

Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Districts Referees' Association

BEING AN ASSISTANT REFEREE

Being an assistant referee or 'running a line' is a vital job, demanding just the same level of fitness, dedication and 100 per cent concentration that a referee needs. Even the most junior referee can be called on to act as an assistant, at the end of each season the local league finals always appoint assistants and this may be the very first time many officials are handed a flag. But certainly after only a couple of seasons, junior referees will have the opportunity to act as assistants in Supply League games. These are a much higher standard of football and the job there has to be done right.

The referee and the assistants are a team, just as much as the players and it is vital that they act together at all times.

We hold regular training sessions on how to be a successful assistant, and what follows are some very basic principles to set you on the right path.

Contact with the referee

Every referee who has a game involving assistants should contact them several days before the game, to confirm the appointment, to tell them when he wants them at the ground and where to meet if they are travelling together. If you are travelling together ALWAYS be at the meeting point early. If you are late the referee will probably set off without you so that he arrives at the ground on time.

If the referee doesn't get in contact, then YOU ring him. Never leave things hanging in the air.

Arriving at the ground

ALWAYS be there at the appointed time. You never know the referee may be delayed and you will be expected to take over, so you must have sufficient time to cover all his pre-match duties.

Your Kit

Just because you are ‘only’ an assistant, it does not mean that your role is unimportant. Your kit should be in the same sparkling condition as though you were the referee. Take your own clean flags, just in case.

Pre match Instructions.

Each referee has his or her own version of pre-match instructions. Listen very carefully to what he says and make sure you understand exactly what the referee wants you to do, where you need to stand and what sort of signals are required. If there is anything that you don’t understand or you think the referee has not made clear or has left something out **THEN ASK**. There is nothing worse than obvious confusion occurring during a game. Sort things out beforehand.

The Assistants’ Duties

Law Six spells out the duties of Assistant Referees’. It is important that you know and understand them properly

Two assistant referees are appointed whose duties, subject to the decision of the referee, are to indicate:

- *When the whole of the ball has passed out of the field of play*
- *Which side is entitled to a corner kick, goal kick or throw-in*
- *When a player may be penalised for being in an offside position*
- *When a substitution is requested*
- *When misconduct or any other incident has occurred out of the vision of the referee*
- *When offences have been committed whenever the assistants are closer to the action than the referee (this includes, in particular circumstances, offences committed in the penalty area)*
- *Whether, at penalty kicks, the goalkeeper has moved forward before the ball has been kicked and if the ball has crossed the line.*

Assistance

The assistant referees also assist the referee to control the match in accordance with the Laws of the Game. In particular, they may enter the field of play to help control the 9.15m distance.

In the event of undue interference or improper conduct, the referee will relieve an assistant referee of his duties and make a report to the appropriate authorities.

Perhaps the most important principle to be understood is that Assistants are there to **ASSIST not to INSIST**. In other words to act as additional eyes and ears on behalf of the referee, to give indications of what might be offences but to allow the referee to actually decide to stop the game or not.

Talking during the game

Be prepared to speak to the players during the game, if that can help in controlling them. You will also be expected to talk to the dugouts to try and control their actions, without having to resort to bringing the referee over.

However NEVER get involved in talking to spectators, or responding to dugouts/players' questions about decisions the referee may have made. This also applies when entering or leaving the field. You are part of the referee's team; any comments must come from him. People will be looking to find excuses to undermine the officials in any way.

Holding the flag

Handy Tips-

- Flexibility is a key feature; you must be able to hold the flag in either hand and to be able to change hands without thinking.
- Always carry the flag with it on the side nearest to the field of play, whichever way you are running so that the referee can see it at all times.
- When standing facing the field, hold it with both hands, this will let you signal either way and will also perhaps slow you down rather than giving an 'instant' flag.

- When signalling, hold your index finger along the shaft of the flag; this will stop the flag disappearing behind your head when you hold it up.
- Never hold the flag rolled up. It should be hanging freely, ready to be easily seen when you raise it.

Top Tip. Give sharp clear signals upwards with a fully extended arm and then drop it gracefully.

Positioning

The referee will tell you where he wants you to be at corner kicks, penalty kicks and goal kicks. You will be expected to follow the ball down to the goal line **EVERY TIME** – its hard work! You will also be expected to be the goal judge, so you have to be in line.

Judging offside is a major part of being an assistant – you must keep yourself in line with the second last defender at all times and you will find this requires constant movement. But even then you will require total understanding of the offside law and all its interpretations.

One hundred percent concentration is needed at all times. One tiny lapse and you will find yourself a couple of yards out and then you will be unable to give decisions with total accuracy – it has happened to us all.

Knowing the correct signals

Use only the correct signals, shown in the Laws of the Game. Don't try and make up your own, it will own confuse everyone. But if you can, try to indicate discretely to the referee why your have flagged for an offence, e.g. holding

Wait – wait - wait

One of the great skills experienced assistant develop is waiting before they flag. For example at offside, they frequently wait until a particular player has received the ball before raising or keeping the flag down. Probably the best secret is they **WATCH THE REFEREE** to see what he is going to do. Penalty decisions are often contentious and should always made by the referee. A good assistant will wait to see whether the referee has seen the incident and is going to give the decision (or not), rather than flagging for something that the referee has perhaps already judged on. Generally only if a referee is completely unsighted, would an assistant be confident to signal for a penalty.

If however a referee completely misses a minor offence and you flag for it – keep your flag raised even if the referee does not see it immediately. Do not lower the flag unless the referee waves you down or the play moves to the other end of the field and the danger is passed. However if you spot and flag for a serious offence, keep the flag up until the referee stops play and consults with you.

Substitutions

Responsibility for ensuring the correct substitution procedure is an assistant's duty. The dugout will tell you when they want to make a change and it is up to you to signal to the referee during a stoppage in play. You must check the name of the player going on and ensure that the change takes place at the halfway line. Never allow the substitute to go on the field until the other player is actually off it.

If you are on the non-operative side of the field and see the other assistant signalling, don't be afraid to signal as well to draw the referee's attention to what is happening.

Handy Tip. When you are holding the flag up for a substitution, hold it above and behind you head. You will realise why when you don't and suddenly you can't see a thing!

Mass confrontations

Listen carefully to the referee when he is giving his pre-match instructions. He will tell you where he wants you to do to cover the incident. Your duty is to watch everything that is going on. The referee's team will be viewing from different angles to ensure that the players responsible are identified correctly and then dealt with. The referee will probably consult with you both before dealing with them and restarting the game.

Watching the referee

You must maintain eye-to-eye contact with the referee all the time. He will be looking to you for assistance and will be acknowledging your presence throughout the game.

Watch also for small hand gestures from the referee, which will indicate to you which way he thinks throw ins, for example, should be given. Follow his lead, that way both referee and assistant are seen to be working together and there is no controversies. If the referee has not seen

something serious, do not be afraid to call him across to speak to you. The big decisions must be correct.

Keeping records

One of the assistants will be delegated the task of keeping duplicate records with the referee. This is important should the referee get injured so that whoever substitutes for him knows what the score is or who has been cautioned etc. That does not mean the other assistant can ever relax – he must always be watching for what might be happening behind the referee's back.

Great Experience

Acting as an assistant, even though there is a lot to think about, it is a great opportunity to learn. If you are in the Supply Leagues, you will be working with experienced referees at a higher standard of football. You will be getting the chance to see how lots of referees work and learn from their good habits, which you will be able to adapt into your own game.

Don't worry if at first you find things difficult, you will quickly find your feet and become comfortable in your new role.

Always remember you are there to assist the referee, you are additional eyes and ears so that the game is controlled properly. You are there to ensure that he misses nothing and the major decisions are given correctly.