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EDITORIAL

Strange to be back to cloud and rain. An incredible summer, with more than a few referees over-cooked on one or two of those long sunny days doing six-a-sides. Good fun though. The legacy - there always has to be a flip-side - is the crisis over scorched pitches in Tilehurst that the Council has taken out of use.

The Reading Football League is launched and it was a pleasure to receive such a professional and attractive handbook. We'll hope the games reach the same standard!

The Taylor (interim) report came and went, to be followed by the now-predictable nonsense of a minority of so-called England 'supporters' in Sweden. Wouldn't it be nice to get back to a preoccupation with the game itself. After all, England are in a reasonable patch and look quite likely to get to the World Cup finals.

Refereeing has been less in the news, though the possibility of advertising on shirts and higher fees for Football League refs raised a bit of a flutter.

In Reading there continues to be plenty to interest referees, quite apart from the games. The RA has interesting monthly meetings in prospect and welcomes old and new members. But whatever you do, do enjoy your football and your refereeing.

Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Reading RA

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PRESIDENT'S PIECE

Honesty is the only policy

In October the appeal will be heard against the damages awarded against Private Eye magazine to Mrs Sonia Sutcliffe, wife of the Yorkshire Ripper. After the earlier hearing there was much consternation at the size of the award, and the magazine complained that it was being used as a punishment. To me the crucial point that seems to have been missed by all the commentators, is that the magazine had been telling lies. That appeared to be only a minor point and yet, is there anything more sacred than the truth?

In refereeing too, the truth is all-important. There is no way that our decisions will always be correct, but they should always be honest. We should believe at the time that we make them that they are correct, whatever other influences there are. I've always remembered comments made back in 1977 at one of our monthly meetings by Eamonn Dunphy. Eamonn, an Eire international and author of books like 'Only a Game', was a Reading player at the time and complained that referees lacked moral courage. 'Referees have the desire', he said, 'the perfectly natural desire, to balance up their decisions, and they are subjected to pressure from the crowd. But decisions will not balance and crowds will not be appeased.'

I recall being antagonised by this allegation that referees who felt that they had made a mistake would try to correct it, either by later awarding a dubious decision to the 'wronged' club, or that they would refrain from decisions which might further antagonise spectators who had been forceful in their comments. Just recently I was talking to two amateur footballers (not from this area I hasten to add) who repeated this allegation and seemed to think a 'decision balancing act' was pretty normal. Is this true? I sincerely hope not. Every single decision must be made according to the facts as they are seen, not subjected to outside influences and certainly not to previous decisions.

Of course decisions can be better if you are fit and can keep up with the game, if you are fully conversant with the laws, but to my mind, if they are not above all honest, then nothing else matters.

Honesty can be the only policy in refereeing, if not journalism.

Dick Sawdon Smith

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

Reading RA AGM 18 May 1989

The meeting of some 80 members opened with the presentation of the Fair Play and Linesman's Awards. In the absence of the Secretary, the President introduced the Secretary's report which recorded a very successful year, especially in terms of membership and training. However, attendance at monthly meetings had not risen in proportion and some social events had not been well supported in spite of the efforts of Social Officer Steve Green.

The Treasurer's report and statement of accounts led to numerous questions and lengthy discussion. For a number of separate reasons, including the resignation of the treasurer early in the season, the Society had been over-spending on its current account. New Treasurer, Geoff Way, was concerned but had clear strategies for the future. The long-term situation with £20,000 well invested is not worrying, but action had to be taken to improve cash-flow, prior to firm budgetary control for next season. Two immediate proposals were carried:

- (a) to change rule 9 to delete the requirement to supply all members with a free copy of the chart annually (equal to an increase of income to the Society of £1-75p per member at today's prices), and
- (b) to increase the annual subscription by £1 to £10.

All the officers were re-elected, with Geoff Way, acting Treasurer, confirmed in office. Steve Green had resigned from the committee and was thanked warmly for his many valuable contributions, including the design and purchase of the society tie, design of magazine and handbook covers, and organization of social events. With an existing vacancy, two new committee members were sought. Bob Emmett and Neil Dainty were elected and welcomed to the committee.

The Fred Porton Award for 'the most promising Class 3 referee' was awarded to Colin Pike. It was announced in his absence that the Major Sainsbury Award was to be awarded to Kevin Parsons for his services to schools' football. It was also announced that Richard Over had been promoted to the Vauxhall Opel League middle. The members concerned were heartily applauded. A collection taken for those bereaved as a result of the Hillsborough tragedy realised £59-50.

The evening and season's meetings concluded with more informal chat and a curry supper.

County RA AGM 12 June 1989

This year's meeting was a distinct improvement after the shambles of 1988. The officers were re-elected en bloc, with the exception of Steve Green who has been forced by other commitments to stand down as Training & PR Officer. A replacement has still to be found. David Madgewick, referee of the County Senior Cup Final, was congratulated on his handling of the game and presented with a memento on behalf of the County RA. The meeting concluded with an interesting talk on the Referees' Association by Peter Molyneux, Secretary of the RA Southern Division.

OUR NEW TREASURER

Well, not exactly. Geoff Way has been there before - this will be his third period of office as Treasurer.

Typically modest, Geoff doesn't talk much about his own playing. After being a valued member of a firm's team in London, Geoff joined Sonning Common when he moved to Reading. He was a central defender. 'More stopper than sweeper', he claims, which could explain the knee problem that took him out of playing into refereeing. He started doing Saturday and Sunday games and insists it was family commitments that led to his present concentration on Saturdays. In addition to officiating on local leagues, the Middlesex Border and the Chiltonian, he had several years on the Hellenic.

Geoff was first an RA committee member in 1977. He was elected Treasurer in 1978, Secretary in 1980 and then Treasurer again in 1982 for one further year. Welcome back Geoff!

AUGUST MEETING

First meeting of the new season. Well attended - in spite of holiday absences - and lively. The Secretary reported on the County AGM and the National RA Conference and, under correspondence, gave notice of a Special General Meeting to precede the October monthly meeting and called particularly to re-consider the notice required for the publication of the society accounts.

The question of reports and report-writing was raised and members heard from Ted Cambridge some home-truths about what the County actually receives from some referees, and how such reports are then dealt with.

After half-time John Lambden took over in his role of Training Officer. The change to law this season simply makes it compulsory for footwear to be worn (Law 4). John went on to discuss dangerous play. He gave examples of situations which tend to be considered dangerous auto-matically, whereas each situation must be considered on its merits e.g tackling with the foot lifted, tackling with two feet together, tackling be sliding, tackling from behind. As on other occasions it is a matter of the referee's judgment of the incident as it happens.

THE TWO-REFEREE SYSTEM - REALLY A NEW ANSWER?

[In the March issue of the Reading Referee the editor reprinted an article from The Times on the 'two-referee system' and invited members to respond]

In his article David Miller gives his support for a system of two referees instead of the present system of one referee and two linesmen. He goes on to outline how the system would work.

When writing about what he terms 'cup-tie football', Mr Miller seems to believe that the referees make many mistakes during a game: 'We all know that in almost every game we see there should be three or four penalties, for instance, yet often there are none.' This statement in itself, I believe, is incorrect. Every supporter knows that his team were 'robbed' by the referee every time they lose, but with a little thought

the statement made by Mr Miller can be seen to be wildly off the mark.

I believe that the top referees do an excellent job, a fact which is borne out by watching the game on television. With the aid of action replays from many angles we can normally see that the referee is right. Unfortunately, in the rare instances when the referee is seen to be wrong, the media will highlight the mistake for weeks to come.

Mr Miller opens his argument in favour of adopting two referees instead of one by saying that it was tried in the first FIFA indoor five-a-side championship in the Netherlands in January 1989 and was a great success. However, there is no reason to believe that something that works in five-a-side will work in the full-size game. Two referees would work very well in five-a-side: the pitch is small - about an eighth the size of a normal pitch. Thus the referees are never going to be far from the action. Furthermore, there is no offside law in five-a-side, a fact which makes it possible for the two-referee system to work very well.

Mr Miller comments that there were no linesmen in the experimental games he has seen. He goes on to say that he would like to see 'linesmen retained exclusively for making line decisions' in 'important matches'. What is an important match? Surely the most important match for twenty-two players and one/two referee(s) is the one they are involved in. For those players the game on Sunday morning at Prospect Park is just as important as the international at Wembley the following Wednesday night.

From my point of view there are two major factors against the introduction of two referees per game. The first is the offside law. There is no way that two referees can keep a close watch for offsides at both ends, in case of a quick break, while at least one of them remains close to play. If one referee is close to play, he cannot judge offside as well. Yet under the system advocated by Mr Miller there is no other official to judge offside. The second referee is on the halfway line waiting in case the other team breaks away.

The second major disadvantage would be the problems caused by each referee having a separate view of an incident. We all know what problems can be caused when the referee and linesman give a decision in opposite directions. These problems would be much worse on any occasion when the two referees went against

each other. If the two referees did go against each other, what would happen? Does the referee closer to the action give the decision, or the referee who, although further away, had a better view? Maybe the game should stop and the referees should stop too and discuss the incident. However, for me that would destroy the game. Football at its best is a fast-moving game which flows very nicely. Without that quality it would lose its appeal to both players and spectators alike.

Mr Miller also claims that by having two referees the referee would be removed from the crowded middle of the pitch. This may well be true but when the ball comes in his direction on the wing, that area will become just as crowded in some games.

My final criticisms of the system are more short-term and practical. What would Liverpool or Arsenal say about the mistakes that would inevitably occur when the new system was introduced? These mistakes could cost them points and, in the long run, championships. Although any fan will tell you that his team has been cost points by a referee, the mistakes which are currently rare would become numerous until the new system had been well tried out and the referees got used to it. Is it desirable to change a system which in my opinion works well already, when initially at least it would merely lead to controversy?

Lastly, where would all the referees come from? It might be easy to provide the officials in the professional game, but what about Sunday morning? Appointments' secretaries already haven't got enough manpower, so the last thing they need is FIFA telling them they now need two referees for each game.

Ian Pletcher

THOSE TRANSFERS

I recorded the first £1 million and then the first £2 million transfers so I have to refer to Chris Waddle and the £4.25 million paid by Marseille to Spurs. I don't particularly want to. It must make sense to somebody (mustn't it?). Waddle presumably.

Mo Johnston, a Catholic ex-Celtic player going to Rangers is a different sort of story. A break through the old sectarian bigotry or a recipe for worse? We shall see. Graham Souness is either courageous or foolish depending on where you stand.

No comment on all the other transfers. There must be some saner way to run the business

**NATIONAL RA CONFERENCE, The Guildhall, Southampton.
17 June 1989**

A beautiful sunny weekend by the sea. Well nearly (not too far from the sea that is). This year's gang of four - George Mills, John Lambden, Derek Reigate and yours truly - were together in the Polygon Hotel. Good breakfasts and comfortable but overheated. The fault of the weather.

Friday evening was not the usual disaster. We had somewhere to buy drinks, to sit, and the supper was efficiently served (and eaten). Lots of old friends of course. Biggest problem was that the President had previously eaten something that disagreed with him and he couldn't touch his Newcastle Brown. A pleasant evening for the rest of us.

Saturday dawned beautifully and it demanded commitment from us to go to the Guildhall for the Conference, but we did. The Lord Mayor remarked as he opened the proceedings that it was our first time in Southampton. Although he would say that, it is still nice to be made so welcome.

A long obituary list was followed by the happier news that Ted Croker had just received the CBE in the Birthday Honours.

An unusual start was a challenge to the standing orders, sustained after a card vote. The President, still feeling a bit fragile one suspected could have done without that. (The effect of the change agreed was to allow more than two members from any one society to speak on any motion).

One of the gripping parts of Conference is always the presentation of members for Life Membership. The two this year had 40 and 41 years of distinguished service respectively. It was disappointing that only one was present. And only 11 out of 18 present for their Meritorious Service Award. However distinguished a member's service, I don't think the award should be made in absence unless there is a genuine medical reason. I would make those who find it inconvenient to attend wait till the next year.

The Annual Report led to another challenge nicely put in the form of a question by our own President George. The Hon.

General Secretary had concluded his report by asking whether it would "not be to the advantage of everyone if all registered referees with County FA's had to be members of the RA." Given that the RA Conference had agreed just that with a massive majority some 10 years ago after George presented the proposal, it was a bit odd to say the least, and needed to be challenged. As it is already RA policy, one might have expected the Secretary to have known. The President brushed the problem aside quite neatly but the point had been registered.

For the first time I can remember, Conference heard that the FA had accepted the RA recommendations on Assaults. (Full details will appear in the Football Referee.) Colin Downey pointed out at some length, however, that the guilty continue to escape because referees' reports are inadequate - punishments often cannot be made to stick. Also, from his analysis of hundreds of reports he had to wonder whether referees sometimes helped to bring assaults upon themselves. Simple things. Do we stand too close when speaking to a player? Do we get in between players? We must always be careful - some assaults might be prevented.

On the property front - proposed new RA HQ - a suitable place has been found and a picture was on display. The purchase is expected to proceed.

The notices of motion had a rough time generally. We did agree that Conference could be held in May (as well as June and July) but proposals to use profits to defray personal accident and assault insurance premiums, to allow non-affiliated members, to institute a levy for legal expenses insurance, were all defeated.

Amongst the guests who addressed Conference was Ken Ridden, FA National Training Officer for Referees. Negative publicity on assaults after last year's Conference had made recruitment even more difficult. We are losing some 4,500 referees (a quarter of our membership) each year. Not the fault of Instructors who do a great job. Assessment is being improved through assessors' courses. The only law change to look forward to relates to players' clothing and footwear. Next year there may be a ruling on shinguards.

A quieter and more satisfying day than some have been - largely because anxiety about the FA's inaction on assaults had been removed. It doesn't mean the problem has gone away but members felt supported at last.

Saturday evening means dinner, dance and draw. The meal was ordinary but the company was good. We had a group from Alton, including John Martin, the Football League referee, sitting with us and it made for a pleasant evening. I won a (blank) videotape on the tombola, but no prizes for any of us in Reading in the Grand Draw. The car went this year to a (youth?) group in Bradford. Our young friend from Slough who won several prizes on the tombola a couple of years ago including a colour TV, won several again this year including the star prize of a huge socket set. How does he do it? Maybe his luck will rub off on us one day.

Next year we're off to Scarborough. That really will be by the sea. Any more takers?

50 YEARS YOUNG

To their delight George Tyson and John Martin have gone into the record books again as they start their Football League season at the age of 50. George has been in the FL middle for 13 years, John for 15.

As Colin Downey, FA referees' secretary has said: 'They are both extremely fit and of course vastly experienced'. The rules won't allow them to do either FA Cup or FIFA matches - but then 5 years ago it was unthinkable that anyone should go beyond 47.

Some would argue that they are preventing younger referees from reaching the FL middle, but if George and John are being retained on merit, it is up to younger referees to deserve to replace them.

PITCH PROBLEMS

After the problem of escalating prices for Council pitches, some pitches have now been taken out of use because of the ravages of the Summer drought. Others are being hired out complete with hazards such as ruts, dangerous rubbish and inadequate markings - and referees are having to refuse to allow games to go on. Time for the Leagues and clubs to act together and show the red card as in Edinburgh

Evening News (Edinburgh) 12/9/89 (spotted by John Moore)
EYES RIGHT?

I was interested by the editor's note about (temporarily) losing a contact lens whilst refereeing and suddenly having to rely on monocular vision. 'My secret exposed' he said. Surely that was no secret. Those of us that know Brian as a wearer of strong spectacles must have guessed that. when he ventures on to a football pitch without them, he must be wearing

contact lenses. Those of us for whom contact lenses are a secret, are those who wear lenses the whole time and are never seen in glasses. Although one contact lens wearer often spots another, people generally have no idea.

What a pity though, that a referee is seldom seen on the pitch in spectacles. We see the occasional one on the local parks, but they must receive frequent obvious comments from spectators if not players. Surely such comments must generally be unjustified. The chances are that if a referee has realised that his eyesight is deteriorating and he has accepted the fact that he needs glasses, then his corrected eyesight is probably excellent. Having purchased his first glasses he will accept that he needs to pay regular visits to an optician and have new spectacles as his eyesight changes. His vision on the football pitch is likely to compare very favourably with a referee who is putting off the evil day, knowing that his eyesight isn't as good as it was.

How many referees wear glasses for driving to a match, but take them off to referee? I did this until I went over to contact lenses. Being a fitness fanatic, I always hoped I would get away with it, but no matter how fit you are, you can't completely overcome the problem of being short-sighted.

A bespectacled referee not only leaves himself open to ridicule, but is likely to have problems when rain (especially drizzle) affects his glasses. This is probably the main reason why so many sportsmen go over to contact lenses, but there are a lot of people who are scared of the idea. Everybody initially hates the thought of wearing a lens on the eye itself (no doubt some of us more than others), but it is surprising how quickly the eye adapts to having a foreign body in it without any discomfort.

Don't be put off either by Brian's mishap in temporarily losing a lens during a game. It doesn't happen often. Lenses are generally available in three different types: hard, soft, gas permeable. Each type has certain advantages and disadvantages and your optician may recommend only one sort for your eyes anyway. The problem Brian experienced would certainly be most unlikely to happen with soft lenses which, being fairly large, are held firmly in place by the top and lower eyelids. [Mine are gas permeables - and it was the first time one had gone adrift in hundreds of games. Ed]

So don't keep putting off the evil day. If in doubt about your eyesight for refereeing, give contact lenses a try!

Gordon Crutchfield

[Gordon assures me he doesn't have shares in contact lens sales or manufacture. Nor do I and I endorse all he says. Ed]

THE DECIDER

What a climax to the season! It was by accident I noticed that the Liverpool v. Arsenal game was to be on TV live. Wasn't I pleased I had spotted it. An enthralling and historic match as it turned out. I suppose it was hard if you were a Liverpool fan though still a sort of fairy-tale ending - this time for the unfancied Arsenal who certainly deserved to win on the night. They did have a fine season until they got jaded or cold feet towards the end. Nice to share the trophies round a bit anyway.

Reading's final match was pretty surprising too. Made Houdini look an amateur.

ONE PLUM TOO FEW

It always happens. Missing from the list of honours at the end of last season was Neil Dainty who at the end of his first season had a line on the (Saturday) Subsidiary Cup Final. Well done Neil! Sorry I missed you first time round.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

September 21

Peter Molyneux, Secretary
RA Southern Division

October 19

Training Evening (with participation)

SOCIAL EVENTS

Neil Dainty and Bob Emmett are busy preparing a programme. Let them have your suggestions and support.