

Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Districts Referees' Association

Controlling a Game

No one expects that a newly qualified referee's performance will be perfect from day one. You will make mistakes and it takes years of experience (i.e. making mistakes) to develop all the best practices that we see from our colleagues at the top. And yet even they apparently still don't get everything right.

But what the clubs have a right to expect is that a referee even in his or her first game should know the Laws and be able to enforce them to the best of their ability. You must bear in mind that you are the only person in junior football who is getting paid expenses, so you must be prepared to always give of your best. That applies whether it is an Under 11's game or in the Premiership.

What every referee should do is think about what went on in the last game and whether there were things that could be improved on. Was anything missed, could positioning or certain incidents have been better, could flare-ups have been prevented etc. Self-analysis is always important even before assessors come on the scene to offer advice and assistance towards promotion. Another important factor is keeping up to date with the latest Law amendments and discussing any queries you may find with other colleagues. This latter can all be done by joining the Referees' Society and attending the weekly training meetings.

Some games will be easier to control than others but all will need controlling with 100 percent concentration for 100 percent of the game. You will get a game when you think that everything has gone well and you can relax until it blows up in your face in the 89th minute.

After a couple of seasons, almost all referees want to make the next step up the ladder – if only for their own satisfaction. You have to apply to be assessed but will receive written reports on your games. It does not matter thereafter at what level you are at or hoping to achieve, the sections of assessment are all the same so we might as well start off with the same format.

Remember at first nobody expects you to be ready to turn out at Old Trafford but there is a certain level of competence that you should strive for.

1. Application of Law (contains Decision making accuracy)

Do you know the Laws?

Can you when and how stop and start the game?

Do you inspect the field of play and the players' equipment before the game?

Do you know the difference between the penal offences and the technical offences?

Did you restart properly with the correct signals?

Did you recognise when to take action regarding Sending Off/Cautioning and Misconduct?

Did you deal with dissent?

2. Positioning – Fitness – Work rate

Are you facing play at all times?
Do you keep involved in the game at all times?
Do you move all round the field and use time to get into position when play has stopped?
Do you move towards the location when an offence has been detected and awarded?

Obviously no one expects a young referee to have the fitness of an Olympic athlete but fitness plays an increasingly important part as you progress up the ladder as it has an impact on every other feature of performance. You should certainly always be fit enough for the level of football where you referee – it follows the higher the level of football, the higher the level of fitness required of you.

3. Alertness and Awareness(this includes management of stoppages)

Do you remain concentration and awareness during open play?
Do you restart the game with a reasonable degree of accuracy in positioning?
Do you manage injury and substitutions appropriately?

4. Communication

Do you make too many signals or too few, are they clear and sharp, is everyone able to understand which way you are signalling?
Do you use the whistle effectively? Can it be heard? Do you vary its tone according to the seriousness of the offence? Do you use it too much or too little?
Do you talk to the players and tell them why you have stopped play or given a decision?

5. Teamwork

Do you use the Club Assistants effectively and respectfully?
Do you brief them properly?
Are you prepared to over rule them but giving a ‘thank you’ signal when you do so?
Are you able to deal with a Club Assistant who tries to take over from you?

6. Advantage

Are you able to show you recognise when an advantage is being player?
Are you able to give the correct voice and arm signals to the players?

Advantage is a difficult area for first time referees to understand. In fact when the players are also very young they don't understand it either. Our advice therefore is probable for the first few games is not to worry too much and award the free kicks rather than cause yourself and the players confusion – unless the advantage is so clear and so plain that everyone can see it and react accordingly.

As your experience grows, you will gradually get more and more confidence and will start to spot an advantage as it is happening. After a couple of seasons you might even see and signal for advantages that the players don't see and that may cause a few grumbles as well. But don't worry experience is a great teacher and you will start to get it right in the end.

7. Overall Match Control

Are you deeply involved at an accurate level for the game?
Are all the over competencies above helping your performance?
Do the players and managers show you respect?
Is your decision-making consistent?
Do you relax and enjoy being part of the game?

Controlling a game is what a referee is all about? If at the end you know you have worked hard done your best, have dealt with problems as they occurred, have enforced the Laws consistently and impartially to the best of your ability then no one ought to complain. Watch other referees and learn from them, but referee in your own way, do not try to imitate someone else. Think about the game and try to identify areas that you can work on to improve next time around.

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Most of these topics may seem pretty basic to you. You will certainly have been taught them during your initial training and you will find that they are repeated in many differing ways during continuation training. But we have found that if we can get junior referees to get the basics right and to have only good habits, then they referee much better with greater consistency. That leads to greater control and less trouble. It also means that young talented referees are spotted much earlier and promotion is quicker.

But most of all we want you to enjoy being a referee.