official showing time left for play? We haven't got it right yet - for example the problem of wanting to substitute no. 4 four minutes from the end.

[Mike admitted to using one watch which he had forgotten to restart on numerous occasions!]

Why don't FL and Premiership referees send players off for foul (offensive) language? They should but Mick believes the Law is wrong - it should be a caution for foul language and a sending-off for abusive.

Would he favour a 'sin-bin'? Yes, after being against the idea for a long time.

[Mick confessed to being one of the old school, out of sympathy with the changes which took individuality and personality out of referees and refereeing. Newcomers have to be robots.]

What about the 10 yds sanction for dissent (being tried in Jersey)? Not sure. What would happen in the penalty area? [Cries of 'penalty!' Ed]

How are FL referees assessed? 1st and 2nd years every game; more experienced less frequently. Clubs do mark but he thinks the assessment is what counts for promotion.

What about approaching players before a game? He believes firmly in saying nothing.

Is the fear of litigation going to affect the way we make decisions? He didn't think so.

Giving the problems created by offside couldn't it be abolished? No.

Do the TV cameras affect your refereeing? You may be conscious of them as you walk out, but you forget them and they really make no difference.

Mick had been as good as his word and had dealt with everything thrown at him (as it were). Personally I prefer our speakers to take a theme or an issue, so that there is more coherence and I did worry a bit about the message our less experienced colleagues were getting. However, Mick certainly kept us involved and interested and didn't tire us too much for the second half!

Among those to be welcomed by the Chairman was John Oxley, Chairman of the County RA. The items of news from the County included a statement that the problem of players' jewellery that we had raised, was going to be tackled by the Football League and Premiership.

Others items:

The final total for membership was 143 - probably the highest ever (of fully paid-up members).

The two training courses were now successfully concluded. The 'standard' course: of 20 members, 18 had sat the exam and 17 passed. Of the 20 members of the Sunday League course, 17 had taken the exam and all had passed. Peter Pittaway and his team were congratulated on both the

numbers trained and the quality of the training. As ever it remains to be seen how many will finish up refereeing regularly. Peter also mentioned the second course for the Sunday League - to start at the end of March - and his hope to do a proportion of the training out of doors, given the time of year.

Our Quiz team had not got through the Divisional Finals. In fact they were seventh of eight teams. Regulars Malcolm Garstang, Neil Haddock and captain Peter Pittaway were supported by reserve Derek Reigate. Neil scored the highest points for our team and deserved special congratulation. It seems that injury problems and playing away contributed to our unexpected defeat and Peter promises better things next year.

From the Leagues:

Reading Football League

Abuse is still not being reported by referees - in spite of the RFL's commitment to take action (and record of doing so).

Our request that teams should have a change of shorts and socks to avoid a colour clash was *half* accepted - the idea of spare *socks* will be put to the AGM.

Sunday League

Quicksilver have been suspended.

Referees must report any problems to the League who will take action.

Other points:

Malcolm Garstang is on the list for the FA Instructor's course.

There was some discussion about the Mentorship scheme - to be taken up in committee.

Dick Sawdon Smith and other examiners were highly critical of the oral examination (which is to be revised anyway it was understood).

PROBLEM SPOT

Life Member George Mills presented a different type of problem arising from a question set on the recent examinations.

The ball is in play near the corner. A United player standing near the penalty mark shouts abusive and insulting language. The candidate is required to state the *action to be taken*, the *reason* for it, the *method of re-starting* play.

Although the correct action would have been to stop play, send the player off for using abusive language, showing the red card and re-starting with an indirect free-kick from where the offence occurred, half the candidates would have awarded a penalty.

George made it clear that he was in no way blaming the training team - he accepted that the question was so framed as to confuse examinees by mentioning the penalty mark. George's concern was rather that the new version of the LOAF omitted the clear statement of previous versions, and that these new referees might go out and give the wrong decision.

April

Thanks to the persuasive powers of Chairman Derek Reigate, Tom Smeaton, Chairman of Premiership club Leicester City, had agreed to come to Reading as Guest Speaker. Some 40 members were in attendance.

Tom, who had been a Director before being elected Chairman, revealed at once how committed he is to football and Leicester City FC. Winning the Coca Cola Cup had been a great event though he drew a veil quickly over Europe and Atletico Madrid this season. His particular concern as Chairman is with the business side of things - more than 50% of the business is not football. Money does affect things. Some £140 million is spread among the Premiership Clubs by BSkyB and that means there will

inevitably be *scrutiny* of everything. Referees decisions made in a split second can cost 3 points, can mean Europe or no Europe, relegation or survival in the Premiership. Possibly *millions*. Tom never questions or criticises the decisions of the referee. He believes referees do their best (but he believed there were ways to improve that best - to be mentioned later).

Often asked how Leicester City has fared since the flotation last year, he believes they are doing well. They have made a profit, paid a dividend and are 10th in the league. Most crucially, the club still belongs to the people of Leicester who are now major shareholders alongside the institutions. Although Tom personally has to spend a lot of time with sponsors and the financial side, no-one ever forgets that it is all about football and the 'grass roots'. Leicester has a special relationship with its fans and the locality. 'pay-as-you-view' is not for Leicester - the experience is actually being there.

Leicester City is committed to its community and has a 'Community Department' - the only one not required to make profit. They pioneered 'Family Night Football' which brings parents and children into a party atmosphere and boosts the gates for reserve and youth games. On one occasion they had 10,000+ in attendance. They are in cahoots with the schools, offering children tickets as prizes for good attendance and attainment. In August Leicester City FC is also hosting the World Cup for Players with Learning Disabilities.

The Chairman had asked Tom what he thought of the standard of refereeing. Tom stressed that he thought it was high and as high as it could be, given the situation in which referees operate. But the standard is not high enough. The answer (for Tom) has to be full-time professional referees supported by whatever technological aids can be devised. He believes the present structure is fine but needs a new top layer of professionals. (When challenged later about what 'professional' referees would do over and above what our present officials do, Tom responded rapidly with examples, such as better understanding through practice of the ways in which players act and re-act, the dynamics of movement, the

psychology of players, body language. However, Tom stressed that there must be a proper career structure and a high level of reward. He pointed out that, though the Chairman discuss fees for officials, it is the FA that decides. He personally would pay a lot more).

What was Tom's relationship with his manager? It was a relationship based on trust, with each having his own area of responsibility. Tom, as Chairman, deals with money, the manager deals with the players. With proposed transfers, after a prospect has been watched at least five times and other opinions have been sought, the manager makes a recommendation, together with a suggested fee. Tom then arranges the contract and negotiates the deal.

Leicester City's manager, Martin O'Neill was well-known for expressing his views, especially about referees, in no uncertain terms. With a smile Tom reminded us that Martin is a Northern Irishman and he suggested putting him in a plastic bag for five minutes to allow his brain time to catch up. 'He gets so involved, he really is the 12th player.' Tom thought the media should give everyone time to settle after a match or incident.

A more serious relationship problem for the Chairman is with his other directors. The game and all about it is moving so fast and the directors are finding it difficult to keep up.

Finally, Leicester is looking forward to its new stadium. Tom had visited many stadia in Europe but described in detail the 'Reebok experience' at Bolton. He confessed to being mesmerised and filled with ambitions for Leicester - including two changing rooms, each with luxurious accommodation for 4 officials. He looked forward to the day when all would be female.

Among the many questions Tom responded to:

What contact does Leicester City have with referees? Tom again explained his manager's reactions but went on to say that referees are always welcome at the club and come in, for example, to officiate at small-a-side games.

Are the players given any guidance on the Laws? This does happen but with the younger players. The youth programme is education: about technical aspects, diet, physique, stamina and includes 'a test on the Laws'.

Do players contracts oblige them to take part in the community aspects of the club? Yes and they are uniformly keen to help even more than is actually required of them.

The Chairman and members thanked Tom for his thoughtful, polished and good-humoured presentation.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to business of which there was very little to report.

- The Secretary reminded members that proposals for officers should be made at once. There were vacancies on the Committee, but further proposals could be made at the AGM.
- The High Wycombe Society would be holding its 75th Anniversary Dinner at Wycombe FC on 2 October. Ticket £18.50.
- Members voted unanimously for John Hewson to continue as Secretary to Southern Division of the RA.
- The County FA had confirmed the ruling about a player taking part in matches being played simultaneously. Reference was made to page 4 of the FA Memorandum (dated July 1993) which states: *'A player who leaves the field for any reason, is permitted to take part in another*

game which is taking place at the same time, unless the Competition Rules state otherwise.'

- Andy Awbery underlined the importance of sending in reports. He was to appear in court as a witness in a case of one player taking another to court.
- The Allied Counties League needs more Reading-based officials. Application forms (for *new* recruits) available from Tom Walton.
- The winner of this year's draw for two FA Cup Final tickets was Terry McPherson. (Reserves: Alan Turner; Ray Brown).

ABOUT THAT NEW EDITOR

In spite of my efforts, I have not yet been able to find anyone willing to take over from as editor. So I have agreed to let my name go forward for re-election, but remain ready to step down. I firmly believe that editors have sell-by dates and I must have passed mine. Think about it - there are certainly potential editors out there hiding their lights under bushels. Talk to me. If you don't feel quite ready, we can arrange for you to work in gradually. Commitment is really what matters.

WHO MAKES THE LAWS OF FOOTBALL?

A simple question with perhaps a more complicated answer says Dick Sawdon Smith

Here's a question for your next pub quiz. 'Who makes the laws of football? It's a fair bet that most would answer 'FIFA', but of course we know that to be wrong. The correct answer is that it is the International Football Association Board who compile the Laws Of Association Football (LOAF), which we as referees try to uphold.

The International Football Association Board was formed in 1883, after matches had started between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and it became obvious that a uniform code of Laws was needed. The Board consisted of two members of each of the four countries, and it was agreed to meet annually. This has happened ever since, with the exception of the war years, and the Board alone was given the power to alter the laws of the game.

This is still true today, except that in 1913, in recognition of the great expansion of the game throughout the world, representatives of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) were added to the Board. This meant that the same Laws would apply wherever the game was played.

I mention this because if you have been reading the sports pages over the last few years, you could be forgiven for assuming that there is only one man who makes football's Laws. We constantly read the thoughts of Sepp Blatter, General Secretary of FIFA, particularly prior to World Cup finals.

The latest pronouncements from the man who controversially hopes to step up to become President of FIFA, is a sending-off for tackling from behind even if done fairly and the ball is played, and wherever it happens on the field. Also he calls for the banning of any form of sliding tackle.

Here's another question, if not for the pub quiz, at least to create discussion in the bar. 'Who is France's best ever player?' To be honest, how many French players can you think of? The answer has to be Michel Platini. What's the connection? Well, it appears that Platini is the man who gives Blatter his ideas on tackling.

He is an enthusiastic participator in Task Force 2000 (yes another task force) set up by Blatter. Blatter, whose own wild suggestions have included widening the goals and reducing teams to ten men to make it easier to score, has been told by Platini that what is needed is to create an environment in which players are protected so that they can express themselves.

Those of us who can remember the 1966 World Cup, will recall how Pele was kicked out of the tournament, and most of the recent changes have been to outlaw this type of aggression. Quite right too, but will the game be improved by removing tackling completely which is what Platini would like to see?

I'm sure that the home countries' representatives on the International Football Association Board will be very loath to accept alterations to the Laws which would in effect reduce football to a non-contact sport, but are they being compromised by the mouth of Sepp Blatter? Whatever happens, there's one thing of which you can be certain. As far as spectators, players, and managers are concerned, we as referees will get the blame.

A VOICE OF SANITY AND SUPPORT

Patrick Barclay, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 5/4/98, feels that the officials are more sinned against than sinning.

There is nothing wrong with referees, I increasingly feel, that abolishing the rest of us would not solve. Fans, journalists, players and especially managers are all guilty of using the man in the middle to cover up their own shortcomings.

It is the new English disease - as I noted last week, having watched the English referee David Elleray brandish two red cards and several yellows at the Germany-Brazil match in Stuttgart without causing the slightest controversy - and it is becoming dangerous. Already this season one linesman has been assaulted and at Barnsley last weekend only some alert man-marking by the players prevented spectators from reaching Gary Willard, who left the field during a heated afternoon in which he sent off three home players.

Afterwards, predictably, paranoia was more prevalent than shame. A Barnsley fan told the television cameras the dismissals were part of a

conspiracy to save fashionable clubs such as Tottenham from relegation. Even Danny Wilson, Barnsley's manager, muttered darkly. The truth of the matter, which was that the Liverpool forward Michael Owen had been too quick for Barnsley's defenders, was buried under a mound of misguided passion.

Nor was *Match of the day* to which we still look for wisdom, much help. It concentrated on Wimbledon's defeat at Manchester United, which Alan Hanson was allowed wrongly to ascribe to a supposed mistake by Dermot Gallagher in ruling that three United players had not obstructed the goalkeeper's view of the first goal. "Cowardice" was what Wimbledon's manager, Joe Kinnear, called it, emphasising the trend towards lunacy. Another weekend, another set of scapegoats. It is all so monotonous and can only end in tears. You may or may not agree with my opinion that refereeing in England is stronger, more constructive and more judicious than ever before in some 30 years' experience, but beware those who tell us the opposite: the likes of David Mellor, on his cheaply populist phone-in, beaten managers and the reporters who seize upon their excuses as an easy angle. Nowhere else does this pantomime run on the same scale. And it must stop, because events at Barnsley point to a return of fencing.

Less than a decade after Hillsborough, the prospect can hardly be contemplated. But, in a different way, the game has again become a potential killer. All that is needed is for everyone to calm down and accept that it cannot function without respect for authority. To err is human. So is to um. Referees are not, however, permitted the luxury of hesitation, unlike the television analysts whose deliberations prove little more than the difficulty of instant decision-making, and the situation will not change in the foreseeable future. Even the seductive idea of a fourth official in front of a screen is a non-starter, principally because it would alter the character of the game, giving it the staccato rhythm of gridiron without the discipline intrinsic to an overtly physical code. Dissent would become an even more tiresome intrusion than it is now.

Anyway, as the FIFA General secretary, Sepp Blatter, told me recently: "Football is an art, not a science." If for no other reason, Blatter should be

wished well in the forthcoming contest for the presidency. Since the dismal World Cup of 1990, the international refereeing regime has become more fussy, to its benefit. The encouragement of creation, however, a complicated business and both faster play and the proliferation of television scrutiny have increased the burden of the job. Gone are the days when we could be told the best referees went unnoticed. That was always rubbish - a good referee's prominence was, and forever will be, dictated by the behaviour of the players - but going unnoticed is no longer an option.

Though managers may be broadly sympathetic, they tend to take the narrow view of particular incidents and there are few exceptions. Among those who have vividly defended unworthy cases in the Premiership this season are some of the most intelligent and astute: Martin O'Neill of Leicester, Gordon Strachan of Coventry and Roy Hodgson of Blackburn. True, decisions can undermine a manager's work. But Brian Little, a figure of admirable restraint throughout his mainly successful time at Aston Villa, would probably acknowledge that the mistakes that confounded him lay in trusting players.

What we have to get used to is a world in which referees are not remotely connected with the concept of infallibility. They need to be treated as professionals, respected and understood as such, just as Nigel Martyn, a popular goalkeeper, has been accorded a sense of perspective while his blunders cost Leeds points. To this end the one-match suspension of Gallagher for his handling of an Arsenal-Chelsea match was useful, especially as the Banbury referee reacted so maturely. "I hold my hands up," he said. "This will kill the myth that referees are not accountable."

Quite. They are assessed and, like clubs, promoted and relegated. There is arguably no more professional, and certainly no more thoughtful, section of the game than the FA referees' department. It is always ready to study new ideas such as, in effect, three-man refereeing, with the linesmen more involved; FIFA are to begin experiments. In the meantime let us hush the sirens of ignorance and recognise that our Premiership referees are the best we have got. And, by and large, better than we deserve.

"GET YER EYES TESTED, REF" (with a discount)

Referees have come under increasing attack this season by managers, players and supporters who seek a convenient, often helpless, target on which to vent their frustrations. However, it is presumably with tongue firmly in cheek that *Total Football* - the ultimate fans' magazine, as it likes to call itself - has come up with an idea that it feels may lead to more accurate officiating.

Total Football has teamed up with Vision Express, the national optician chain, to offer cut-price eye tests the hard-pressed men-in-the-middle. All they have to do is produce a copy of the magazine, a bona fide referee's whistle or linesman's flag and an FA referee's certificate. Then, instead of £16.95, the test will cost only £10. What a magnificent gesture.

[Russell Kempson in *The Times*, 7/3/98]

'WINNING A PENALTY'

I am often irritated by what the commentators and pundits say during televised matches.. The interpretations of Law by Kevin Keegan and Ron Atkinson especially should be engraved on tablets of stone as a warning to posterity. A player is scythed down and the culprit cautioned. Our wise men are invariably saddened that the referee is being 'rather harsh', because 'I didn't see much wrong in that'. Then, when they see the replay and the obvious brutal and foul tackle, they concede grudgingly that there might have been some justification

Leaving aside the commentator's interpretation of Law, I deplore the way they consciously or unconsciously question the officials' decisions by the expressions they use. I mentioned a few on a previous occasion, like 'the linesman *has given him* offside'; 'the referee *has given* a corner' - i.e. 'I'm sure he's wrong but that's what he's given'.

One expression which seems to have come more and more into vogue and gets right under my fingernails is 'X has *won* the penalty'. And they say it as if it's some great achievement. I wonder whether our commentators ever think about the effect of what they are saying.

I have always thought penalties undesirable, a sign of *failure* on the part of the defence, because that's what foul play is. 'Winning' should suggest something good and positive, but 'winning a penalty' can only mean either inducing a defending opponent to commit a foul in the penalty area or, more usually and worse, acting as if a foul has been committed. And so, if you manage to cheat the referee into giving the penalty, you have 'won a penalty'.

A far cry from the Corinthians who used to refuse to accept a penalty even when given. . .

MORE FACTS FROM THE PAST

1957-58

The season overshadowed by the Munich air disaster in February in which eight of the Manchester United team - the famous 'Busby Babes' - were killed. They were on their way home from a drawn game in Yugoslavia with Red Star Belgrade and had qualified for the semi-final of the European Cup on aggregate. 15 others died, but the seriously injured Matt Busby (later Sir Matt) recovered.

Against the odds, United reached the FA Cup Final, but there was no fairytale ending. Bolton Wanderers were already one goal up when Nat Lofthouse bundled the goalkeeper and ball into the united net in the 55th minute for a controversial second goal.

England played their first international ever against the Soviet Union in Moscow and drew 1-1.

Sunderland were relegated to the (old) Second Division for the first time since they joined the Football League in 1890

Heart's won the Scottish League championship for the first time this century with an astonishing season's record, finishing 13 points ahead of Rangers. They won 29 lost of their 34 League matches and lost only one, scoring 132 goals and conceding only 29.

1958-59

World Cup year and the debut of Pele at the age of 17 in the victorious Brazilian team that was to outclass all the opposition except, ironically, England and Wales (the latter having qualified for the finals for the first time).

At 18, Jimmy Greaves became the youngest player to score five goals in a First Division match (for Chelsea against Wolves). He finished the season as the Division's highest scorer with 33 goals.

In the Second Division the leading scorer for the second season in a row was Brian Clough, later of managerial fame, with 42 goals. He averaged a goal a game over three seasons and reached 100 goals in fewer games than any previous player.

Aston Villa were relegated from the First Division in the last minute of their last game of the season when they conceded the only goal of the match.

Dennis Law, playing inside forward for Huddersfield Town, played for Scotland at the age of 18, the youngest ever. On his debut he scored one of the goals in the 3-0 defeat of Wales.

The transfer fee record was broken by Matt Busby in his attempts to rebuild the decimated Manchester United team. He paid £45,000 for English international Albert Quixall of Sheffield Wednesday.

1959-60

Brian Clough's goal-scoring talent was recognised, first with a place in the Football League side which won 5-0 against the Irish League with Clough scoring all the goals. He was then picked for the international side but dropped after only two games (one drawn, one lost). It was said that he would not be able to develop a fruitful partnership with Jimmy Greaves and he never played for England again.

The FA Cup final proved memorable for the wrong reasons. Blackburn Rover's star Derek Dougan asked for a transfer an hour before the kick-off; David Whelan broke his leg trying to tackle Wolverhampton's Norman Deeley. With no substitutes allowed at that time, Wolves went on to win 3-0 against the ten men, with Deeley getting a hat trick. The Blackburn supporters were incensed by the fierce Wolves tackling condoned by the youngest ever Cup Final referee, Kevin Howley. They pelted him and the Wolves players with orange peel, apple cores and any other rubbish which came to hand.

Dennis Law moved from Huddersfield to Manchester City for the first transfer fee between British clubs to exceed £50,000.

Jock Stein took his first job as a manager at Dunfermline. After he took over, the club won its remaining six matches and avoided relegation.

Tom Finney, doyen of Preston North End, retired after 24 years and 472 matches. He made 76 appearances for England.

There was a dramatic finish to the League Championship. Burnley, who had not headed the table all season, beat Manchester City in their last match to overtake Wolves and win the title by a single point. In so doing

they deprived Wolves, who went on to win the FA Cup, of a hat-trick of titles and the double.

England was chosen to host the 1966 World Cup.

THE PLUM TREE SEASON 1997-98

Congratulations to all our members who have been appointed to finals this season. These are the ones we have been told about - let me know if you've been missed out because I invariably have to add a postscript in the next issue. Have a good and enjoyable game!

Berks & Bucks FA

Saturday

Senior Cup	Assistant Referee	A. Wellstead
Junior Cup	Reserve Official	J. Fleming
Senior Trophy	Assistant Referee	K. Hodgson

Sunday

Youth Cup (U/18)	Assistant Referee	M. Overton
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Combined Counties Premier Challenge Cup

Assistant Referee: M. Garstang

Suburban League Cup

Assistant Referee T. Walton

Chiltonian League Cup

Assistant Referee C. Pike

Reading Football League

Senior Cup Referee: N. Isham
Assistant Referees: P. Kelly
M. Baker

Reserve Official: M. Bellman

Intermediate Cup: Referee: J. Freeman
Assistant Referee: M. Albury

Junior Cup Referee: J. Fleming
Assistant Referees: M. Rowley
K. Wilson

Reading Sunday League

Tilehurst Charity Cup Referee: J. Moore

Reserve Official: P. Hitt

Industrial Cup Referee: M. Bellman
Assistant Referees M. Garstang
J. Peacock

	Reserve Official:	T. Walton
E. Cambridge Cup	Assistant Referee:	V. Bark
	Reserve Official:	P. Pittaway
John Lusted Cup	Assistant Referee:	K. Wilson
Treasurer's Cup	Reserve Official:	D. Williams

Reading Evening Post

Senior Cup	Referee:	A. Awbery
	Assistant Referee:	J. Fleming
	Reserve Official:	P. Hitt
Junior Cup	Referee:	K. Clark
	Assistant Referee:	G. Broadhurst
	Reserve Official:	D. Naish
Jubilee Cup	Assistant Referee:	C. Hitt
	Reserve Official:	M. Costello

Allied Counties' Youth League

League Cup	Assistant Referees	M. Fillingham C. Pike
Challenge Shield	Assistant Referee	D. Crossland

South Chiltern Minor League

Chronicle Cup	U/11	Referee	C. Hitt
	U/12	Referee	K. Browne
Redland Cup	U/10	Referee	C. Hitt
	U/15	Referee	I. Garden
Nash & Owens Trophy	U/10	Referee	M. Overton
SH George Trophy	U/16	Referee	P. Hitt

PROMOTIONS

Congratulations too to the following members who have gained their promotion this season:

Class 2 to Class 1	V. Bark, D. Williams
Class 3 to Class 2	A. George, N. Haddock, C. Hitt

FAIR PLAY AND LINESMAN'S AWARDS

Congratulations to this year's winners of the long-standing awards we make to clubs and their linesmen in recognition of their contribution to Fair Play.

Fair Play Award

1	Mortimer FC	RSL (Premier Division)	9.0
2)	Old Presentonians	RFL (Division 1 Thames)	8.5
2)	Goring FC	RFL (Division 1 Kennet)	8.5

Linesman's Award

1)	K. Clayton	Forest Old Boys (RFL)	8.5
1)	M. Stannet	SRCC (RFL)	8.5
3	S. Dell	Mortimer FC (RFL)	8.2

Alan Turner, who does all the administration to make these highly appreciated awards possible, thanks all members who have played their part by supplying the marks. We in turn thank Alan for his umpteenth year (10th?) in running the scheme.

NOW THEY TELL US . . .

Did you read about that new research from Spain reported in *The Lancet*, 24.1.98?

According to Dr Sanabria and his colleagues assisted by a referee from the Spanish Royal Football Federation, the assistant referee's job is physically impossible because of the way the eye focuses. Put simply, the action of focusing/re-focusing takes from 250-300 milliseconds - during which time players will have moved. So the attacker who appears to be beyond the second last defender may not have been. FIFA was hinting at something of the sort when the Law was last changed and they counselled generosity to the attacker if in any doubt. Interesting how research eventually confirms what we had known by instinct and experience for years

However, all of that is only part of the problem, the last and, in fact, less important part. The real problem is the movement of the eyes/head when the ball travels a long way, say, from a deep defensive position up to the attack far in the opponents' half. How many of us make a systematic allowance for the movement/re-focusing gap?

I tackled the problem in an article in the *Football Referee* nearly 20 years ago *Oh to be a Chameleon!* (December 1978; reprinted in the *Reading Referee* April/May 1994). It seemed to me then as now, that if we don't abolish offside as I have also advocated, we need to develop swivel-eyes

like a chameleon. Meantime, until the genetic engineering catches up, I pointed out, with examples, that being in the right position, exactly opposite the second last defender is probably more critical.

Of course, with a long dead-ball kick from defence, we can use *hearing* to support sight. Many assistant referees watch the attacker/defence relationship and *listen* for the kick. An excellent solution so long as they remember that sound travels relatively slowly and if the distance is, say, 45 yards, it will take about an eighth of a second to arrive. So again, the attacker could legitimately be beyond the last defender by the time we made the judgment.

Given the never-diminishing controversy about offside decisions and the clear evidence that we cannot be expected to get the decisions 100% right, there seem to be only two choices, both quite unpalatable to many referees: either abolish offside or devise electronic aids to overcome our in-built physical limitations.

AND FINALLY

Thanks from your editor to all this year's contributors of reports, articles and other items. Particular thanks to: Dick Sawdon Smith, who never fails to interest and has an even wider audience than us as his articles are often 'borrowed' for other society's magazines; John Moore for his contributions and work on the copy for the press; and of course you, the readers, if you have managed to read this far.