

# READING REFEREE

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## *Editorial*

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## **IT WAS ALL THE COMPUTER'S FAULT**

Observant readers may have noticed in our last issue that the article about the County FA meeting with County RA officers had a fascinating gap in the middle - caused by an electronic gremlin (we claim). This never happened when we used quill pens. That paragraph should have read as follows:

The Chairman went on to suggest that candidates' discontent was generally due to them not being promoted.' An easy enough thing to say, but, at best, inadequate as a response and, at worst, insulting. The unsuccessful candidates I have spoken to have accepted the decision *when they had confidence in and respect for the assessor*. Those who have resented the decision have split into two groups: those who felt one or more of their assessments was incompetent and therefore unfair; and, occasionally, others who felt a colleague had benefited from an assessor's misguided generosity - also incompetence - when they had not. All of which demonstrates for me that the problem lies not with the candidates, but with the assessors.

## SEPTEMBER

### MONTHLY MEETING

Chairman Stephen Green opened the meeting with an account of Geoff Way's contribution to refereeing and the Reading RA, and members stood in silence in his memory. (A tribute appeared in our last issue)

A good turn-out of some 70+ members. Owing to another engagement, Guest Speaker Mike Lewis, MD of Reading FC until his recent resignation, had asked to go on first.

Mike's first request was that we shouldn't take too seriously what he has said about referees. He started his career in the management of football at Newport in 1976 and always made referees welcome. His stories of that ground set the tone for the evening and had his audience in tucks. 'It was tidal - the river came up and the pitch was covered with water and seagulls.' He described how, on one occasion, a referee from Bristol and new to the Football League, declared the ground unfit early in the day but, after the efforts of the groundsman and ample drink, was persuaded to play it as the tide receded. 'A high profile game - against Darlington - but, after all that, we lost 2-0'.

Referees? From the administrator's point of view, Mike claimed that 99% are OK. Reading had complained to the FA about a particular referee 'who gave us a nightmare (twice)' and asked for him to be kept away from Reading 'for his own safety'. It seemed to be working but he has recently been appointed again. . . .

With managers. it's different. Mark, for example, had had a go at the linesmen the previous night. 'No point - I've never known an official to change his mind.' Mike is concerned, however, that some referees seem to be refereeing for the assessor in the stand. He doesn't think the relationship between clubs and referees is right and would welcome more contact, especially after the match - not to criticise, but to get explanations. He welcomes the pioneering relationship Reading FC has with Reading RA and thanked us again for our help with the Royals Cup. He also believes the time has come for professional referees, because too much is now being demanded of our top officials.

Reading FC is at an interesting stage. He underlined the commitment of the Chairman, John Majeski (???) while not concealing his lack of knowledge of the game (with a few anecdotes) He, Mike, would have preferred to move to new pastures last season but feels he given Reading a boost since his appointment.

Reflecting back on his career in football, he pointed out how different it had been when he started at Newport. They had problems - 'the seats all faced the pitch'. 'The biggest cheer of the afternoon didn't mean they'd scored - it meant the pasties had

arrived'. Attendances were so bad, they announced changes in the crowd, not in the team'.

All referees have a red letter day in their career. His was getting the job at Spurs in 1978. He even got sponsored houses for Ossie Ardiles and Ricky Villa, Then there was Ossie's sponsored XJ6, which he drove sitting on three cushions so that he could see out. More stories - e.g. of the Laurie Sanchez deal when the Swindon officials were in the boardroom ready to sign when Wimpdon offered £25,000 and Mike was told to take it and break the news to the others.

Mike accepts that refereeing is difficult. He had once been pressed to do a game at the age of 20. A disaster. Where do you position yourself? He thought near the ball and kept getting in the way of the players or struck by it. At all levels it is so much better to have a man (or woman) in the black and white uniform and not just someone in a tracksuit. Mike concluded by repeating his plea for more dialogue between referees and others involved in the game.

In response to questions, Mike was defensive about the bad language young Reading players were using in a South-East Counties game. About a new stadium, he was uncertain. Although he thought a move to Smallmead unlikely in the very near future, he did not rule out possible development at Elm Park. Managers? He reflected ruefully that his first job had been to fire Roy Bentley and Maurice Evans. Of managers he has known he thought Ian Branfoot the best in terms of success. Mark McGee is the shrewdest but he does have the advantage of the best players. Of managers elsewhere, he rated Colin Addison of Newport the most successful - lifted the team from 92nd in the Football League to the championship. Keith Burkinshaw he thought underrated. Finally Mike agreed that Whitchurch had been a vital facility, but now was perhaps less so.

Thanking Mike, the Chairman presented him with a Reading RA tie following custom (the last of our stock) and also with an engraved paper weight as a special leaving memento.

The business started exceptionally after half-time. The Secretary reported that he had sent a letter of condolence to Geoff Way's family; that the next County RA meeting would be on 5 October; that the Society was proposing to send a letter to National RA asking for financial support to allow Stewart Mills to get a barrister's opinion about a possible civil action against his assailant.

Membership has reached 96, but Andy Awbery made a plea for those who had not re-joined to do so as soon as possible. (Remember you are not insured until you have paid your subscription).

Other items:

- a new match report card is available from Kevin Parsons, the Supplies Co-ordinator
- Christmas Raffle tickets will be available from the November meeting
- the Reading Football League could do with more referees (as could the Sunday League)
- Keith Simmonds reported on a very useful meeting of the Sunday League officers and Reading RA officers. Members were pleased to hear that the league has gone on to a monthly appointments system as requested. The league plans to reward long serving referees - presentations at an invitation dinner.
- a warning not to leave your kit in the changing room at Laurel Park
- a further clarification that, on the Sunday League, the card must be given to the referee before the game and not on the pitch. It should bear the names of substitutes, but the names of other players are not required.
- two Sunday League players, after being disciplined by the County FA, would not be allowed to register for this season. One of the clubs had been heavily fined.
- members were reminded that rings etc had to be removed or taped up (whatever had been seen in the World Cup).
- Caroline Hitt (Peter's wife) is the new South Chiltern Minor League Referees' Appointments Secretary. She is looking for officials. U/10 to U/16 divisions.
- Reading Schools' games will be held Friday evenings at Palmer Park. See Kevin Parsons.
- we are reminded that the County badge has to be worn for all County appointments.

Finally, Stephen Green, as Senior Training Instructor took up again the new mandatory instructions. Members were encouraged to share experiences so far. One member reported cautioning eight players in one game. The assessor had commented that it should have been ten. Another had heard from a manager of a referee on the local league allegedly 'not going to apply to new instructions'.

What about instructions to club linesmen? Two members are instructing as previously - all across the park; One is asking for the flag only if the player is within the 10yd zone of play. Arguments were put forward for both approaches. What you *must not do* is simply accept the flag.

Sliding tackles and tackles from behind? A challenge. Some members are going into the dressing room and for them it appears to be working. In one case reported, it also seems to have reduced the bad language problem. Overall, members felt there was a change for the better this season.

## **OW'S ABOUT THAT THEN? JUST A GAME!**

Arrived good and early. Sunday morning, sun shining, Autumn nip in the air. Checked the pitch. OK. The home team manager, as an ex-player, recognised me. As he turned and saw me, his eyes had that look: 'Oh, not him' and his voice gave it away. I very politely asked for the match ball..

Pre-match instructions for the club linesmen, and both teams were out on the pitch. Strong blast on the whistle, captains came forward, firm handshake. I hoped everyone would enjoy their game of football. I told them to tell their players - they knew the likely ones - there would be no mercy on foul language.

Whistle, and the game's on its way. First attack, a home team corner and an unfair challenge on the keeper. Quick whistle, no dissent. But I had the feeling the home team were going to need watching. 8 minutes and bang! there it was. An *away* team player had brought his opponent down with a late tackle. 'I've got to have that one.' Caution and yellow card. No dissent.

The caution had nothing to do with the new mandatory instruction - I immediately felt 'I'll caution him for that'.

Off we go again. Good football and goal-scoring chances at both ends. The home team go three up. 37 minutes gone and one of the home team players shouts the cardinal sin words: f . . .ing this and that to someone in his own team. I dismissed him for foul language. 40 minutes and that was a deliberate body-check. Again by a member of the home team. Another caution and yellow card. Re-start play. 43 minutes and a late tackle and again it was a caution for a home team player. The away team scored to end the half 1-3 down.

Second half and some brilliant football. A player twists his knee and is substituted. The away team come back to 3-3 and then score the winner.

The away side said: 'Thanks ref' and said the game was 'well controlled' and 'fair'. One home team player shook my hand and he thought I was 'a bit hard'.

I had sent off two of the home team's players previously for foul language but that was in 1987 and had not sent anyone off for foul or abusive since 1989. I had gone into the match with an open mind and a clear conscience. Also, the mandatory instructions had made no difference. I would still have had all those cards in a previous season.

Sometimes it happens like that. The home team had older players who lacked fitness; the away team were younger, fitter and had a hungrier (and better) attitude to the game.

I awarded myself 11/10 for doing the business and not quitting. As Mike Lewis said - some teams don't like certain referees . . . .

Alan Turner

## **IT WAS A GOOD START . . . .**

[In our last issue concern was expressed at the lack of initiative and support for referees shown by the County FA, and the postscript to the article mentioned a meeting just called for Assessors. The meeting is recorded here at some length, not only for assessors who were not at the meeting, but also for promotion candidates who tend to be kept in the dark about what they can reasonably expect from the assessment process. Ed]

The meeting had been arranged by Ted Cambridge, Divisional Secretary for Division 5, to discuss the guidelines for referee assessors issued by the FA. Members of Division 4 and 6 had also been invited.

The plan for the evening was a model for the way in which referees and the County FA should be working in partnership. Ted introduced the evening, before passing over to our members, Stephen Green and Peter Pittaway, who took the central role. Andy Awbery, as Referee Appointments Secretary for the Reading Football League, but also an assessor, explained his wish to make sure that candidates had appropriate games and how it could be achieved.

Stephen Green opened by saying that the evening was not for teaching assessors to assess - rather it was to consider best practice and to meet the criticism of varying standards. Assessors are the guardians of refereeing standards. In addition to this meeting, there would be a practical session later in the season, with the opportunity for assessors to assess the same referee on the same occasion and discuss the outcomes.

With the benefit of his many years of experience, Peter Pittaway, in effect, interpreted and fleshed out the material contained in the FA handbook for Referee Assessors. Peter believes the need for assessor training has increased as the game has got more difficult.

### *Approach and Preparation*

An assessor should look for the positive - we want to improve referees not destroy them.. Don't damn with faint praise. Don't stay in the car or hide or stand chatting on the touch line. Walk round, change your angle of view. Don't interfere, but if the referee smiles, smile back. Don't ignore him after the match, but be careful what you

say to avoid giving a wrong impression. Not the best time - he may only hear what he wants to hear. Arrive early and stay till the end.

Some matches will not be of the best level for assessment but very few fail to tell you a good deal. It is helpful to get some 3 to 2 candidates as well as 2 to 1. Remember you are judging whether the referee is ready *to start* in the new classification - not whether he could take on the most challenging match around. The aim of the assessor is to decide whether the candidate is a *potential* Class 2 or 1. Also remember there will always be differences among assessors, as among referees, but we aim for greater consistency through training.

[Here one assessor regretted that promotion could now happen too quickly and quoted the example of one Class 3 being assessed after having done *one* previous game. Rather than force referees just to wait for promotion, it was suggested that compulsory in-service training as part of the qualification for promotion would kill two birds with one stone. [County FA please note]

A few do's and don'ts. Don't agree to assess anyone you know well -you have to be objective. Don't forget your pen/pencil and paper (or dictaphone if you have one and prefer it)

You are assessing on the Laws but remember you have a different angle of view for a particular incident. The referee has to be right in Law, however.

### *Signals*

2 to 1 - sharp and precise. Use of whistle - variety etc. Check speed of re- starts.  
3 to 2 - expect less, still has a lot to learn, but should show signs.

### *Stoppages*

Does the referee try to keep the game going? Pernickety? Abused? Attitude to injuries - too soft? too hard? Estimation of 10 yards (and insistence)? Stage managing of free kicks?

### *Advantage*

Very difficult at local level. Perhaps he should have used less. Was it a cop-out?  
Comment on use of signal/lack of.

### *Co-operation with linesmen*

They need instruction more than ever with interpretations. Does referee acknowledge/overrule when necessary (or slavishly follow)?.

### *Application of the Laws*

- penal
- technical
- misconduct

Were they applied fairly and consistently? Did the referee recognise intent? Does he blow simply for physical contact? Did he fail to use the card? Was he intimidated? Did the referee *help to create* misconduct?

### *Positioning and Movement*

You won't ever see perfect positioning. This is the assessor's cop-out criticism. The real questions are: did he miss much? did he lose control?

### *Overall Control and Authority*

In too many reports this seems to be in conflict with the rest. Who ran the game? If he really was in control he deserves the pass mark.

Assessors complete two forms: one for the candidate, one for the assessors' meeting which includes the mark and recommendation. The general remark is very important as the candidate is not seeing the result. It should be clear from the text what the mark and recommendation are going to be, i.e. the conclusion should match the evidence.

Finally, assessors have always been told not to take isolated incidents into account. That needs qualification. If a candidate makes a clear error in Law, that can't be disregarded. On the other hand one insignificant thing or doubtful decision should not be allowed to sway your judgment.

Ted Cambridge concluded the meeting and there were thanks all round for a fruitful evening.

[The meeting was an excellent start but of course there is more to be done to *professionalise* the whole business of assessment and promotion. It was disappointing that not all assessors were present. Charitably, one can put this down to the relatively short notice. If we have good notice of the practical session to come, there will be little excuse for absence. The FA materials look very good but deserve a wider audience. And of course Ted's initiative needs to be repeated county -wide, not just in our area. Maybe it has been. Ed]

**ESPECIALLY FOR NEW REFEREES**



It is easy for the more experienced to forget those early stages before you acquire your own routines. What have I to remember to do? Not so much during the game but before and after. Until it all becomes second nature - rather like learning to drive a car - there seem to be so many things to remember and to get done in the right sequence. If you get it wrong, not only does it make the task more difficult but you also give away your newness and inexperience to the teams and officials, and that could put you at a distinct psychological disadvantage.

Before leaving home, you will have done the correct administration for the league or competition. You have been notified of your appointment and have confirmed in the manner required.

You have probably thought about the game - league or cup, time of season and league positions or round of cup - about the teams, and you have checked where the ground is, worked out the journey time (likely maximum, as well as minimum) and decided on the intended time of arrival, never less than 30 minutes before kick-off, frequently more. Your kit was washed/cleaned immediately after your last game and simply has to be checked and put into your bag. You have devised your own checking system, even a checklist when you are starting. Many old hands (like me) will include some spare string or tape, and an inflator and adaptor. (Others refuse to do so on principle, so you make your own decision).

Once at the ground, remember you are on view and may be observed. What impression do you hope to give? Confident and self-assured but not arrogant. So do everything *purposefully*. If there is any doubt about the playability of the pitch, go and look now (in wellies if necessary).

Make yourself known (if there's anyone about). If the ground is unfamiliar, seek help - even experienced referees don't know every ground. Get changed and do whatever rubbing and bending and stretching you wish. Then *methodically* pocket your equipment. Devise your own way for remembering e.g. learn the contents of each pocket or invent your own mnemonic. Not too difficult, only six different items: cards, coin, flags, pencil, watches, whistles.

Go and see the managers/teams. Introduce yourself, get the match ball. Ask for more/less inflation if necessary.

Go and check the pitch. Devise your own way. You have to be satisfied it is playable, that there are no objects on the surface likely to cause injury, that the lines and nets are OK. One method is to start at one corner and walk towards the goal after checking the corner flag (if it's in; if not, mental note to check it later). How? Find out where 5ft comes up to on your body and remember the flag post has to be at least that tall. It's useful to be estimating the width of the pitch as you walk because it will affect the game and your positioning. (3 yards before the penalty box means a pitch of minimum width i.e. 50 yards; 15 yards and

you're probably at a Football League ground). Check the nets. It really is important to see that they are well tied to the bar and uprights and firm in the bottom corners. They should also be pegged down all round but that's less important.

*Know the length of your own pace.* Walk towards the penalty mark from roughly the centre of the goal. Note the distance to the goal area line and to the mark. (If the mark is well out, make a mental note to re-pace if there is a penalty). Keep the count going past the penalty box right to the halfway line, looking at the pitch for objects as you go. Think about the length of the pitch. Minimum 50 yards to the halfway line; 60 and the players' fitness and yours are going to be tested.