

# Durham County RFU Referees' Society



## A Guide to Rugby Refereeing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The art of refereeing lies in the referee's approach to the game and is marked by the quality of their decisions combined with the manner in which they make them. They must be firm, approachable and accurate but most of all CONSISTENT.

There are two diametrically opposed ways of refereeing, the positive and the negative; the latter tends to be destructive and occurs when the referee sees their position and decisions as ends in themselves, with their mission being successfully completed by the awarding of a decision for a range of infringements including a knock on and a forward pass. On the other hand, the positive attitude is exemplified by the referee who is able by observation, explanation, and where necessary, penalties, to correct the transgression and allow the game to flow.

It is important not only to know the Laws, the Definitions and the Notes but also to be able to visualise the situations where they apply. Whilst some of this can be attained by pure reading of the relevant section of the Law and by talking to players and coaches to gain their point of view, the most important learning situation off the field is in regular attendance at training and discussion meetings held by the Society, where it is possible to discuss and gain knowledge from other referees and clarify points which may have been causing confusion.

This booklet is an attempt to provide BASIC information which will assist your development as a referee. The content has stood the test of time with the original document being a short document published by the Berkshire Society of Rugby Football Referees. I used this as a model and produced a document for the Kent Society of Rugby Football Union Referees in 1982. This was again updated for the Durham County Rugby Union Referees Society in 1986 and 1991.

Finally, what you see on television is not necessarily the way that you should be refereeing early in your career as there are variables which will not apply to you such as assistant referees who are able to assist and intervene, a television match official who has a particular role. Each of these allows the referee to assume positions different to the norm.

Durham Referees Society welcomes all new members and those with an interest in refereeing.

John Pearson

Retired International Referee

## 2. PREPARATION.

Preparation for a game begins as soon as the previous one finishes. Then is the time to start to look at the mistakes which may have been made and to look at ways in which these can be avoided in the future. Also look at what has gone well and continue to work on these. If the referee has been assessed they should take on board the assessor's comments.

A most important part of the preparation is being fit enough to referee and this is best assessed by the individual in the light of their physique, age, and level of fitness relative to the level of game which they control and the realistic aspirations which they may have. Decisions made late in the game can often be affected by the referees' ability to react both physically and mentally. Proper physical preparation can ensure that the referee is not only fit enough to keep up with the game, but that mental alertness, which physical fitness assists, is manifested throughout the game. Referees must attain the appropriate fitness levels linked to the game which they are graded at.

In the period prior to the match the referee should check all items of dress and ensure that they have a minimum of two neutral coloured shirts, matching socks, black/blue and white shorts, clean boots and laces, two adequate whistles (which work), two pencils, two watches (which also work) and a card upon which to record the score and any other essential information such as half time, second kick off and time of "no side" and details relating to the use of yellow and red cards. If involved in cup matches, leagues or competitions where special rules apply, the referee should make sure that they have a full working knowledge of these.

On the day of the game the referee should allow time in travelling for any unforeseen circumstances such as traffic, road works or even getting lost. Aim to arrive at the ground in sufficient time (about an hour or more before kick-off) to check the pitch and its surrounds, introduce themselves to club officials and the two captains, ascertain if there will be touch judges, replacements, medical personnel, check studs and supervise the toss which should take place in the vicinity of the changing rooms. It is accepted that the captain that wins the toss will make the decision for kick or end, on the field of play, just prior to kick off.

Again, if there are special provisos for a game be aware of these for they will undoubtedly have an effect at some point during the day in terms of your refereeing or organisation. For example, ensure that you are aware of the replacement Law for that particular game and if there are further adaptations and modifications to the Laws for Age Grade matches.

Most sides have an expectation that the referee will be available to undertake the briefing, stud check and the coin toss early in the proceedings and the time to undertake this should be established with the two captains. Any briefing to players should be short and to the point covering the essentials of the scrummage engagement and any other aspects which the referee wishes to draw to the attention of players.

### 3. DURING THE GAME.

From the start of the game the referee's application of the Laws should be fair, consistent and accurate. During the first ten to fifteen minutes the players should be able to discover what the referee is working towards. This should relate closely to any statements made in the briefing with the players. This is best established by being alert and definite using appropriate signals and giving short clear explanations for stoppages i.e. by the application of the art of refereeing the players know what the referee is about.

By their explanation of the Law and their practical interpretation players should be aware of their expectations with regard to situations such as:

- *the kind of binding and stance of players in the scrummage.*
- *the way in which the ball should be put into the scrummage.*
- *that pushing, barging and obstruction are not permitted in the lineout.*
- *that there should be clear gap between the teams in the lineout.*
- *that the backs should remain 10 metres away from the lineout until it ends.*
- *that the ball is released in a tackle and made available..*
- *that players bind in ruck or maul and enter from an onside position through the gate or retire behind the offside line.*
- *where the border line exists between an attempted charge down/knock on and obstruction/late tackle.*
- *that advantage is consistent in those facets of play where it is exercised.*
- *that they will not allow players to dispute their decisions or show dissent.*
- *during the opening stages of the game the referee, when they feel happy with it, can also indicate their own awareness by warning of transgressions verbally and quietly tell miscreants that they are on, or just over, the borderline - it is not always necessary to blow the whistle.*

In this way players may become convinced that the referee knows what they are about and is attempting to add to their enjoyment of the game rather than detract from it. Universal popularity is not one of the criteria by which a referee is known on a rugby pitch but fairness and impartiality should be.

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## 4. APPLICATION

During the course of the game the scrummage, lineout, ruck and maul will inevitably involve a large percentage of the players in a very small area of the pitch. It is possible to look at each of these situations and build up a mental picture and 'check lists' belonging to each facet of the game. The following are SUGGESTIONS; there are variations to the following statements, but these reflect basic guidance.

### 4.1. Scrummage:

As it forms check for:

- *the binding of the front row on the command bind and on the command set.*
- *the stance of hookers, props and flankers.*
- *that the front rows come together straight and stay straight – apply 'crouch, bind, set' but in any case, ensure that they are reasonably close together.*
- *that the hooker's feet are not in front of the props.*
- *that the tunnel is clear for the ball to enter.*
- *that all participants are in field of the five-metre line.*

#### 4.1.1. At the put in check:

- *that the ball is held midway between knee and ankle.*
- *that the ball is put in, in one movement, at the correct line and strikes the ground correctly. If it is not correct, has there been dummying or feeding or has the hooker struck too early, or too near to the mouth of the tunnel therefore twisting, lowering or swinging?*
- *that the scrum halves allow each other to take up the correct position and continue to do so until the end of the scrummage.*

#### 4.1.2. Follow up:

- *does the ball come back out of the tunnel or pass straight through?*
- *check the bind and position of the front row, especially the opposing tight head and the hooker.*
- *check the binding of the flankers for slipping of bind, interference with an opponent's bind and obstruction on the opposing scrum half.*
- *that if the players are not bound then they retire immediately behind the offside line (5 metres back).*
- *check that the opposing scrum half does not get in front of the ball or obstruct other players or impede their opponent.*
- *check for obstruction by a flanker if the No. 8 breaks with a ball from the base of the scrum.*
- *check that the defending backs are 5 metres back.*

- *if the scrum wheels over 90 degrees i.e. the front rows go beyond a line parallel to the touchline, reform the scrummage where it stops, side last in possession to put the ball in unless there is a penalisable offence.*
- *when the ball is out check that the scrummage breaks up in an orderly fashion and ensure that no illegal activities are taking place.*

#### **4.1.3. Positioning:**

- *generally, stand the same side as the scrum throwing the ball in and give the engagement sequence before moving two to three metres back and slightly to the attackers side of the scrum.*
- *(Standing on the side which gives a view of both sets of backs is an alternative to attain control of offside.)*
- *move early with the ball to allow a wider view of the scrummage, the ball, both sets of flankers and the defending backs.*
- *do not forget to check the position of the attacking wingers who may be waiting for a kick.*
- *attempt to read where the ball is going and move to the most likely breakdown point.*
- *be aware of the need to keep up with play.*
- *take the fastest and most accessible route ensuring that you keep the ball in view for the maximum amount of time.*

## **4.2. Lineout.**

### **4.2.1. Formation:**

- *get to the line of touch early - from here the lineout can be established in a regular and orderly fashion. It will also assist if there is a quick throw in.*
- *start at the front of the lineout and then move to appropriate positions.*
- *ensure that there is a space between opponents and that the lines are straight and clear.*
- *ensure that the front player is beyond the 5 metre line and the back player is inside the 15 metre line and that the person at the front (hooker) of the defending side is 2 metres away from the lineout.*
- *ensure that all non-participants are 10 metres away from the lineout.*
- *in a short lineout ensure that players who are not participating in the line out do not join it before they are permitted to.*
- *check that the non-throwing side have the same or less participants than the throwing in side - if they have more look for advantage before awarding the freekick.*

#### **4.2.2. Ball thrown in:**

- *check for early closure of the space by non jumpers.*
- *look for barging and pushing of the jumper and support players, and for players coming in to support the jumper by moving into the space between the jumper and the opposition in the lineout. (In essence, moving in front of the jumper in order to protect the jumper.)*
- *check to see if the ball is thrown in straight - advantage can apply if it is not.*
- *if the ball is caught look for offside players and the defending backs encroaching*
- *within the 10 metres.*
- *if a maul develops ensure that players are in legal positions until the lineout ends i.e. an ensuing ruck or maul has moved beyond the original line of touch.*
- *if the ball is tapped or knocked back from the lineout or a player emerges with the ball, open play exists, look for obstruction by the side who have possession.*
- *ensure that anyone who peels to the front or the back does so within the confines of the Law.*
- *on a long throw, ensure that everyone was onside until the ball left the thrower's hand.*
- *as the ball and players move away from the lineout check behind to ensure that no irregularities are occurring.*

#### **4.2.3. Positioning:**

A great deal of contention exists in this area and such things as, physique (tall/short, mobile/immobile), weather conditions (position of the sun, direction of the wind) type of lineout, where the ball is thrown or where there are areas of disagreement between players, can affect the positions taken up by a referee. In general, the following is offered as guidance:

- *set it up from the front and then move as desired.*
- *do not remain static but vary the position from which you view the lineout.*
- *after setting it up avoid the line of touch.*
- *when moving to longer positions in the lineout always keep the thrower in view, i.e. move backwards.*
- *stay out of the scrum-halt's way but get in close if expecting trouble.*
- *stay goal side when the lineout is inside the red zone'.*
- *watch players, not the flight of the ball.*
- *always be moving, or ready to move.*

### **4.3. Ruck and Maul**

These are crucial areas where there can be a great deal of friction if the Laws are not adhered to.

#### **4.3.1. Ruck:** (where a tackle has occurred)

- *keep up with play as it forms checking that a tackle did occur.*
- *is the ball played immediately and if not is it the tackler, or tackled, who is responsible?*
- *for the non-release? Penalise quickly if the Law has been transgressed - it will stop the pile-up and reduce friction. Ensure that the jackaller (i.e. an opponent on their feet attempting to take the ball from a tackled player) is attempting to pick up the ball.*
- *check that the tackler and tackled players are on their feet before they play the ball again.*
- *if support players do not stay on their feet and go down on top of tackled or tackler or*
- *kill the ball, penalise them quickly - more experienced referees may prefer to see if any advantage can accrue but there are dangers inherent in this.*
- *ensure that players enter the ruck through the gate and from behind the offside line.*
- *check that players entering the ruck have their shoulders above their hips.*
- *check that non participants are behind the offside line.*
- *check that players do not handle the ball on the ground - if they do, penalise.*
- *check for any instances of foul play and deal with promptly.*
- *when the ball emerges, ensure that any loiterers do not impede play.*
- *always check behind as the ball moves away from the ruck.*

#### **4.3.2. Maul.**

- *check that the maul is a maul by Law and not open play.*
- *check that players are joining from behind the ball, through the gate and on the correct side.*
- *ensure that players are bound legally and are not fringing; they do not possess "elastic arms".*
- *ensure that players legally involved in a maul are not dragged out by an opponent.*
- *ensure that the maul is not deliberately collapsed.*
- *check the offside line for opponents encroaching.*
- *when the ball emerges ensure that loiterers do not impede the play. check behind as the maul breaks up and the ball moves away.*

### **4.3.3. Positioning at Ruck and Maul:**

- *be up with play - this can mean just in front, just behind or level, dependent upon each situation.*
- *identify the position of the ball early.*
- *be mobile around the ruck and maul, as necessary.*
- *when the position of the ball is identified widen the angle by moving away from the ruck or maul, look for fringers.*
- *be aware of breaks and movement close to the ruck and maul. Do not remain in a position which impedes attackers or defenders i.e. be ready to move forward, backwards or sideways, quickly.*
- *stay out of the pass line between 9 and 10.*
- *be aware of the way in which players enter the ruck and maul, if you arrive early it can be beneficial to be on the 'far side' of the ruck and maul out of the way of the bulk of the players.*
- *keep rucks and mauls 'tidy.'*
- *in general games involving players with less ability require a quicker ending of ruck and maul.*

### **4.4. Kick off.**

- *ensure that a drop kick is used.*
- *ensure that kicker's team are behind the line when the ball crosses it - play advantage*
- *if appropriate but be aware that there may be inherent dangers in this.*
- *watch for obstruction by the receiving team.*
- *be aware of a tackle on a player in the air receiving the ball before they land on the ground..*
- *watch the reaction of players don't watch the flight of the ball.*

### **4.5. Kicks.**

- *keep the ball between you and the majority of players.*
- *watch players, especially protect the kicker from obstruction, early and late tackles – in the first instance you have time as the kick in the air is of little consequence to you.*
- *follow up all kicks, a charge down can dramatically alter the pattern of play.*  
*be aware of a tackle on a player in the air receiving the ball before they land on the ground.*
- *watch for offside players interfering with play especially those within ten metres and not retiring.*

- for penalty kicks at goal move infield 'halving' the angle between the goal posts and the kicker
- *avoid distracting the kicker going for goal, especially getting in front of them whilst they are taking the kick.*
- *when a drop goal is attempted get as close to the goal as possible.*
- *on tap penalties generally go infield keeping the players and the ball in view.*

#### **4.6. Close to the Goal Line/Dead ball line/In goal.**

This is the most crucial area on the pitch and whilst mistakes made further out in the field of play may be forgiven those made in this area will not. This is the area where reputations are made or lost, players lack tolerance with matters to do with this area.

- *try to be slightly in front of play.*
- *be over the goal line first, try to anticipate where the ball will cross the line and be there.*
- *watch for attempted drop goals.*
- *ruck, maul, scrum and lineout do not exist in In-Goal and this lack of understanding by players can lead to friction.*
- *do not allow too many players between you, the ball and the goal line.*
- *watch closely for the critical moment of the try being scored or the need to disallow it.*
- *Remember that if in doubt err in favour of the defenders.*
- *BE DECISIVE, if doubts exist stand by your beliefs.*
- *if a decision is contentious (and a number will be), give it and retire quickly to the place where the game will recommence - do not get involved in debate.*
- *never ease up just because it appears that the ball is going over the dead ball line or touch in goal; it may not, get close to it.*
- *be certain that the ball has been grounded before awarding a try.*

#### **4.7. General Play:**

- *be alert and aware of possible changes in direction.*
- *never allow too many players between you and the ball.*
- *always attempt to be close to the action, but not so close that you join in either voluntarily, or more likely, involuntarily, with the assistance of players.*
- *attempt to 'read the game' building up an image of the situations which are taking place and their likely outcomes.*
- *stay on the balls of your feet, do not run flat footed.*

## 5. ADVANTAGE

The flow of the game, in general terms, is determined by the way in which a referee by their correct, consistent, yet sympathetic use of the Advantage Law, fosters its use by players.

The Law states, that with few exceptions, the referee SHALL play advantage and this fact alone hopefully ensures that the game does not stagger from one set piece to another.

Whilst the referee has complete discretion as to what constitutes advantage it should be remembered that a mere opportunity to gain an advantage is not sufficient cause to ignore the original offence. This in itself may not, however, be satisfactory. Most offences, excepting those involving foul play, merit the playing of advantage as the Law states. Inform players that an offence has been seen and that advantage is being played verbally and by means of the advantage signal.

In simplest terms advantage may be viewed in the following way - 'would I want advantage in that situation if I were playing?' Whilst this is not infallible it is a good guideline. As you become more experienced so will your playing of the Advantage Law.

Where a score could have occurred but for a particular action(s) and advantage has been played the probability is that the referee should return to the place of infringement and award a penalty if no score occurs. If in the opinion of the referee a try would probably have been scored but for the illegal action(s) of the defender then the realms of a penalty try have been entered. However great care should be taken to ensure that advantage is applied consistently.

The following is a list of those situations where it is best not to play advantage:

- *tackled player or tackler not releasing the ball on the ground.*
- *player lying on the ball.*
- *player killing the ball at a ruck.*
- *offside player within 10 metres of a player waiting to receive a ball from a kick.*
- *players in front of a ball at kick off or drop out (although there are instances where advantage can be played quite safely).*
- *instances of foul play and misconduct - IF advantage is played great care has to be exercised to ensure that the incident does not escalate and the perpetrator is seen to have been dealt with at the earliest available point in time.*

It is imperative that the referee is consistent in playing advantage, i.e. that the same criteria are applied for the achievement of advantage throughout the game, although it must be recognised that the element of time will differ according to circumstances. As you become more confident and at ease with advantage and its application, variations may occur with regard to the situations mentioned in the last paragraph.

## 6. SIGNALS

Much has been said about signals and since the Law Book of 1990/91 the recommended signals have been photographed and reproduced. For the sake of the Law book they have been divided into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary signals with the express purpose of aiding communication between referee, players and spectators. The explanation for the use of these, in the view of this author, leaves something to be desired especially for the inexperienced referee and therefore for the purpose of this document they have been divided into those which should be obligatory and those which are voluntary and developing as experience is gained. The actual physical form which the signal takes should however be adhered to.

### 6.1. Primary Signals

Following the whistle, the referee SHOULD signal their decision where no advantage has been gained, i.e. Penalty, Free Kick, Try, Knock On, Forward Pass. There should then be a brief explanation, should this be necessary, to inform players why the whistle has been blown. These need to be precise and succinct and only practice will allow these to flow and be second nature. Two examples are provided below:

*"Scrum half feeding, no advantage, free kick to reds. "*

*"First knock on by reds, no advantage, scrum down, blue ball."*

It is preferable to refer to teams by name, however if you are unfamiliar or there is an awkwardness in pronunciation or length of name the predominant colour for each team can be utilised.

### 6.2. Secondary Signals

These cover many other aspects of the game and should be used as confidence grows.

It should be noted that a specific sequence of events appears above and this can be best described as:

- Whistle
- Signal
- Explain

There is a logic in the above in that players will be able to understand more clearly what course of action they must take next.

Undoubtedly the best way of signalling is to 'make the whistle talk' but this takes time to evolve. The following is suggested as a guideline upon which to base further work:

- short blast - minor stoppage, touch, scrummage;
- long blast - free kick, successful conversion;
- longer blast - try, penalty;
- longest/hardest - foul play and misconduct

It is necessary to remember that crowd noise and wind may have an effect upon the way in which you blow your whistle. Remember that at a ruck and maul the whistle should be loud enough for players to hear.

It is advised that the whistle is NOT used to bring players to the centre for the start of each half, repositioning the scrummage, ensuring gaps and spaces in the lineout, or for directing touch judges behind the posts.

## 7. DISCIPLINE.

Foul play, dissent and bad temper are not attributes of the game of Rugby Football and should not be tolerated by the referee. Instances of the above should be handled promptly and firmly, and it needs to be recognised at the outset that the Advantage Law is not a 'smoke screen' to hide behind and allow the above to occur.

For instances of foul play under Law 9 a player shall either be cautioned and suspended for 10 minutes (Yellow Card) or sent from the field of play (Red card); in either case a penalty must be awarded to the non-offending team. If a Yellow card is given a note should be made of the offender's name, and/or number, position and the offence so that should an offence of a similar nature (Second Yellow card) be committed by the same player details are clear as to why they were sent from the field of play - in this there is no option (Red card). Whilst stating that particular elements should not be tolerated in the game, care has to be exercised when sending off players, or when issuing 'general warnings' or cautions, especially with regard to the former as these reduce the options available to the referee. For instance cases of dissent can be dealt with by initially advancing the penalty 10 metres and, where necessary, speaking to the captain. If things continue those players specifically involved in the incident should be cautioned and given a Yellow card and the matter discussed with the Captains.

In many cases a cooling off period or a caution may be sufficient to let players see that justice has been done.

### **RFU REG. 19.6**

*Notwithstanding what has been stated there are those offences which require a player or players to be sent from the field. In these cases the referee **SHALL** as soon as practicable, and at any rate within 48 hours from the conclusion of the match (Level 5 and below) provide a completed report of the incident to:*

- a. The Disciplinary Secretary of the Constituent body to which the Player's club is affiliated or allocated, or to the RFU Head of Discipline and also*
- b. The Referee's Society or, if they is not a member of a Referee Society to the CB in whose area the match was played.*

## *MATCH OFFICIAL ABUSE*

- a. A Match Official reporting abuse shall comply with the requirements set out in Reg. 19.6 save that where the Player has not been ordered off in relation to the alleged abuse a MOA report shall be completed within 7 days.*
- b. The Match Official SHALL set out in the report FULL details of the alleged physical and/or verbal abuse including in the case of verbal abuse his/her recollection of the actual abusive words spoken. Details of any witnesses to the abuse should also be included on the report form.*

Any reports which relate to adults that are either players, club officials or spectators regardless of whether they are from clubs covered by Durham County CB or from clubs outside the CB should be submitted ASAP to John DOVE, Durham County Discipline Secretary. They will then ensure the reports are forwarded to the appropriate recipients.

Any reports which cover Age Grade players only should be submitted ASAP to Philip Walton the Durham County Youth Discipline Secretary

It is important to remember that a player dismissed from the field of play is immediately suspended and remains so until their case is dealt with by the appropriate Discipline Panel. Due to this, many CB's now hold weekly hearings. It is therefore essential that reports are submitted in line with Regulation time schedules. Should any referee have problems submitting their report on time they MUST contact the Discipline Secretary to make them aware. This is especially important in relation to reports which are to be forwarded to other CB Discipline Secretaries.

Guidance with regard to the completion of report forms can be obtained **if required**, from the **CB Discipline Secretary**, Society Hon. Secretary or a Member of the Referees Society Committee.. The report should, in any case be factual and confined to relevant details of the case.

Where possible, the referee should if requested/required to do so, attend the disciplinary hearing. Referees are not usually requested/required to attend if the player submits a guilty plea.

Sending players off is not the nicest thing to have to come to terms with and even for experienced referees this can give rise to self-doubt. If you want to talk the situation through approach a member of the Committee or a senior referee

## 8. CONCLUSION

The referee holds a delicate balance between the Laws and expectations of the players, coaches, and spectators. The referee must at least match the efforts of the players in their attempts to provide a framework in which they can play the game of rugby.

After the game, take your time in showering and changing whilst going over the major elements of the game. Go into the bar and if no one offers to buy you a drink, buy your own. Take your time drinking it and if no one comes to talk to you find someone to speak to such as the touch judge, an official or a player. This can be a lonely time but it gets less lonely with experience and subsequent visits to the club. Discuss the game, the Laws, and aspects of the game, but never argue about points which players, officials or spectators may put to you - accept that there may be differences of opinion. Attempt to avoid discussing the decisions of other referees as the circumstances appertaining to their game may have been different to yours - remember it could be your turn for this type of treatment next week.

It is hoped that this booklet will be of assistance to you in furthering your abilities and ambitions as a referee.

Remember that most referees do not get paid for refereeing and that the game, for the most part, is about enjoyment, for YOU and the PLAYERS. If in doubt with regards to any matter ask a committee member or a senior referee – do not be afraid, we have all made mistakes and will no doubt continue to do so. Better to 'ask a silly question' and to clarify the position than to make a mistake which could have been avoided.

## 9. Referee Skills and Competencies by Grade/Level

The following information is offered to assist Match Observers with the compiling of reports. The lists of skills and competencies are not exhaustive but offered as a guide when observing the performance of referees at various stages of their development.

### Level 11

This is the starting grade for referees. It is given to those who have not refereed at all or who now want to do so in the adult/15-a-side game. It is highly likely that they will have recently completed their refereeing course. Consequently the MO form used to report on performance is designed to describe the challenges (new referee, new to rugby, first game, first senior game etc), highlight fundamental requirements and offer basic advice to help with their progress.

We expect to observe:

- Safe management of key areas including tackle/breakdown, scrum and lineout;
- A basic knowledge of law and use of WSE;
- Efforts to get into an effective position to make decisions;
- Reasonable level of fitness for 80 minutes;
- Should be able to recognise and deal with foul play in order to keep players safe.

The important thing to remember is that we want this level of referee to operate safely and enjoy the experience sufficiently that they want to repeat it. Consequently the reports should be written in a positive and constructive manner. Once they fulfil the above they will be ready to move to Level 10.

### Level 10

Once the referee has demonstrated a basic competence they will then be placed on a path that will allow them to operate at a suitable level. The first step will be at Level 10 where they will have charge of the lowest grade of game. This is where they will learn about and practice their skills. It must be understood that refereeing low-level games is not necessarily easy, particularly for a new referee. Consequently the challenges may well be the same as those at L11. At this level we expect to observe the same things listed at L11 but as a referee gets more game time they will also demonstrate:

- An understanding of basic positioning at scrum and breakdown;
- A basic knowledge of materiality and attempts to play effective advantage;
- Efforts to build relationships with captains and key players;
- An ability to recognise and deal with foul play;
- Should be able to clearly demonstrate a differentiated whistle tone;
- Should be able to demonstrate a developing presence and confidence;
- Should be able to demonstrate the lines of running required when refereeing.

As with L11 the comments made in the report should be positive and constructive

## **Level 9**

This is the first level where the referee may get their first experience of league rugby. The expectation is that they will be sufficiently skilled/competent to contribute effectively in these games. Consequently in addition to L10 ability they will be expected to demonstrate:

- A basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teams they are refereeing and what they are trying to achieve;
- A competent knowledge of Law and ability to apply it reasonably consistently;
- Consistent, clear use of WSE;
- Use of primary and secondary signals on most occasions;
- An understanding and application of the basics of preventative refereeing;
- Ability to build rapport with players;
- An ability to manage the tackle and breakdown and encourage fair competition;
- Effectively manage the scrum ensuring that it is square and stable and at the correct height; lineout including gaps, receivers, hookers and non participants; relative offside lines;
- Development of effective verbal skills that complement other areas of communication, i.e. calling 'advantage scrum/penalty' and 'advantage over', encouraging tacklers to release the tackled player, players in front of the kicker to retreat and to observe offside lines at ruck and maul;
- Understanding of sanctions required when foul play occurs – dangerous tackles (late, early, high, straight arm, player tackled whilst in the air etc);
- Should be developing the ability to deflect the attempts of players to discuss or challenge decisions and to resist the urge to discuss or seek approval for the decisions they have made;

## **Level 8**

At this level the referee is now able to demonstrate skills and competencies as for L9 and in addition will be able to employ a more preventative refereeing style and introduce confident and positive player management skills (verbal communication, body language). The skills displayed by teams at this level can be markedly different from those at 9 and should be considered in terms of the challenge to the referee. In addition to L9 skills and competencies the referee will be expected to demonstrate:

- Smart and appropriate dress on and off the pitch;
- Awareness of their development by providing the MO with specific performance objectives;

- Competent knowledge and consistent, accurate application of Law;
- 'Presence' and 'authority' – confident decision making; positive body language particularly when under pressure;
- Due regard for and understanding of materiality;
- A refereeing style that is more preventative than punitive;
- Contextual judgement – empathy and understanding of what the players are trying to achieve;
- A full understanding of player safety issues, the Law and sanctions related to foul play;
- An appropriate level of physical and mental fitness for the duration of the game including an ability to change pace and keep up with play and make accurate decisions;
- Good positional awareness that will allow the referee to influence players and make credible decisions;
- Awareness of trends in particular where and how often penalties are occurring;
- A good understanding and effective use of advantage, more often than not calling 'advantage scrum/penalty' and 'advantage over';
- An ability to manage players both participating and not participating in set pieces. In particular:
  - Scrum – marking the scrum; understanding what is required at each command, before and after the ball is introduced; ensuring a safe and fair contest; managing collapsed, wheeled scrums; SAFETY;
  - Lineout – knowledge of when a lineout has started and is over/quick throw ins and communicating that to players; awareness of across line offences that affect player safety;
- An ability to manage the breakdown by the timing of arrival, communicating and use of whistle;
- Recognition of when a ruck or maul is formed and the requirements for players forming and entering; a knowledge of when the ruck has ended/maul has successfully/unsuccessfully ended and what action to take and verbal communication to use;
- Consistent and accurate use of primary and secondary signals;
- An ability to exceed MO expectations in some areas;
- An ability to participate in an 'adult conversation' with the MO and display a good level of communication.

## Level 7

At this level the referee will be expected to have real and observable management skills. They may not be fully developed but they will be apparent. They will have all of the L8 skills and competencies and in addition will be able to demonstrate:

- A level of fitness that enables them to keep up with play throughout the match;
- An understanding of the game and ability to recognise changes in team game plans and to adapt their refereeing style to suit;
- Positive, confident body language and controlled appropriate verbal communication when under pressure, particularly when dealing with foul play;
- Contextual judgement and an ability to act with authority or apply a 'light touch' when communicating with players, coaches and officials;
- Ability to acknowledge possible mistakes;
- Ability to assist continuity by communicating appropriately with players;
- whilst play is in progress (encouraging players to stay onside/retreat at kicks, indicating that a ball has gone backwards etc);
- Effective breakdown management throughout the game, accurately identifying the tackler/assist tackler/tackled player by colour and number and having a low tolerance of players who go off their feet;
- Confident set-piece management including:
  - Scrum - appropriate verbal instructions to front row players that indicates a reasonable level of technical knowledge;
  - Lineout – knowledge of requirements of participants/non- participants and use of appropriate communication to ensure compliance (teams delaying formation, forming away from line of touch and walking in, delaying throws, early lifting, distance of receivers/non-throwing hooker);
- Ability to recognise materiality at advantage and to communicate accordingly, recognising the importance of penalties in kickable positions;
- Accurate knowledge of Law relating to foul play and ability to differentiate and willingness to apply appropriate sanctions;
- Ability to recognise, discourage and/or appropriately manage repeat offences/offenders;
- A willingness to accept and discuss assumptions about their performance.

## Level 6

At this level the referee has reach the top of the ladder as far as Society appointments are concerned. As such they should be able to officiate any game appointed by the Society. The major difference between this and L7 is the ability to confidently, comfortably and credibly manage the game. They will display a high level of confidence (not arrogance!) and a clear ability to understand and discuss the game

and their contribution to it. Players and coaches should be able to trust the referee's judgement and expect them to:

- make reliable, consistently accurate decisions;
- be fit enough to get into a position where credibly accurate choices can be taken;
- develop relationships with captains and key players that encourage positive play;
- understand that the game is not about them;

All of the skills and competences shown at L7 apply to L6 referees but there is now an expectation that they will demonstrate them consistently for the duration of the game. They will demonstrate:

- Situational management. This can be observed from the comments/instructions made/given at any point in the game. This can range from specific commands (breakdown - 'leave it red 6 you are off your feet!', maul – 'don't pull them out, red 4 is fine where they are they were the first person there.' Scrum – 'the scrum is going nowhere, the ball's at the back, use it 9'; to a request, ie use of downtime or appropriate moment to advise a captain that their players are getting lazy at the breakdown and asking them to deal with it; or a warning – 'Skipper, that's two penalties in 3 minutes inside the 22. You know what can happen next.'
- An ability to identify the offender at each penalty decision - 'Red 7, not releasing the tackled player;'
- Awareness of penalty patterns, ability to use the information to influence player behaviour and willingness to use an appropriate sanction;
- Judicious, timely use of sanctions (particularly yellow cards) to change negative behaviour;
- Tolerance threshold that matches player/team skill levels so that decisions and communications are made quickly and effectively;
- A mature approach to the post-match debrief and an ability to engage in constructive conversation with players and coaches after the game.

## 10. Match Official Development Reports

It is inevitable that you will want to know how you are progressing and there are a number of ways in which this can happen. There is the feedback provided by players, officials and clubs to you - some of this will inevitably be less than complimentary. Do not be deterred by this, you will also receive compliments. You can begin to establish your own analysis of a game and how you fared. Another situation is when you are seen by a 'Developer or Observer' appointed by the Society to look at how you are progressing. They will report back to the Society by means of a standard report form with a number of grades for various facets of the game. Durham Society referees are graded from level 11 (starter referee) down to level 6 (more experienced referee). Depending on your grade this will decide on what form the 'Developer or Observer' completes. More experienced referees are graded by the area group officials (level 5)

and then by officials appointed by the RFU for level 4 to level 1 (Premiership referee).

A copy of the two society report forms in use are appended and the following is an attempt to provide guidance with regards to the meaning of the grades which will appear on the forms.

## **11. Referee Skills and Competencies Reports by Grade/Level**

A more detailed explanation of what is expected of the referee is included in the following two forms. Form 1 is for newer referees and once they progress to a higher level of match then Form 2 will be used.

[RFU Match Official Development Form 1](#)

[RFU Match Official Development Form 2](#)

### **Match Official Development Report (Form 2) Matrix.**

This is a document to assist the Match Official Developer in providing high quality, constructive developmental feedback in a consistent manner that meets the individual needs of the referee involved. Assists the Match Official Developer in summarising the key strengths and development areas across the key officiating aspects.

[Match Official Development Report \(Form 2\) Matrix](#)

## **12. Serious Injury Report Form**

It is important that any Serious Injury is reported as soon as possible. A serious injury deemed to be when a player is taken to hospital and admitted. However, if in doubt please record details of any injury that concerns you. In this way you will have accurate information to refer to if and when necessary. A link to the appropriate reports/forms is at:

[Referee Society Injury Report Form](#)

## **13. Competition Rules and Regulations**

In order to ensure the Competition Rules and Regulations are the most up to date versions, links to Competition Rules and Regulations by competition organisers will be included here when they are available

- *Durham County Senior Cups*
- [Durham County Youth Cups](#)
- [Candy League Rules](#)
- *Northumberland League Rules*
- [RFU Regulation 15 – Age Grade Rugby](#)

## **14. General Society Information**

### **Society Membership**

There are a number of Membership categories in the society.

To be a Member that is entitled to vote at General Meetings you must be a current full member of the society which requires an Annual Subscription to be paid.

### **Meetings:**

Referees are advised to attend training meetings at all times, and to observe the Society convention of sending apologies for absence, in advance, if unable to attend.

Attendance at meetings is viewed as an essential element of referee development and it is in the interest of all Match Officials to attend. The Grading Committee and General Committee of the Society are concerned that referees should attend so that if required they can demonstrate an up to date fitness to practice.

In addition to the monthly Society training meeting, other meetings, of special interest to particular groups of referees, are organised on both a regular and a more ad hoc basis.

### **Expenses:**

Expenses claims for Match Official duties are made to the treasurer using the Whos the Ref website expenses function.

Any other expenses claims should be made to the Treasurer using the Society expenses claim form.

### **Tickets for International Matches.**

Members of the Society will be circulated with the relevant information at appropriate times, or when it has been received from England Rugby.

The Society receives a small allocation. Whilst every effort is made to obtain members' ticket requirements the Society is governed by the limited allocation.

### **Annual Society Dinner.**

This takes place at a suitable venue during the season. Members are encouraged to attend what is the main social function of the Society.

### **Complaints and constructive ideas.**

If you feel unhappy with anything related to the Society or have positive suggestions about the way in which improvements can be made, contact one of your Referee Representative members of the Referee Committee.

Complaints of a very serious nature should be made in writing and sent to the Hon. Secretary. If they are about the Hon. Secretary, they should be sent to the Chair of the Referee Committee. They will then be presented for the attention and deliberation of the Board.

## 15. BEING A REFEREE - AN AIDE MEMOIRE

### 15.1. Know the Laws

A good referee will *pay due regard to every word*:

- *master the definitions;*
- *visualise the situation;*
- *read and understand the notes on the laws;*
- *join in discussion at Society meetings.*

### 15.2. Know the Game

A good referee will learn the finer points of the game from coaches and players and seek to understand their point of view.

### 15.3. Be Fit

Referees should be fit not only to ensure that they are able to keep up with the game, but for the equally important reason that physical fitness ensures total mental alertness.

### 15.4. Before the Game

Referees should:

- *Check dress - clean shorts and neutral shirt;*
- *correct socks;*
- *clean boots;*
- *2 whistles;*
- *Arrive early at ground;*
- *orientate themselves;*
- *examine playing enclosure for peculiarities, e.g. odd lines, overhanging trees, dead ball areas;*
- *meet team captains;*
- *encourage punctuality;*
- *obtain touch judges;*
- *brief both teams as necessary*
- *remember that refereeing is an art. It is neither a science nor the job of a lawyer, still less that of a policeman. Players and spectators come to enjoy the game, not to watch the referee.*

### 15.5. During the Game

A good referee will:

- *be firm, fair, friendly and approachable;*
- *be cheerful - a wink or smile often defuses a troublesome situation;*
- *be consistent;*
- *be alert, move quickly;*
- *be definite and never hesitate;*
- *look behind and around;*
- *take firm control right from the start of play*
- *avoid gesticulating mannerisms;*
- *play the advantage law;*
- *not slop about;*

- *use signals correctly;*
- *whistle clearly with variations for different occasions;*
- *give short clear reasons for stoppages;*
- *not be sarcastic or frivolous;*
- *use common sense re officials attending injured players.*

### **15.6. Positional Play**

This is an art which can only be acquired by practice and study. There are no detailed rules but the following suggestions are made:

### **15.7. General Play**

A good referee will:

- *always be up with play;*
- *always be on their toes ready to move;*
- *move towards play, not parallel to the touch lines;*
- *operate on in-field side and not get near the touch lines;*
- *avoid looking into the sun;*
- *anticipate moves, understand the game.*

### **15.8. Scrummages**

A good referee will:

- *stand on the same side as scrum half;*
- *after the commands, crouch, bind, set stand 2-3 metres back and slightly to one side of the half-back;*
- *move away from the scrummage after the ball is in to allow a wider view;*
- *stay out of the pass line of 9 and 10;*
- *watch blindside;*
- *follow the ball, move in a U and not take short cuts.*

### **15.9. Rucks and mauls**

A good referee will:

- *be mobile around them;*
- *know where the ball is;*
- *stop them quickly when they are ineffective.;*

### **15.10. Lineouts**

A good referee will:

- *vary their position;*
- *avoid line of touch;*
- *stand on in-goal side in the red zone;*
- *not hinder movement of scrum-half.*

### **15.11. Kicks**

Referees should always:

- *keep ball between them and the majority of players;*
- *follow up all kicks;*
- *move from the mark quickly in case of penalties;*
- *watch for the tap kick;*
- *watch their shadows and other distractions during place kicks;*

- *watch for obstruction, late tackles after a kick, and players within 10 metres of the player waiting to play the ball, and receivers of a kick being taken out illegally in the air.*

#### **15.12. At the Goal Line**

A good referee will:

- *be 1-2 metres in front of play;*
- *watch for dropped goals;*
- *be over the goal line first;*
- *watch for the crucial moment.*

#### **15.13. After the Game**

It is part of the referee's task to:

- *thank the team captains and touch judges;*
- *meet officials and players;*
- *avoid arguments with them;*
- *learn something from every game.*

## **16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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