

READING REFEREE

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Editorial

Life always seems to balance good news with bad, one step forward, one back.

We have got our local council used to involving us in concerns about playing facilities and accommodation, especially for referees. We have been consulted about the long overdue refurbishment of the changing rooms at Christchurch Meadows. But the Council continue to get it wrong. Where there can be up to 12 officials and would normally be at least four, there is a cubby-hole planned for referees, with one chair and room for no more, and access is through a team dressing room.

Then there is Coley Rec with its unequipped half garaage referred to at the October meeting. How long is it before we have to recommend to our members not to officiate where facilities are appallingly inadequate. We have never expected luxury at local level, but squalid inadequacy must be too little. Perhaps an on-site meeting at the various grounds with our elevccted representatives should be the next step.

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SEPTEMBER
Monthly Meeting

About 50 members were in attendance. The Chairman congratulated Stewart Mills in person for his success in becoming a Licensed Referee Instructor. We had received details of the USA Cup 1996. The tournament will be held from 11-21 July. The National RA 5-a-side competition is to be discontinued but County RAs are encouraged to continue with theirs and the B & B RA is doing so.

Reading Borough Council had announced a Users' meeting with the changing facilities at Christchurch Meadows high on the agenda. The RA would be represented.

Membership stood at 89 (including 4 Life Members and 6 Vice-Presidents).

The main training course had 21 members and, in addition, the special course at Presentation College being run by John Moore assisted by Malcolm Garstang, had another 15. Training/revision meetings had been arranged for promotion candidates.

The Reading Football League was, like the Sunday League, very short of referees. Keith Simmons of the Sunday League promised to ensure that referees get the notices to the handbook. Problems were reported with old goalpost holes at Desborough Park, and (again) with changing facilities at Coley Rec.

Jim Fleming reminded members about our own fitness training evenings and, on the social side, announced a questionnaire inviting members to say what functions they would like to see organised *and support*.

Christmas Raffle: John Moore urged members to do their best to sell all the tickets they received but in any case counterfoils and/or unsold tickets should be returned a.s.a.p.

Referees wishing to officiate on the Allied Counties should contact Tom Walton.

David Jeanes had been elected to the Berks & Bucks FA Council to replace Charlie Strong as Division 5 representative.

Problem Spot

Richard Highfield reported a hypothetical problem. An attacker cutting in towards goal just inside the goal line attempts to evade a tackle by going off the pitch where he is fouly tackled by the defender. What action do you take? How do you re-start play. No problem. Well, not exactly. The responses were many and various. 'I would give the penalty anyway'. 'You must caution the defender'. 'Re-start play by an indirect free kick'.

Given that the tackle was unfair and off the pitch, it should have been clear. Correct action:

- 1 Stop play.
- 2 Caution or send off the player depending on whether he has an obvious goal scoring opportunity
- 3 Re-start with a dropped ball (a free kick/penalty only when the foul is committed on the field of play)

The Guest Speaker was David Crick, FIFA linesman. David has been refereeing almost 25 years, including five on the Premiership.

The first problem for the linesman is that he has a flag and wants to use it. 'Only use it when you absolutely have to'. Interestingly the duties listed in Law VI do not include offside although it is in fact the major duty. Their role is further defined in Law V, International Board Decision 5.

Offside. It has never been an offence to be in an offside position.. We should be glad to be rid of the words 'seeking to' - always problematical. The other important change relates to the notion of 'active play'. Three elements of active play:

- 1 'is or could be involved in play, say five yards'.
 - 2 aware of or distracted by opponent
- [Here David showed a series of clips to illustrate his points]
- 3 deliberately moving forwards or calling for the ball

Where are the areas of active play? [David referred to the OHP projected drawings from the book prepared for World Cup officials]

The trick now, more than ever before is to WAIT. FIFA now talks of 'phases of play'. You can only be offside in the *same* 'phase of play'. The FIFA emphasis is on *fair play, skilful play, attacking play* and so fewer offsides.

We, as referees, must be consistent in acting on the mandatory instructions because we are the guardians of the letter and spirit of the Laws.

OCTOBER Monthly Meeting

This month we struggled to have 50 present in spite of having advertised a nationally known speaker. Members are asked to make a special effort to get to meetings and to encourage others to do so. There are always some with genuine reasons for absence, but there are others too.

Coley Rec 'facilities' remain a problem. Described as 'half a garage with no chair, no hooks, no shower'.

Our membership has reached 105. Although this is good in national terms, it is a matter of some concern that quite a few of last year's members have still to re-join. They will be chased but it would be nice if they came quietly. Don't forget you are not insured . . .

\Both training courses are progressing well.

We are asked by County RA to be aware of an increasing concern about Sunday morning players especially being under the influence of drugs. While the referee cannot be expected to be expert, any suspicions should be made known to club officials.

There will be meeting of the officers of the County RA and Berks & Bucks FA early in December..

It was reported that the FA is downgrading punishments for players. Ted Cambridge said there was only case where this had happened and that County FA actually determined the punishment.

Players' ID cards are to be introduced by the FA in the year 2000. The Reading RA has asked local leagues to introduce them as soon as possible to make everyone's life easier.

The Reading Football League reported that one referee had arrived eight minutes before kick-off. Members were recommended to allow 40 minutes at local level. Both leagues had had complaints about referees overcharging on expenses. The RA asks members to be strictly correct - neither to undercharge or overcharge. One member advocated fixed fees/expenses as happens in other leagues, but the counter arguments were given. The fee for Divisions 1-4 of the Sunday League is £11 not £10 as in the Handbook. (Apparently no (possibility of back-pay)

Ted Wiggins reported a recent incident when he was assessing. A player was injured and there were no first aid boxes. The team with the injured player was refused the bucket of the other team and a fracas ensued. The referee acquitted himself well in sorting it out, but had to send a goalkeeper off. It should never have happened. It was confirmed that teams should have a kit and from next season the Council, as well as the Sunday League in its rules, will insist on a first aider too.

Jim Fleming distributed more social event questionnaires and said the rest of the Christmas Raffle tickets would be sent out by post.

Malcolm Garstang who is to lead our County Quiz team this year appealed for volunteers.

Problem Spot

Nt so much a problem spot as a 'clearing up a problem' spot.

As Senior Training Officer, Stephen Green referred to September's discussion of lining and the role of cub linesmen. Some of our members had upset experienced and keen club linesmen by telling them to give any offsides in view of the law changes. We still need help and the goodwill of our club colleagues. Do instruct them differently. Tell them clearly what you want and warn them more firmly than previously that you may well overrule. In simple terms try to get across the notion of 'active play'. Make them feel wanted but do make it clear what they can and can't do. Also tell the players through the captain.

The Guest Speaker was Ron Groves.

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SHOWING THE BLUE CARD Or 'Is the ref colour blind as well?'

No, it's more complicated than that. Just when I thought I'd got the red and yellow cards sorted, I discovered there's another

On a recent visit to the USA, I was asked by one of my footballing enthusiast friends what I thought of the blue card. I first thought I was suffering from deafness, not colour-blindness. But then this was America . . . Obviously my first question was 'what *is* the blue card?' Could it be for showing to a player who makes 'blue' jokes? Or perhaps it's a means of controlling the unwelcome sight of grown men hugging and kissing (or worse!) following a goal. No, neither of those. The answer was to be found in the match programme. The game was New Mexico Chiles v. El Paso Patriots (I'm not joking!) played in Albuquerque in August as part of a national tournament.

The Blue Card, we are told, is shown to a player committing any 'direct kick foul'. These infringements are recorded by the 4th official, and when seven (or multiples of

seven) have been committed, a 'live shootout' is awarded. Next question: what is a 'live shootout'?

I quote the actual words:

'Live Shootout

a Refers to shootout taken during 'regulation/OT' play, and not a tie-breaker shootout. A live shootout shall be taken from the top of the centre circle, with all players, except the shooter and opposing goalkeeper, lined up on the halfway line or behind.

b At the whistle play is live for all players with no restrictions of any kind: shooter may dribble, kick, pass etc, provided the first touch of the ball is forward.'

In real life what happens is: once the whistle is blown the player with the ball runs like hell for goal with the rest of the two teams in pursuit, but having had a start from the edge of the centre circle.

A live shootout is also the punishment for a 'professional foul'.

I understand from my American friend that these shootouts are very popular with spectators over there. But would they/could they work here? Would the average British crowd appreciate play being stopped for a live shootout, particularly towards the end of a close match when tension is at its peak? It seems like one of the quickest ways to kill off an exciting match. This view is apparently not shared by the Americans who see the live shootout as one of the more interesting parts of the match. Whilst I can't see too many advantages (and possibly many disadvantages) of the blue card approach, I do wonder whether this form of shootout wouldn't be a better way of dealing with the so-called 'professional foul', particularly at local level, or even replacing penalties to conclude a cup-tie. How many times have we seen the player sent off on the local park for instinctively putting his hand out or for the clumsy challenge - anything but professional. That having been said, I have to admit I can't recall too many players on the parks finding the net with only the keeper to beat (and with no pursuing horde!). At local level, with no 4th official (sometimes no 1st official), the blue card for cumulative offences would be almost, if not totally unworkable.

As with many things our American friends come up with 'to liven up the game', our immediate response is probably to dismiss the blue card and live shootouts, but I wonder if there isn't something to be learnt from their experiments and experience.

Phil Lewis

Is This the Alternative?

ARMY'S FOUL FOOTBALLERS FACE THE GLASSHOUSE

TMicheal Evans, the Times, 20/10/95

The Army may maintain firm discipline on the parade ground but on the football field soldiers are now indulging in the worst excesses of their civilian counterparts.

The verbal abuse and indiscipline have become so bad that hundreds of qualified army football referees are handing in their badges. Of the 600 referees affiliated to the Army Football Association, fewer than half have registered for this season.

Major Kevin Reardon, chairman of the Army Football Association's referees' committee, said that, unless the new trend of abusing the referee stopped, the system of red and yellow cards might have to be replaced by punishment in the military prison at Colchester.

Speaking to the Army's magazine *Soldier*, Major Reardon said that the two principal reasons given by referees for throwing in the towel were the abuse they regularly received from players and the lack of support from their units.

He said that in the near future there would not be enough referees to cope with the number of matches. 'Traditionally in football, rank on the field tends to go by the board,' he said, 'But if trends continue it will only be a matter of time before referees abandon red and yellow cards for the good old-fashioned glasshouse'.

DIVINE INTERVENTION?

It was recently reported that Maradona had been made President of the IAPF and a *Times* writer asked mischievously whether he had been elected by ballot or a show of hands. God knows.

WHAT DOES 'NEVER MEANT TO' MEAN?

Are you as puzzled as I am by the FA and the Julian Dicks affair?
For those who haven't been following it closely, the story goes something like this. Dicks, the West Ham defender, appeared to stamp on the head of John Spencer, the Chelsea striker. Robbie Hart, the referee, apparently saw the incident but did not penalise Dicks because he had 'not considered violence was intended', but he was invited to re-consider by the FA on the basis of the video. Harry Redknapp, the West Ham manager, thought half those who saw the video would say it was an accident, half would say Dicks did it on purpose. Crucially for Redknapp, Dicks had assured him that he 'never meant to do it'.

So, from the video evidence, Harry Redknapp's statement and even Dicks own claim and Robbie Hart's defence of his inaction, the stamping is admitted. The only question is whether it was intentional.

What did Dicks really mean by saying that he 'never meant to do it'? I suspect he meant, like many players, that he didn't *premeditate* the violence. 'Intend' in the sense of 'plan beforehand'. And I would believe that. But in the split second of anger/frustration before the stamping he certainly appeared to make a choice as to where to put his boot.

So presumably thought the three FA judges who found Dicks guilty of an act of violent conduct' and, taking into account that his 'previous' - 54 cautions and nine sendings-off - sentenced him to *a three match suspension!* That for an offence which, if committed on the other side of the barrier, could have led to an 18-month custodial sentence.

Who, one must wonder, is bringing the game into disrepute?