

Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Districts Referees' Association

Pre-Match Duties

Arriving at the centre circle at the appointed kick off time, calling the captains, tossing the coin and blowing the whistle to get the game underway is not the only duties referees have to do before each and every game.

We have seen referees arriving at the dressing room, with five minutes to go. Racing out to their game, then equally quickly rushing in at the end to collect the fees and roar off to the pub.

This is not the professional image that referees ought to be creating. Make no mistake, the clubs; the players and the leagues quickly get to know referees who do this sort of thing.

If you have any pride in your work and certainly if you have any ambitions to progress then there are certain lessons to be learned and actions to take before EVERY game.

Making Contact

Most referees start to think about the game when they first receive the appointment. Is it a top of the table clash? If it is a cup-tie will there be extra time and penalties? By the Wednesday or Thursday before the game, the Home Club Secretary, ought to have contacted you to confirm the game and the kick off time, and ensure you know how to get to the ground etc. If he hasn't rung, **YOU** contact him, what a good impression you will give to him!

If you are a referee and have neutral assistants, it is your job to contact them, to make sure how you are all getting to the ground, sometimes you travel together or to tell time you want them there for pre-match instructions. Again if you are an assistant and the referee hasn't contacted you. **YOU** ring him.

Looking the Part

It goes without saying that every referee should look the part for every game. Freshly washed kit, polished boots should be the norm. Equally turning up to the game in a suit with collar and tie, creates a great impression of a professional outlook. Once again the clubs and the Leagues will quickly get to know which referees turn up looking scruffy and wear dirty kit. Looking less than the party often means the individual referees in less than the proper manner.

Get used to arriving at the grounds properly dressed, when you take the next step up to a Supply League, this is an absolute requirement for all officials.

At the Ground

Most Leagues require their officials to be at the ground sometime before the kick off and that time is clearly stated in the League Handbook. Remember, this is the MINIMUM time. You will probably find that the minimum time is barely sufficient to complete all your pre-match duties.

So you must turn up at the proper time. The first thing you do it to find the respective managers and let them know you are there. That will give them, and you, an opportunity to have a chat about the game and remove any minor problems they might be having. You can for example, resolve any problems about colour clashes, giving the teams ample time to change.

Once you have found your dressing room, change into your boots and go and check the pitch. You MUST do this every time, and it doesn't matter if you played on the same pitch last weekend. ALWAYS REMEMBER THE SAFETY OF THE PLAYERS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Examining the Field of Play

Examine the pitch by yourself. Don't let either manager go with you; they may well try to influence your decision one-way or the other. Look at all the markings and make sure they are clear and correct. (It is almost guaranteed one penalty mark is not there or it 11 yards from the goal line!!!). Make sure there is nothing dangerous any where on the field, broken glass, tin cans, dog dirt, used syringes etc. Look for ruts or rabbit holes. Are there deep pools of water or are there ice patches.

You do not have to examine every blade of grass and you will quickly develop you own method that covers all the pitch and gives you confidence that there is nothing dangerous lying about.

If you find any problems then you don't have to clear them up yourself. That is the responsibility of the home club. But it is nice if you examine the pitch early and then give them ample time to resolve matters.

If you have doubts about how the pitch will play, say due to heavy rain, don't hesitate to ask for a ball and kick it around to see if it runs freely or just sticks. This might indicate weather playing the game would become a farce.

If the managers and teams see that you have examined the pitch in a professional manner, they are much more likely to accept any decision to play or not to play. They might not agree with you, but it is your decision after all.

Don't get sued

It is important to remember, that a referee MUST inspect the field of play before a game, if only to prevent him being sued by a player who is injured during game. Attempts have been made to sue referees, when players have been injured and then tried to allege that the ground was too dangerous and the game should not have been started. So make sure you do check the pitch and that the teams know you have done so. This is extremely rare but should you ever get a letter from a solicitor trying to implicate in this sort of incident then immediately contact one of our Committee or the Lancashire Football Association, who have their own legal team to look after you. So don't worry – especially if you have done the job right in the first place.

It is also important to understand that if you do start the game and weather or ground conditions deteriorate to such an extent that you can abandon the match at any point. (Also take a look at our Association's Leaflets on 'Adverse Weather' and 'Cancellations'

Team Sheets

In some Leagues the Leagues Rules require that team sheets be handed to a referee at a certain time before the kick off, in others merely the names of substitutes. Try not to be too dogmatic about receiving them, remember it is often one man who is trying to see to all the running of his team and he does sometimes get a bit harassed. A gentle polite reminder nearer the time often goes a long way to good relationships. We suggest that only deliberate flouting of the league rules need to be reported.

Warm Ups

Nowadays, most teams do warm up exercises before games. Ask about a short warm programme for yourself and then do it before each game. You will be surprised how being seen warming up will enhance your reputation with the teams – as well of course as preparing you much better for the game to come. Use the warm up period to get to know the teams, check the colours, have a final quick check of the field of play.

Checking teams

Some leagues require referees to check the players' equipment before each game – and it is astonishing how many referees don't do this. Give yourself time to check boots and look of jewellery etc. Better to resolve matters now than later during the game. The players may ask you questions, which can be answered in a friendly manner. But do not make promises you are not going to keep (like sending off everyone off for the first use of foul language in whatever circumstances)

Preparing yourself

If possible take a minute or two by yourself in the dressing to think about the game and to ensure that you are prepared mentally. Use this time to check that you have everything you are going to need - your notebook, two pencils, two whistles, flags, a coin, red and yellow card. watches.

Now you are ready for the off

Leaving the Dressing Room

Give yourself plenty of time to get to the pitch you are playing on, sometimes they are quite a way from the dressing rooms. As you get there, have a quick last minute check of the nets, in case they have become loose during the player's warm ups.

Get to the centre circle and blow the whistle in plenty of time for you to toss up and have both teams in place at the appointed times. It doesn't matter if one of the teams is late, because you can report them to the League if they delay the kick off. Just as long as you were there in time.

After the game.

At the final whistle, try and get the match ball and take it into the dressing room with you. That way the manager has to come to speak to you and pay you your match fee. But don't worry if the match fee doesn't appear – don't go chasing it – when you get home contact the League Secretary, who will get it for you immediately

Try to keep slightly separate from the players, managers and spectators as you make your way back to the dressing room. This can avoid confrontation.

Never agree to any suggestions that you should 'forget' to send in any misconduct forms – in fact if such suggestions are made forcibly or persistently, then you maybe should be reporting that as well!

After a few games, you will find yourself a routine, which gets you to the correct game, in good time for you to complete all your duties. When you arrive at the centre circle knowing that YOU have done everything correctly, then you will be relaxed and able to give the best performance.

It goes without saying that all of us sometime come across situations that we have never seen before. Those are the times when we need to talk to someone about it. Contact a fellow members of the Society or better still come to our Training Meetings every Monday night, when we can all learn from everyone else. You never know, one Monday you might hear about something that then happens in YOUR very next game.