

Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research

Fact Sheet No. 15

Refereeing

“Referees have the most difficult job in the world. They’ve got to make split second decisions and don’t have the chance to sit back and ponder on what they should do. I fear that, at times, we managers feel referees should be absolutely perfect for 90 minutes; and that everything has got to be dead right every second of the game. Yet we can’t get this as managers. We don’t always pick the right team, carry out the right training method and book the right hotels. Players don’t put every pass right, and coaches don’t always bring youngsters through as they should. So, we’re wrong in expecting referees to be perfect when we’re not perfect ourselves.”

Don Revie, quoted in *World Soccer Referee*, 1976, the autobiography of Jack Taylor

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The issue of refereeing football matches is never far from the forefront of public debate about the modern game. From top to bottom, from World Cup matches to Sunday League 'parks' football, players, fans, armchair analysts and governing bodies all have their views on developments in the art of match officiating. One or two referees have even become quite celebrated public figures in Britain under the sometimes harsh glare of ever-extending and more sophisticated TV coverage of top level football.
- 1.2 It must be said that most refereeing occurs in a routine an unobtrusive matter; the vast majority of matches at local and national level do little to direct public attention to the match officials or to the behaviour of players. In fact, in some ways it is the referee's lot to be in the public eye only when routine is interrupted by malpractice by players or misjudgement by officials. 'Good' refereeing is, regrettably, but predictably, hardly news.
- 1.3 Refereeing, has been especially prominent in the public eye in Britain recently for a number of reasons. We will focus here on six areas of concern which, arguably, have been the most newsworthy and problematic in recent debates about the changing role of football match officials. These are:

- (i) *The problem of violence and abuse aimed at local league and, to a lesser extent, at top referees as evidenced by the infamous attack on Paul Alcock by Paulo Di Canio*
- (ii) *The issues of incentives for, and the recruitment of, referees*
- (iii) *The case for professional referees*
- (iv) *The place of referees in the post-FA Blueprint world of the professional game in England*
- (v) *The recent changes in the laws and in FIFA memoranda for referees*
- (vi) *World Cups '94 and '98 and the 'new' refereeing*

2. The issue of violence and abuse

2.1 As we have already said, even at the local level, player violence and abuse aimed at referees is hardly an overwhelming issue, especially given, on the one hand, the *amount* of football played locally in England and, on the other, the unusually high level of *informality* which characterises the lowest level of organised football in this country. However, at local levels outside the professional and semi-professional leagues, these matters and the associated difficulties involved in *recruiting* sufficient numbers of officials to keep pace with the extraordinary growth in the numbers playing the game at this level over the last 30 years, remain serious. It is routinely asserted that the more than 5,000 local referees who are recruited annually only replace the number who give up the game each season either through work, injury or retirement. The turnover, then, among the nation's 27,000 active referees is quite considerable. Of the new recruits, reportedly *one quarter* last only a matter of weeks; some of these are, simply, quite unsuited to the task in hand, or give up because of work or other commitments. Others are, almost certainly, unable, as one report has suggested, to face up to the sometimes harsh realities of the weekend football ritual (*The Guardian*, 1 December, 1989). Recruiting referees at this level is not only a problem for football of course. The RFU recently reported that 800 referees quit rugby each year, many citing 'verbal abuse' from fans and players among their reasons (*The Guardian*, 11 January 2001)

2.2 It is a simple matter, of course, to focus on a small number of highly publicised violent incidents in local football and suggest that they represent the 'routine' experience of referees in the modern era. This is not the case. However, there are signs that referees *have* been demanding new protections from potential assailants. Life bans on players and officials for serious assaults on referees were first introduced at County level in 1989, for example, indicating, perhaps, increasing concern about standards of player discipline in local football. Allegedly, too, some of the worst indiscipline now comes from younger players and from their parents. A 13 year old from Liverpool was recently banned for five years after his father, *and then the player himself*, assaulted the referee during a local junior match (*Liverpool Echo*, 22 January, 1994). Some indication of the pressures on local referees also comes from the case of the 43 year old washing machine repair man from

Norwich who, after seven years as a match official, punched a player in the face during a Norfolk Sunday League Division Four match. It was later revealed that he [the referee] had admitted to making a mistake in a decision, opted for a dropped ball to restart the match, and finally 'snapped' after being taunted by players for "not knowing the rules" (reported in *The Guardian*, 28 February, 1992).

- 2.3 Although they are not uncommon at this level, problems relating to *threats* of violence to referees are not confined, of course, to local football. The recent removal of perimeter fencing at most major professional stadiums make top referees and their assistants in England perhaps especially vulnerable to physical attack from irate fans, though at one or two other places in the world it is not unknown for referees even to be *shot* by disturbed spectators.

Some attacks on match officials

February 3 1995: Blackburn Rovers v Leeds United

40 year old season ticket holder attacked referee, Roger Gifford, at the end of a 1-1 draw. The man was restrained by players and stewards who handed him over to the police.

August 25 1997: Notts County v Lincoln City

Referee Phil Richards was attacked and felled by a fan 15 minutes from the end of match following the sending off of a home player and the allowing of a controversial last minute winning goal for the visitors.

January 31 1998: Portsmouth v Sheffield United

Referee's assistant, Edward Martin, was attacked and knocked out by a visiting fan after the official confirmed a red card offence by the visiting goalkeeper. 120 stewards on duty failed to stop the offender gaining access to the official. A 34 year old meat porter was jailed for three months for the attack, banned from all grounds for a year and banned for life from Bramhall Lane. This incident prompted an FA inquiry which exonerated the home club, a decision described by David Elleray as 'inadequate'.

September 6 1998 Leicester City v Middlesbrough

A 21 year old Middlesbrough fan was convicted of assault and jailed for two months for throwing an injury-causing cup of scalding Bovril at a referee's assistant following a disputed offside decision. He was also barred for 18 months from attending any football match.

- 2.4 *Verbal* assaults from *fans* on referees are now routinely expected and they seem to be largely accepted here. 'Verbals' from professional players have also become more commonplace - if not entirely accepted - against top officials. In March 1989 a top referee, David Elleray, was 'wired up' for sound for a Granada TV documentary programme, *Out of Order*. Many of the comments picked up from players in the Football League match between Arsenal and Millwall were 'bleeped' out of the transmission because of their abusive character. One player, Tony Adams, a recent England captain, was also clearly heard calling the match official "*a cheat*". Echoing observations about a recent TV documentary in which the England team manager, Graham Taylor, had *himself* used expletives liberally, Alan

Robinson, then the Public Relations Officer of the Referees' Association, commented in 1989 that, "*Swearing at a referee remains a sending off offence, but some players [and managers] swear automatically whenever they express themselves*" (*The Guardian*, 30 November, 1989).

- 2.5 More recently, overtures from Sky Sports (in 1994) that referees in FA Premier League matches be 'wired up' to the television commentators in order better to explain their (the officials') decisions to armchair viewers has also recently been rejected by the FA Council, despite the quite successful use of such an arrangement in the technically more complex but less flowing sport of rugby union. 'Verbals' from referees also occur on occasions. In December 2000, and in the first case of its kind, a referee on the Premier League list, Peter Taylor, was charged by the FA with using 'insulting words and language' towards the Notts County striker Sean Farrell. In other dismaying cases referees have lodged damning complaints against the FA. In 2001, for example, the referee Gurnam Singh was successful in an industrial tribunal case he brought against the FA claiming that FA officials took acceptance to his racial background and 'wanted to get rid of him.' Ken Ridden, then the FA's Director of Refereeing was alleged by a former referee's co-ordinator to have said of Singh: 'We don't want people like him in the Premier League.' (*The Independent* 24 March, 2001)
- 2.6 In a recent survey of referees at local county association level (Williams, 1996) around one half said they had recently considered giving up officiating, including 37% of those under 30 years of age. Of all referees most mentioned harassment by players or fans as the main reason for thinking about quitting.

Table 1: Reasons given by referees who had thought of giving up the game (%)

Harassment by players/fans	37.9
Fitness problems	20.3
Job/domestic responsibilities	15.0
Worsening behaviour	9.7

In the same piece of research referees were also asked about trends in player behaviour. Many had been refereeing for many years, so it is perhaps not surprising that most of them thought things had not changed for the better.

Table 2: Listed below are a number of examples of player misbehaviour experienced. Indicate your views on trends in these areas. (%)

	Situation Improved	No change	Situation Worsened
Feigning injury	8.1	53.3	38.6
The so called 'professional foul'	36.6	36.2	27.2
Arguing with officials (dissent)	8.0	21.7	70.3
Foul language by players	9.0	23.8	67.2
Abusive language by players	7.2	27.9	64.9
Serious foul play	17.4	62.2	20.4
Violent conduct	16.2	43.4	40.4
Violence aimed at officials by players	13.0	39.2	47.8
Unfair use of elbows	3.3	36.8	59.9
Calculated 'cheating' by players	5.5	39.4	55.1
General disrespect for officials	7.9	26.0	66.1

Source: Williams (1996)

3. 'Who'd be a referee?': the problem of recruitment

- 3.1** Connected to the problem of better protection for local league officials from abuse and attack is also the issue of the relatively low *incentives* offered to able local referees, including ex-professional players, to take up the game, locally. Criticisms here has tended to focus on the, sometimes, poor facilities on offer to new officials, the low match fees provided for officiating at 'parks' and higher local levels, and, especially, the sometimes slow progress routes available to talented officials to take them from the local level up to the National Lists of referees and linesmen who officiate at FA Premier League and Football League matches.
- 3.2** *Some* changes have already occurred here. Roger Milford, for example, refereed his first FA Cup Final in 1991 at 50 years of age. He had refereed his first local league match in 1973 at the age of 32, and his first Football League match in 1981, eight years later. For the time this was quite rapid progress through all the grades of local and non league football. By 1993, 'double promotions' had been introduced in England into the system of promotion for referees and linesmen, partly in response to FIFA's lowering of the retirement age for international referees to 45 years. In theory, this means that FA Premier League service may arrive for a 'high flyer' in under seven years, though, in practice, eight to ten years often remains the minimum apprenticeship, even for a top official.
- 3.3** In 1993, the *Association of Premier League and Football League Referees and Linesmen* (PL&FLR&L) suggested that most officials join the FA Premier League and Football League National List as linesmen at between 33-36 years of age (*Decision Time*, p.7). But, a top international player, for example, who retires at 35 years of age would seem to have little or no chance of extended international refereeing

before reaching retirement age. Back in 1982 Gordon Taylor, then the Secretary of the PFA, called for:

“Compulsory training at League clubs for players to be encouraged to move into refereeing. We want a detailed procedure where ex-players can quickly climb the ladder to become top class referees” (Daily Mail, 11 November 1982).

Eleven years later, according to the, now, Chief Executive of the PFA, the same Gordon Taylor:

“The logic of using former players [as referees] is inescapable. But it seems to be a closed shop at the moment. We have no input into the training of referees” (The Observer, 28 November, 1993).

- 3.4** This situation, that refereeing in professional football is a *parallel* and largely amateur ‘career’, rather than a ‘complementary’ one to playing the game professionally, is mirrored in a number of British sports, though not in all of them. In 1993, only three out of the 26 top rugby league officials had played to a high level; fewer than ten of the top 44 rugby union officials had played to county standard; only two out of 70 British basketball officials had played the sport seriously, and none of the 55 officials on the field hockey National List had played to a high standard. Only in county cricket, of the major English team sports, was the pattern different. Here, 23 out of 26 umpires were ex-players, reflecting the greater ‘professionalisation’ of umpiring, in a sport where the daily commitment to officiating, at least in terms of hourly duties, largely mitigates against full time employment elsewhere. Arguably, too, there are complexities in cricket and wide divisions between the professional and other branches of the sport, which make greater demands that officials, more usually, should have played at the highest level (*The Observer*, 28 November, 1993).
- 3.5** In 1994, there was just one former professional player on the National List of Premier League and Football League officials, but the PFA was now supporting this ex-professional in his quest to move rapidly onto the Leagues’ Referees’ List. In August 1995, Steve Baines, a central defender with professional experience at seven clubs, took up officiating duties in the Endsleigh League. In 1995, too, 19 professional players expressed interest in a PFA and FA joint initiative on training professional players for refereeing at the top levels. Eleven of this first batch finally took - and passed - their Class Three refereeing examination. Baines, himself, made it to the League list on the ‘fast track’ of just six years refereeing experience. His experience is likely to be repeated by others. According to the PFA Chief Executive the current situation (of very few ex-professionals as officials) is neither desirable or surprising:

“The FA are asking players to take part in a process where the opportunities for getting to the top are so dim and distant as to be discouraging. The system should take due notice of a player’s playing experience and make provision for accelerated promotion.”

4. **Bring on the professionals?: the debate about full time refereeing**

- 4.1 If professional players and their supporters *want* and expect more ex-professionals 'in the middle', cynics might argue that such a plea as the one above, for 'poachers' to be allowed 'gamekeepers' whistles and watches, might simply worsen players' behaviour by encouraging a climate of tacit acceptance of recognised 'professional' practices of carping, swearing and low level 'cheating'. Supporters of the players' case claim, instead, that ex-pros can better gain the respect of professional players and distinguish more easily the professional 'con' from the malicious and dangerous foul. They also point to the divide between 'part time' match officials, whose enjoyable 'hobby' might be refereeing top matches, and a player and manager whose very livelihoods may depend on an official's split-second decision. One un-named FA Premier League manager commented on this issue (cited in *The Guardian*, 7 March 1992),

"Up to now I have been against the idea of professional referees, but I have changed my mind. The referees and linesmen do not seem to appreciate the enormous consequences for clubs of some of the decisions they are making. They blow the final whistle and walk away."

- 4.2 The words above match those of Don Revie, the manager of Leeds United who, back in April 1971, following an alleged 'offside' goal by West Bromwich Albion which cost the Leeds club the League Championship, railed that the hotly disputed outcome amounted to *"nine months ruined by one man"*. Revie called for *professional* referees at a time when an official report suggested that only 12 out of 92 League clubs were 'satisfied' with the standard of refereeing (reported in *The Guardian*, 19 April 1971). Twenty four years later another survey asked: 'Is the standard of refereeing equal to the demands of the modern game?' 91% of a sample of supporters questioned thought not, as did 83% of professional club managers and 83.4% of professional players (reported in *The Times*, 10 July, 1995).
- 4.3 This longstanding disregard among supporters and professionals for the performance of top referees may not surprise; *praise* for match officials should, indeed, be much more newsworthy. Of course, too, the debate about *professional* referees for football is really as old as the professional game itself. But, it *has* taken on a sharper focus recently because of the vast sums of money now at stake in the game, and also because of the intense media focus on every 'difficult' refereeing decision. In an age of video surveillance, ideas for using the slow motion instant TV replay to determine crucial decisions are attractive to some managers and pundits. Although the approach has been introduced in cricket, if only for decisions on 'run outs', it has been tried and rejected in American Football, a sport which halts regularly anyway because of the requirements of TV but which has at least *some* of the pace, rhythm and flow associated with our own football code.
- 4.4 Most top referees travel at least 10,000 miles in a domestic season in England and spend up to 540 hours on duties directly connected with refereeing. In 1993, payment for their input, including travel and training, amounted to around £8 an hour (£4 for an assistant) in a sport in which some top players now earn twice or three times as much *in a week* as even the best referees can earn over the entire season (See, *Decision Time*, APL&FLR&L, 1993). In 1993 the match fee for a referee for an FA Premier League match was £200. By 1997/98 it was £265 plus

expenses. Few referees, however, complained about this disparity in rewards; after all, to use a standard football cliché, the game *is* about players. Most top referees disagreed, in fact, that they could be any more ‘professional’ in their approach to the game than they currently have to be and that being paid ‘full time’ would allow. Few would argue with the 1994 World Cup referee and current Select Group Manager of the Professional Game Match Officials Board League, Philip Don, when he argued in the early 1990s that the modern game is, “*certainly a lot quicker, the pace is unrelenting*”, and that this has implications for the training, fitness and *positioning* of referees (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 September, 1993). But, as Gerald Ashby, a FIFA referee, commented, “*My mind needs to be active on football the entire week. I am full time because I am entirely committed to the game*” (*Daily Mail*, 27 March 1993).

- 4.5 A small pool of 24 ‘professional’ referees has recently been established at the top level. These are now in charge of all FA Premier League matches and also referee European games. The new Professional Game Match Officials Board (PGMOB) headed by Philip Don. Players and top managers feel that more regular contact between referees and clubs may make the latter more familiar and knowledgeable about players and their culture. Some managers are also of the view that if their *own* livelihoods depended on the decisions they made, referees might be more accountable and more ‘professional’ in their decision making. Others fear that referees who depend on the sport for their living will be more open to corruption or to pressure from top clubs. But there is little to suggest that full time payment *per se* would necessarily improve referees’ decisions, which are often based on a partial view of incidents which are over in a fraction of a second. And there are few signs that top referees *themselves* agree with the view that full time officials will necessarily make better judges than those who devote themselves to football while filling in their ‘spare time’ with a ‘real’ job.
- 4.6 The new professional era for referees has a, predictably, more commercial and more regulatory feel. In December 2000 FIFA flagged up possible sponsorship deals for top referees who were to be able to wear adverts for products and companies. The PGMOB in England analyses every top match on video and puts together clips of matches which are shown to referees at fortnightly meetings in order to highlight examples of good refereeing – but also to illustrate errors that match officials make. The new regime could be harsh in the eyes of some. In October 2001 Dermot Gallagher failed to take ‘red card’ action against players in a Manchester United v Leeds United fixture. In some quarters he was applauded for his ‘common sense- p Gallagher tends to send off few players at this level. For the game’s official bodies, however, Gallagher was out of line: he was removed from ‘high profile’ matches for an unspecified period. This was a refereeing ‘suspension’ from FA Premier League work of a kind which was likely to become more familiar in the new era.

5. 'Decision Time': top refereeing in the age of the FA Premier League

- 5.1 Despite this opposition among referees to their proposed 'professionalisation', the arrival in 1992/93 of a new and lucrative FA Premier League (which quickly established its own discrete list of referees) has encouraged the Referees' Association to look more closely at a number of issues affecting their members, including general questions concerning the resourcing and training of top officials. The publication by the APL&FLR&L in 1993 of *Decision Time: a Discussion Document on the Future of Refereeing at National List Level* corresponded with a period when the morale of match officials had reportedly been "seriously eroded" (p.1) by a lack of confidence in the assessment of referees and especially, according to the report, in the reduction of assessments made by neutral observers; a lack of consultation on match kit (FA Premier League officials now wear a range of colours, not the traditional black); disputes over the reimbursement of expenses; suspicions and allegations about some match officials; and the generally low status of referees and linesmen at the highest levels.
- 5.2 Matters surrounding the role, status, rewards and pressures on top officials came to something of a head during that year (1993) when a Football League linesman, Frank Martin, committed suicide following an alleged 'prank' during a routine fitness assessment test; the 'prank', which involved the moving of distance marker cones, meant Martin faced possible FA misconduct charges. Newspaper reports on the case commented on the pressures and frustrated ambitions of officials at local levels, while referees threatened to strike unless suspensions were lifted on others involved in the initial incident. The 'Martin affair' focused attention both on the ambitions of officials and the demands made of referees, as well as on comments on the handling of the Martin affair, by the Football Association.
- 5.3 *Decision Time* itself takes up a number of refereeing issues which were not covered in the FA's own *Blueprint for Football* published in 1991. The *Blueprint* does contain a chapter on developments in refereeing. In it the focus is substantially on professionalising the *training* of referees, though it also goes on to argue (p. 84) that:

"A Research and Development programme is urgently required to collect and analyse data concerned with the changing needs of football. Examples of matters to be addressed are the notion of professional referees; the viability of former professional footballers as referees; age limits for referees and systems of regular testing; management techniques in their application to refereeing..."

Unfortunately, there seems to be no funds allocated in the *Blueprint* proposals to pursue such a programme of research and we have no knowledge of the existence of such a programme, though we agree wholeheartedly that it is needed, and needed soon.

6. Law changes and new instructions

6.1 In many ways, these important issues raised above were made yet more urgent as topics for investigation and discussion by some really quite radical recent changes in the laws of the game and in instructions to match officials which have, once again, pushed referees into the national spotlight as their interpretations of these new laws and guidelines have been avidly scrutinised by the media and by the football establishment.

6.2 Changes of *emphases* in the interpretation and application of the laws of the game at the national level are by no means new in Britain, of course. More rigorous application of the laws in 1971/72 for example, (the so-called 'refs revolution') was designed to improve discipline in general and to clampdown on the tackle from behind in particular. In 1982/83 a campaign in England against the so-called 'professional foul' produced an unprecedented 229 sendings off in League matches (a 56% rise on the previous season) and complaints from Gordon Taylor from the PFA that:

"The art of tackling is dying out, but, more importantly, I have had dozens of letters from fans that a game that starts off evenly balanced is ending up in a farce" (Daily Mail, 11 November, 1982).

6.3 In 1988/89 the focus in England was on a referees' campaign against dissent and the illegal use of the arms, especially the elbows. This followed an incident in January 1988 in which Chris Kamara of Swindon Town became the first player in the history of the British game to be fined in a court of law for an assault on another professional during a match. Kamara was fined £1200 for causing grievous bodily harm to Shrewsbury Town's Jim Melrose, who suffered a broken cheekbone in the attack. Early in 1993, the FA Chief Executive, Graham Kelly was to defend a professional player in court who had caused a similar injury, with an elbow, to a Torquay United player, John Uzzell. Kelly claimed, some thought ill-advisedly, that the aerial challenge - if not its outcome - was of the kind he might see regularly even during a normal League *week*. The accused, Brentford's Gary Blissett, was dismissed from the field for the offence but was found not guilty in court of assault. Tottenham's Gary Mabbutt was soon able to confirm Kelly's uncomfortable observation that the Blissett challenge was far from unique when suffering a similarly painful and career threatening fate at the hands - or rather the arms - of Wimbledon's John Fashanu.

6.4 The recourse by players to the criminal courts for compensation for injuries sustained during matches was to become something of a pattern in the game in England the early 1990s. This may reflect *less* the increasing violence in football at the highest level (See, Murphy et al, 1990) - though there clearly is a case to be answered here - and more the fact that masculine codes have changed in the game and that the salaries of top players have risen rapidly recently while agents, advisers, sponsors and lawyers have become indispensable company for these talented, but inexperienced, young men who are regularly being bought and sold in complex deals for millions of pounds. A recent account suggested that nearly 200 lawyers in Britain now devote a large part of their time to work around disputes in sport. In the words of Catherine Bond, a London lawyer, "*Sport is so*

*linked to commerce then it naturally attracts the legal side. Where there is money there is often conflict” (cited in *The Guardian*, 19 October 1994).*

- 6.5** At the *local* level, of course, recourse to the courts to deal with football assaults is becoming increasingly frequent. One recent example will have to suffice to cover a multitude of similar episodes which will be familiar to many local league referees.:

“A goalscorer suffered a double fracture of the jaw after being punched by an opponent in a local Sunday football match, a court heard. Defender Hamish Carnan was furious after Colin Dunn ‘robbed’ him of the ball and scored. He floored Mr Dunn (27) with a single blow, causing injuries that left him with his jaw wired up for six weeks...He admitted inflicting grievous bodily harm to Mr Dunn.

*When interviewed, Carnan claimed Mr Dunn scored the crucial goal after fouling him. He said he tried to trip the goal scorer up and they ended up confronting each other before he struck the blow. Carnan (30), a roofing contract supervisor, was ordered to pay Mr Dunn £415 compensation as well as £200 costs and a £100 fine. He was also fined £37 by his club.” (reported in *Leicester Mercury*, 2 April 1992)*

- 6.6** In the wake of police interventions and in an attempt to “*control our own destiny*” the PFA and the Football League introduced plans in April 1988 to deduct points for poor professional club disciplinary records and to introduce automatic suspensions for dismissals as a means of discouraging violent play. On the matter of *direct* police involvement in violent incidents on the field, Alan Robinson, the, then, P.R.O. of The Referees’ Association, told *The Guardian* on 30 November 1989 that:

“The police have so far accepted that the referee controls what goes on within the playing area, but if a player commits a serious or criminal breach of conduct then they reserve the right to become involved at half-time or full-time. The understanding has worked very well.”

- 6.7** This rather cosy arrangement was not uniformly supported, however, within the police service. An article in *Police Review* on 11 November 1988, (p.11) for example, commenting on an on-field assault by Arsenal’s Paul Davis which resulted in facial broken bones and a heavy fine from the FA, concluded that, “*The service must determine that as a general principle soccer hooligans both on and off the field should be prosecuted in the criminal courts.*”

- 6.8** Amidst rising concern about police interventions and prosecutions in the courts the spectre of the ‘professional foul’ in football refused to disappear. In November 1988, a book by the England international defender, Viv Anderson, had this to say on the matter:

“If someone is through and likely to score then I will definitely up-end him. That’s part and parcel of the game. I’d do that without thinking. I’d commit a professional foul if need be, if it was the right thing at the right time....You would probably say I’m a cheat, but I’d say I was a professional trying to win a game... Whether that means handballing accidentally-on-purpose I’ll do it and it’s up to the referee to spot it and

penalise it. I know I am advocating tactics designed to dupe the referee and make him get his decisions wrong."

(Reported in *The Times*, 15 November, 1988)

- 6.9** These frank admissions were a stark example, of course, of the increasingly uncompromising world of the professional player and of the strained 'player *versus* referee' relationship which seemed to compromise any suggestion that match officials might try to get closer to, and develop a better understanding of, this professional culture in which, apparently, cheating was sanctioned and was even, on occasions, celebrated. But, help was soon at hand. In July 1989 FIFA finally issued *mandatory* instructions on sendings off for 'professional fouls' and deliberate handballs in situations where there was an 'obvious goalscoring opportunity'. The new instruction begged the question, of course, of exactly *how* referees were to determine this 'serious foul play' which occurs if, "*in the opinion of the referee, a player who is moving towards his opponent's goal with an obvious opportunity to score a goal is intentionally impeded by an opponent through unlawful means*". What, exactly, was an 'obvious' goalscoring situation? What if a player is moving *away* from goal in order to round a grounded goalkeeper before putting the ball into an empty net, and is then intentionally fouled by the 'keeper? Three criteria were laid down by The Football Association to help referees in their judgement in this difficult area:

The attacker should be moving directly towards the opponent's goal

Take note of where other defenders are sited in relation to the offence (Is the perpetrator the 'last man?')

Take note of where the offence occurred in relation to the opponent's goal

- 6.10** Despite, or perhaps *because* of, the use of these criteria, charges of 'inconsistency' inevitably arose in England. This 'clean up', which was aimed especially by FIFA at the 1990 World Cup Finals, produced much debate in England, especially around the notion of 'intention'. The new directive on 'professional' fouls was for 'deliberate' fouls in accordance with the pre-meditation which goes with the 'professional' offence. But, as every referee knows, Law XII, according to which the new directive applied, insists *all* fouls are intentional. Thus, in principle, at least, *any* foul on an attacker in an obvious goalscoring situation *must* be punished by a sending off. Certainly, it was argued in Britain - for example, by the FA Chief Executive, Graham Kelly, himself (*The Observer*, 21 January, 1991) - that to *book* a player in such circumstances was a major contravention of the new directive. In Britain, however, as elsewhere, it was eventually left to referees to decide if *in fact* an offence had been *designed* to prevent an *obvious* goal scoring opportunity. This did not help stem the predictable criticisms and complaints which poured forth when the decisions of different referees to send, or not to send off, were put under the media spotlight.
- 6.11** Following the domestic traumas of the late 1980s, which had seen four top English clubs face FA disrepute charges for violent player behaviour in 1989, in 1990, and for the first time in 20 years, *no* League club appeared before the FA to account for their disciplinary record. Also, the England national team performed creditably in the World Cup *and* won the competition's 'fair play' award. Signs of a new dawn, perhaps, which has since been somewhat tarnished by the Uzzell and Mabbutt affairs, the eventually unsuccessful Paul Elliot court case alleging wrecklessness in a tackle by fellow professional, Dean Saunders, the Vinnie Jones

narrated *Hard Men* football video and, most recently, the successful court case brought by Huddersfield Town's Gordon Watson after his leg was broken in a challenge during a match against Bradford City.

- 6.12** For the start of the 1992/93 League season, the first for the new FA Premier League, two more refereeing innovations came courtesy of FIFA. The first, widely welcomed because it favoured attacking play, was that attackers *in line* with the second-last defender should be deemed *onside*, not offside as was previously the case. The second was rather more contentious and ruled that a ball intentionally played to the goalkeeper by the foot of one of his own players constituted a 'back pass' and could not be picked up by the goalkeeper. This new law was designed to outlaw time-wasting and 'pointless' defensive back-passing, and also to speed the game up and make it more exciting for spectators in the light of a disappointing Italia '90 and the prospects of a ground-breaking World Cup in front of a potentially sceptical American audience at USA '94.
- 6.13** As some British commentators pointed out, our own game was hardly in need of further speeding up by law changes such as these and critics (the BBC's Alan Hansen, particularly) complained that the new law discriminated against good defending, demanded new, but crude, skills from goalkeepers and promoted an unsophisticated 'long ball' game. It was also argued that, in fact, outfield players *still* passed back to 'keepers from distance for safety, even if goalkeepers then had to despatch the ball more quickly under challenge from on-rushing attackers. In July 1992, Manchester City's Andy Dibble became the first British goalkeeper to claim that a serious injury (a broken leg) caused by a tussle with an onrushing forward in a friendly match in Dublin, was brought about by the new law. Nevertheless, indirect free kicks given on account of goalkeeper infringements *did* undoubtedly bring more goalmouth excitement and, occasionally, goals and, eventually, goalkeepers became more adept at passing out to defenders rather than hoofing the ball aimlessly upfield. The new law also *did* discourage blatant time wasting and the excessive slowing down of the game, especially by continental past masters. Today, even many British sceptics have slowly been won over to the new arrangements, though some critics remain unconvinced.

7. World Cup '94 : a new direction for refereeing?

- 7.1** The staging of the World Cup in the USA for the first time in 1994 provided plenty of scope for the game's international administrators to fashion a new approach to playing the game, urged on by administrators in the USA who were concerned that a repeat of the 'negative', draw-ridden 1990 tournament would banish the prospects for a professional 'soccer' league in the USA, possibly for all time (To induce more attacking play in USA '94 three points were also awarded for a win in group matches). Despite early suggestions about other likely changes - radically 'amending' the offside laws, increasing the size of goals and dividing playing time into four quarters (See, Williams and Giulianotti, 1994) - the innovations for World Cup '94 were eventually rather more modest. Nevertheless, their effects in the tournament, and later here in Britain, have been quite dramatic.

- 7.2 Referees at the World Cup were younger than in previous tournaments (45 years or younger) and specialist linesmen were also nominated for the first time (though this failed to prevent some poor officiating 'on the line'). Important among other changes were instructions to referees on giving players standing in, or returning from, offside positions the benefit of the doubt if they are not attempting to interfere with play (controversially, Brazil scored at least one goal, against Holland in the tournament's quarter finals, which, arguably, would have been called offside under the old arrangements). This new instruction could also help elsewhere. One problem with the new back pass law was that forward players seeking to pressurise goalkeepers with the ball on the ground had trouble getting *onside* again if the ball was firstly cleared by the 'keeper and then returned quickly to the attacking area. This new approach means, in theory, that players 'left behind' advancing defences could now move into 'non-interfering' positions and so escape an offside decision. The aim of the new emphasis is to increase attacking opportunities and to cut down on 'technical' offside decisions.
- 7.3 Secondly, referees were instructed automatically to 'red card' blatant foul tackles from behind. This latter change is especially important because it seeks to provide attacking players with more space and more confidence to play and to shield the ball, and it also rules out an old English centre-back tactic, passed on from the coaching ground, of 'letting the forward know you are there' (i.e. kicking him from behind early in the match) at the risk, at worst, of a caution. In theory at least, under the new guidelines, at the first sign of a violent contact from behind, defenders would now be dismissed. English World Cup referee, Philip Don, welcomed the new instructions precisely because it *reduced* the discretion of referees and made previously difficult decisions (was the tackle mistimed?; was it intentional?; would the attacker have had a scoring chance?; a red or yellow card?) easier to make. Others, as we shall see, have been rather less happy.
- 7.4 Players were sent off in each of the first two matches in the 1994 World Cup, neither of them obviously violent affairs, causing the England team manager to wonder if, "*FIFA are putting pressure on the referees and confusing the players. [They] seem overly concerned about not displeasing the American public*" (reported in *The Observer*, 19 June, 1994). The extraordinary performance, especially of Jamal Al-Sharif from Syria, who cautioned eight players, two of whom later received a second yellow card and were sent off in a very low key match between Mexico and Bulgaria - a match of the kind, in fact, which in England would likely bring hoots of derision from the crowd and cries from fans for players to 'get stuck in' - produced assurances from the APL&FLR&L that the performance of English officials operating under the new guidelines in 1994/95 would be closely monitored, "*to make sure there is uniformity*" (reported in *The Guardian*, 7 July, 1994). However, at the start of the 1995/96 League season, and in the seasons which followed in England, pointed complaints about officials who gave 'too many' red and yellow cards continued to be made by journalists, players, managers and spectators alike.
- 7.5 Interestingly, in Brazil the new approach seems to be regarded as a means of bringing players and officials *closer together*. The Brazilian captain, Dunga, said in 1994, "*In Brazil we used to consider referees as the 'Lords of Truth'. Now, maybe, it will be easier for the referee to be a friend to players*". (**World Soccer**, December, 1994, p.10). Here, in Britain, by way of contrast, the new FIFA guidelines have been

interpreted as posing a real challenge to one traditional strain of refereeing which is familiar to English eyes and is usually liked by players. This can be called the 'appreciative' style, which might be particularly suited to the 'muscular' approach to play in England, with its physicality and verbal intensity, its stress on continuity and its general hustle and bustle. Referees who favour this mode of approach to officiating are not too concerned about the 'industrial' language (swearing) of players, use humour to defuse combustible situations, prize their masculine 'insider' status, and also their unobtrusive and 'egalitarian' rapport with players. As the former top Football League referee, Roger Milford, put it:

"Getting the confidence of the players is a crucial part. Letting them realise that if you're going to make mistakes, then at least they will be honest mistakes. If the game's been good the ref can usually say to himself he's had a good game." (Reported in *The Guardian*, 17 May 1991)

- 7.6 The new approach, by way of contrast, sanctioned by FIFA and welcomed by many British officials, seems to present a much sterner, a more 'detached' and less flexible, face. Here, debate and manly exchanges with players 'as equals' on the pitch is transformed into a much stricter regime, apparently beyond compromise or negotiation, in which referees present themselves as the cold dispensers of a higher pre-ordained justice. According to 1994 FA Cup Final referee, David Elleray, for example:

"There is little doubt that the World Cup style of refereeing will be widespread in England next year. The alternative style of a chat, a pat on the bottom and 'being one of the lads' is fading away, and those English FIFA referees who have seen the benefit of strict refereeing in Europe are being joined by a growing band of colleagues." (Reported in *The Guardian*, 7 July 1994)

- 7.7 In England the new 'stricter' approach has caused controversy. After 10 weeks of the 1994/95 season, red and yellow cards combined were up a reported 39% on 1993/94. However, in Germany, Holland and Belgium the proportion of red cards shown at the start of the 1994/95 season exceeded even those shown in England (See, Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Yellow and Red Cards in Europe, 1994/95
(Up to 13 October 1994)**

	Played	Red	Yellow
England	88	21	267
Germany	72	22	270
Belgium	63	25	180
Spain	50	12	249
Holland	45	15	180

Source: Football Association

The trend in refereeing in English football in the early 1990s seemed clear: more red cards and no real signs that referees were approaching games in the same ways with some consistently averaging *twice* the rate of sendings off of others.

“There is a level of respect for officials within rugby union which I would like to see in football. We call it as we see it. Although television can give you 15 different angles, the only angle they can’t show is the referee’s” (Paul Durkin, FA Premier League referee, *The Observer*, 22 February 1998).

Figure 4: Red Card Comparisons, FA Premier League 1992/93-1995/96

	Games	Reds	Avge.
1992/93	462	34	0.07
1993/94	462	25	0.05
1994/95	462	65	0.14
1995/96	380	57	0.15

- 7.8 All major matches in England are filmed these days, so there is virtually no escaping the endless re-runs of debatable refereeing. Interestingly, while players and managers continue to crave *consistency* from referees - arguably, exactly what the mandatory instructions are at least *designed* to provide - they also bemoan referees who rule ‘by the book’. How these rather contradictory demands for both consistency and discretion are satisfied is likely to go some way towards determining the nature of the eventual accommodation to the new refereeing regime in England. On this matter, David Elleray, the, then, official spokesperson for the 22 FA Premier League referees, told *The Guardian* on 3 February, 1995:

"It is either consistency or flexibility, you can't have both. The new directives on strict punishment for foul play are mandatory, but some people do not seem to realise that this means they must be applied. Managers talk about referees not using common sense in certain situations, but individual flexibility is not allowed".

- 7.9 What is clear, however, from most of the press and media coverage about FA Premier League football from 1994/95 onwards is that it seems widely agreed that one of the effects of the new guidelines is that forward players *are being allowed to play*. There seems to be widespread agreement, too, that the quality of football in the top league has improved and that new star forward players, especially those from the continent - Klinsmann, Zola, Ginola, Carbone, etc. - but also our own domestic talent, now have the necessary protection and freedom to display their skills. It used to be said that continental players could not easily survive in the English League because of its physical stresses and its intensity; that they lacked the ‘bottle’ to survive the hurly burly of the English game and the temperament to deal with packed and passionate English crowds in tightly packed stadiums. Now, with impressive new English stadiums, generally a more urbane setting for the game here, and with new refereeing directives leaning towards promoting attacking skills perhaps the image and experience of the English game is finally changing, both at home and abroad?

8. Recent Developments

- 8.1 Signs of change on the refereeing front in recent years give cause for both optimism and concern. In August 1994, and after 106 years of League football, Wendy Tom became the first *female* to run the line in the professional English game. In 1998 she made the FA Premier League list as one of the newly designated, and ‘upgraded’ referees *assistants*. Less reassuringly, in February 1997 during a FIFA referees’ committee review of Euro ‘96, eight tackles were shown to officials and little agreement emerged: for one tackle, 23 officials thought a free kick would suffice, 10 favoured a yellow card and 13 a dismissal. So much for consistency! (reported in *Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 1997).
- 8.2 Prior to the 1998 World Cup Finals in France, strong directives from FIFA on dealing with foul tackles from behind as an automatic red card offence had managers and commentators fearing matches might end up with eight or nine players aside. Comments from the great French player and head of the French Organising Committee, Michel Platini, and senior FIFA officials suggesting that tackling *itself* might eventually be outlawed from the sport brought consternation, especially in the muscular British game. In fact, the Finals produced no major refereeing controversies beyond an incident involving a certain David Beckham, but they did provoke rising concern about ‘diving’ and cheating by top players. Contrast this with Robbie Fowler’s apparent honesty in March 1997 when he seemed to argue *against* the referee’s decision that he had been brought down for an awarded penalty in an Arsenal v Liverpool Premier League match. By the late 1990s the growing influence of foreign players was being blamed by some in England for an alleged increase in ‘diving’ in the Premiership.
- 8.3 On the issue of *technological* developments in refereeing, a penalty wrongly awarded to Chelsea in an FA Cup tie against Leicester City in February 1997 (Chelsea went on to win the Cup) led the FA Chief Executive, Graham Kelly, to announce that the FA were to investigate the possibility of the use of video assistance for referees, even though FIFA seemed lukewarm on the issue. Opinions here seemed to settle soon on the prospects of using video help *only* to decide on whether shots had crossed the goal line (Romania was eliminated from Euro’96 because a ‘goal’ scored by that country was disallowed. This incident first stirred the FA to set up a working committee to look at the matter of video aid). Referees’ assistants could also draw referees’ attention to an offside decision via an electronic link from the assistant’s flag.

Figure 5: Some recent changes to laws

- Law 4: Thermal shorts must be same colour as team shorts
- Law 5: A player bleeding must leave the field for treatment
- Law 8: A goal may be scored direct from kick off
- Law 12: Goalkeepers can no longer handle direct from throw in
Delaying, or not retreating from a restart is cautionable
- Law 14: Goalkeeper can move laterally before penalty kick is taken
- Law 16: A goal can be scored direct from goal kick
Goalkeepers must get rid of the ball within six seconds of gaining possession

- 8.4 There is also pressure from some quarters for referees to no longer be the *timekeepers* for matches. Today, electronic boards already show fans exactly how much time officials are adding on for injuries, substitutions, delays or time wasting. Some see this as a step forward; others as one more stride down the 'slippery slope' towards undermining the authority of match officials. It seems possible we will soon have some professional officials, hooters to signal 'time', perhaps 'video eyes' on goal lines, and more occasions when match officials are 'punished' for poor performances - Dermot Gallagher was banned by the director of refereeing for a below standard show in February 1998. Only one such previous case of a ban is recorded. David Elleray the Premier League referees' spokesman commented: *"This is one way in which referees are shown to be accountable. Players get dropped if they don't perform and so do referees"*.
- 8.5 In July 2000 the FA in England moved to protect referees from intimidation by players and managers by introducing stringent new penalties for managers and players who abused match officials. Under the new rules, intimidation of officials could result in a £250,000 fine and the docking of two points. If a club was found guilty of more than one offence in the same season fines could rise to £750,000 with another two points deducted. FA Disciplinary Panels dealing with players on this score will also take into account the rank of players – club captains may suffer bigger fines for example. A player found guilty of striking an official will now be liable to a 12-match ban and a fine of one month's salary – up to £250,000 for some top players. Adam Crozier, the FA Chief Executive said: "Players have to understand they are role models. We are trying to make the system more consistent and saying to people that, from here on in, everyone is on an equal footing."
- 8.6 From the start of the 2000/2001 season the use of *video evidence* was also formalised in the English game. Three-member panels now study incidents on video which may have been missed by referees. Some people in the game saw this as a step forward, and in some cases bans were reduced on players following the use of video evidence. In others players involved in incidents missed by referees were brought to account on film. Others questioned whether this was a further erosion of the authority of the referee in an era of 'trial by camera'.
- 8.7 In the 2000 FA Premier League National Fan Survey supporters were asked to comment on player behaviour and refereeing at the top level (Williams, 2000). 89% of all fans said the thing that most angered them about player behaviour today was how they sometimes 'pretended to be fouled'. More difficulties here for referees. 64% disliked 'players arguing with referees'. Only 11% of all fans thought their own club's players 'sometimes' behaved badly. But 39% of fans thought players' behaviour had 'worsened' in recent years. Only 8% of all respondents thought referees had generally been 'good' in season 1999/2000. 29% thought referees had done badly. 49% thought the standard of refereeing at the top level was getting worse. We also asked should referees use new technology for making decisions (see Figure 6)

Figure 6
Referees should use new technologies to make some decisions

For important 'offsides'	67%
For controversial penalty incidents	57%
For goal-line decisions	41%
Referees should make all decisions	28%

Source: Williams (2000)

As can be seen above, fewer than one-in-three supporters now feel that referees alone should make decisions. The feeling here seems to be that new technologies 'expose' referees and that if they are available to improve decision making why not use them? Opponents worry that the use of cameras for decisions will interrupt the flow of the sport – getting offside decisions right is not always possible even with the use of cameras. Maybe we should learn to live with the mistakes of match officials – as we have lived, for many years, with the mistakes of players.

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