



The Flag and Whistle
Newsletter of the South Bay Soccer Referee Association
Serving the Soccer Community since 1976



Written by: Warren Howell and Jonny Joseph
 Edited by: Jonny Joseph and Alan Siegel

March 2023

Notes from the Board

Congratulations to two of our SBSRA members for their Cal South recognition:

Mario Moreno
Rookie Referee of the Year



Gabriel Goldsman
Distinguished Citizen of the Year



Please take a moment to congratulate them when you see them next.

A number of playing days and games have been lost due to rain these past few weeks (see Referee Quick Tips below). Most of these games will be rescheduled, so be ready for many games in the following weeks.

This month's Flag and Whistle is a little longer than usual, okay, a lot longer! We include an article that we think many of us will identify with, written by an English referee (no correction of spelling into American) - **Refereeing Football Matches is Difficult, but Football's Toxic Culture makes it Near Impossible**. Enjoy!

We are approaching our annual membership renewal period and soon thereafter we will start another club youth season. While it is months away, time goes quickly (our older members can tell the rest of us all about it) and we anticipate having more games than we can handle comfortably.

Please be reminded that we have a New Member Incentive program whereby you can enjoy a year's membership with no dues payable for any new member you recruit when they pay for their second year of membership. Please start thinking about any new members that you may be able to recruit.

Board of Directors

President: Jonny Joseph **Vice-President:** Steve Morgan **Secretary:** Kiku Annon
Member-At-Large: Stephen Resnick **Assignor:** Gabriel Goldsman



Professionalism

Match Reports

Our referee duties do not end when we blow the final whistle. We usually need to complete a match report. This is mostly in the form of a printed document provided by team managers. We need to be aware of league requirements and ensure we comply with them.

In particular:

SBPSL games, complete the Line-Up Cards with match result, misconduct, and all other information requested. Ensure the names and jersey numbers of carded players are legible. Retain the SBPSL ID card of all players and Managers sent off. Submit completed Line-Up Cards **to John Moody** (jmomoods@verizon.net) **and our Member-At-Large** by email on the same day as the game, by attaching a scan (in PDF format, preferably) or a picture of the report. **Please ensure the report is legible before sending it!** **NOTE** – there are a number of great scanning Apps available for use on smart phones from which one can email the pdf directly to any contact.

In cases which require misconduct reports, members are reminded to send the misconduct reports to our Member-at-Large and the applicable assignor and **not to any leagues**.

For more details about the completion of any match reports and the reporting requirements for all of our leagues, please visit our Competitions page at <https://sbsra.org/competitions>.

Availability and Blocks

All members have an obligation to minimize the number of times we decline games after we are assigned.

As independent contractors, we all are entitled to accept assignments wherever we can get them. However, in fairness to all assignors, Gabriel and Veto here, and others elsewhere, we are all requested to block the days that we are unavailable to the applicable assignor(s) ahead of time.

Choosing which association/league/organization we want to work for on specific days is perfectly fine. However, waiting to see which games you are assigned and then declining the less favorable ones is simply **not acceptable**.

The extra work it creates for the assignor, is more than most of us can imagine. **Please block ahead of time!**



Honesty

Our assignors' jobs are complex, and they spend a significant amount of time assigning games each week. Periodically, we have members turning back games (declining after receiving the assignment) for various reasons. A common reason is games from another assignor that the member prefers. In many of these cases, we learn about the other assignments and know that any reason given for turning back our association's games is not the truth!

This is not acceptable. Please pick up the phone and call the assignor to discuss your situation. They will work with you to make you happy and will not deny you the opportunity to referee a "better game."

Supplemental Reports

Due to ongoing challenges, we continue to provide the following guidance for all members:

Please be reminded that whenever we have serious situations, a supplemental report is required:

- The **USSF Supplemental report form**, on the SBSRA website, must be used (**NOTE – we no longer use the Cal South report form**),
- The report is required to be prepared ASAP, **within 24 hours** for **all serious situations**, including:
 - **Red cards;**
 - **Serious injuries** (paramedics called, player taken to emergency room/hospital), attended to by the trainer; or,
 - **Game terminations**, etc.,
- Take a **copy of the Match Report** to assist you with preparing the USSF incident report,
- Use **simple language** and include the **facts of the incident** only:
 - **When** – date and time, point in the match;
 - **Where** – venue and specific location on the field;
 - **Who** was involved? The player's name, number and team; and,
 - **What** happened? Don't speculate, just note what you saw.

Note, there is no "**Why**." It is not our job to speculate on why someone did what they did, and we should not include a diagnosis of the injury, even if we have the ability to do so.

- **Do not use abbreviations**, only use **language in the Laws of the Game** to describe the applicable misconduct.
- **Call the Assignor**, after any game that requires a supplemental report, so he is informed when the league calls him.
- **Submit the supplemental report** to our Member-At-Large (MAL) and the applicable Assignor (who assigned the game) who will review the report and possibly suggest edits. **Do not submit supplemental reports to any leagues.**
- Following submission of the incident report to the MAL, please call him/her to ensure it has been received if you have not received an **acknowledgement of receipt within 2 hours**.
- **Following review and approval** of the report by the MAL and Assignor, the **Assignor submits the final report** to the applicable league.



- **If you have kept ID cards** (which may not be required for all red cards), the card(s), together with copies of the match report and supplemental report must be sent to the applicable league administrator **by the end of the first business day (likely Monday)** following the game.
- The **importance of this process** cannot be stressed strongly enough! These reports are really needed by the leagues and everything we do needs to **reflect on our professionalism** as individuals and as a referee association.

Training Opportunities

The following training opportunities are coming up and all members are encouraged to attend as many of them as you are able.

CORE Training at North High

The next training is scheduled for March 21, 2023.

Please sign up any time for future courses, at no cost, at

<https://cysa.affinitysoccer.com/eventmanager/public/calendarlist.asp?calguid=&eventtab=current>

What is CORE?

Center of Referee Education (CORE) is a program established by the Cal South State Referee Committee (SRC). It is open to all USSF certified referees. It consists of physical trainings & lectured meetings for referees who are ambitious to rise to the elite level of Cal South refereeing.

Referees attending this event are expected to come prepared with material for physical fitness (i.e.: tennis shoes, whistle, cards, flags) as well as material for classroom (i.e.: IFAB Laws of the Game, Considerations for Match Analysis, paper and pen).

While these trainings are for referee self-development, please note that Regional or Grassroots Elite certification or recertification require referees to attend at least 5 CORE trainings per year. The same requirement applies to instructors and assessors.

New Referee Training at North High

Do you want a year's free membership dues of SBSRA? Do you know of anyone who wants to be a referee?

Please let them know of the next opportunity to attend Cal South's next New Referee Training in March at North High School at the same time as the CORE training.

Ensure they include your name on their SBSRA New Member Application,

<https://sbsra.org/association/nma/> so you can benefit from our New Member Initiative (NMI) program.



New SBSRA Member Training

Date: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 (if we have sufficient number of signups)

Time: 6:03 pm (1 hour before monthly membership meeting)

This training is required for all new SBSRA members to become full members of our association. All referees, both those new to refereeing and those with prior referee experience are required to attend so we can share all the details of how to maximize your enjoyment and experience as a referee in **our organization**.

We require a **minimum of 10 new members** to accept the Arbiter invitation to present the class, please accept the Arbiter invitation at your earliest opportunity to do so.

Cal South Monthly In-Service Webinar

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER FOR OR TO VIEW THESE WEBINARS](#)

Please be reminded that after viewing the presentation, live or recorded, one must take the Review (Quiz) to receive In-Service Training credit.

Other Cal South Offerings - 2023 - National Referee/ Regional to National Upgrade only

Candidates need to register for your selected courses on the Cal South Referee Website under the "Classes & Clinics offered" tab:

(<https://cysa.affinitysoccer.com/eventmanager/public/calendarlist.asp?calguid=&eventtab=current>).

Fitness Test - (National Referee/ Regional to National Upgrade only)

Saturday July 8, 2023

Hawaiian Gardens 8:00 am - 12:00 pm

Monthly Referee Quick Tip

Do we ever referee in the rain?

Southern California is not known for having many rain days in a year (this year is a major exception, of course) but it happens. The games will often be cancelled due to rain as field owners are concerned about the damage that can be done when games are played on wet fields.

Anyone who has ever gotten drenched while dressed knows it can be most uncomfortable to move while wearing wet clothing. So here are a few tips of how to deal with rain while refereeing:

- 1) If you like bringing your referee bag to the field, bring a large garbage bag (unused) to put around the bag to keep it dry,
- 2) Wear a water proof/resistant jacket or sweat suit jacket underneath your referee jersey,
- 3) Consider bringing extra socks and a change of shoes should the rain stop.

Do you have a quick tip to share? If so, please email it to President@sbsra.org.



Two Person (Whistle) Referee System

IFAB and USSF prohibit the use of the two-person referee system. While many of us may use this system for high school and middle school games, it may not be used in any USSF-sanctioned games that we do. If any doubt, please **DO NOT USE THE TWO-PERSON REFEREE SYSTEM** unless you have been assigned by one of our Assignors to be on a two-man crew.

Conversely, if you have been assigned as a **TWO-PERSON REFEREE CREW** for **non-USSF-sanctioned games**, please honor the assignment regardless of what your assigned partner may say. If there is an issue, please contact the appropriate assignor, Gabriel for weekend games and Veto for weekday games.

From the Office of the Treasurer

If you believe that you were paid in excess of \$600 in 2022 you should have received a Form 1099 by e-mail. If you did not receive one, please request it by email from Treasurer@sbsra.org. Please be reminded that regardless of amount received and whether you received a Form 1099 or not, all income is reportable on Schedule C in your Federal income tax return.

As provided for in the SBSRA bylaws, we invited nominations for the vacant, elected board position of Treasurer at our prior membership meeting and Bruce Ashton was nominated. We will vote on the replacement at the March membership meeting with nominations possible up to the time when the vote occurs.

Please be reminded:

- 4) **Home/Mailing Address Changes** - Provide the Treasurer with your change of address at the same time that you make the change in Arbiter,
- 5) **Checks** – please cash these in a timely manner,
- 6) **Forfeits** - Notify the applicable Assignor and the Treasurer within 24 hours of forfeited games. This way we can ensure the applicable league is billed for the ref fees that would have been paid on the field and that the referees are paid the fees owed to them,
- 7) Please submit your W-9 form <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf> to the Treasurer. Everyone is required to do so by Federal law. We will include this as a requirement to include the completed document in our Returning Membership Application process for the 2023 – 2024 season.

Monthly Membership Meetings

To maintain our high standards of refereeing, the Association provides two vehicles to share information and instruction with our members – this *Flag & Whistle* monthly newsletter and our monthly membership meetings. Please try to attend the meeting and read the newsletter every month - this is how we share important information with all of our members.



The Flag and Whistle

March 2023

Approval of Minutes

Included below are the General Membership Meeting Minutes from our prior meeting for Membership approval at our next meeting.

Next Meeting

The next Monthly Membership Meeting will take place on **Tuesday, March 28, 2023**, starting at 7:03 pm at our regular location in the North High School Cafeteria.

We look forward to seeing you there!



SBSRA General Membership Meeting Minutes Tuesday, February 28, 2023

1. Call to order - meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm.
2. Approval of January 2023 Meeting Minutes - motion made by Craig Breitman, seconded by Barry Giberman and approved by acclamation.
3. Cal South Training:
 - a) Gabriel Goldsman brought up what could/should be done if a child is wandering on the field when a game is going on as recently experienced by one of our referee teams at State Cup. When this occurred, the AR tried to gently move the child away and a confrontation with a coach ensued. Various suggestions of how to prevent and address the situation followed. GG concluded with the recommendation that the AR should try to get the attention of the center referee and let the center referee take care of it.
 - b) GG then referred to a SBPSL game. He said a referees' job is to try and end the game with all players still in the game. A player was shown a yellow card for dissent and the player immediately expressed some further dissent. Suggestions were made to allow the player to stay in the game by letting him know he was on thin ice anyway. GG said it is probably best not to be too quick to show second yellows for trivial offences. Allow the player to be upset so long as it isn't an outburst that is personal, profane and public. Possibly try to elicit help to control and deescalate by appealing to the manager/coach or team captain.
 - c) A video was shown and GG asked about pregame instructions to deal with the sideline blowing up. One suggestion was to ensure there are at least 10 yards between opposing coaches and/or spectators on the sideline before starting the game. We usually don't have a fourth official. Instruct the trail AR to try to keep track of what happened, especially after a goal or other possible flash point event. If a coach is out of his technical area, that is a yellow card offense and if he deliberately goes into the other coaching area, the LOTG require a red card. GG said we need to handle the sidelines as best we can, using cards if need be. GG said if possible, talk to the coaches to try and keep them in the game (especially if they have no back-up). Someone brought up that the youth leagues need to help us with management but at the end of the day, the referee has to do what they need to.
 - d) GG spoke about the difference between Stopping a Promising Attack (SPA) vs Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO). A video was shown which appeared to be a DOGSO (player fouled in mid field by last defender). GG pointed out that the age and speed of the players needs to be taken into consideration when deciding whether the foul is SPA (yellow card) or DOGSO (red card).
4. President's Report
 - a) Board Meeting - February 2023
 - i. Accident Insurance renewal is being processed, we continue to use Sadler brokerage which specializes in sports coverage. This has enabled us to enjoy significant savings of approximately 20% on the premiums the last few years. We will be switching carrier through Sadler to ensure we have coverage for adult and youth matches and to take advantage of even lower rates per covered referee.
 - ii. 1099s were issued last month, please let us know if you expected to receive one and did not.



- b) League News
 - i. LA Galaxy Futsal - Rosters are now needed for adult games, no write-ins allowed, before the game can start.
 - ii. Coast Soccer League (CSL) Spring Season - starts this weekend. Ref fees are the same as the past fall season and have been updated on our website.
 - iii. SOCAL Spring Season - beginning the weekend of March 25 until May 14, with the first two weekends in April off, so it's over 6 weekends.
- c) Other - Richard Bronshvag and Firas Eid introduced themselves as new members.
- 5. Vice President's Report
 - a) ROL Update - 123 on 2023, 21 members still not on. Technically are not members as ROL is a requirement for membership.
- 6. Secretary's Report
 - a) SBSRA Membership Report
 - i. Full Members - 93
 - ii. Probationary Members - 30
 - iii. Members Not on ROL - 21
 - iv. Honorary Members - 2
- 7. Assignor's Report:
 - a) Cal South Update - Vegas Tournament with 50 Cal South referees and seven from SBSRA were observed for advancing to Regionals, where 25 referees from all associations will be selected.
 - b) Game Expectations for the remainder of the first quarter of 2023 - some tournaments, SOCAL State Cup, Elite Academy, PSL, ECNL all starting up. When asking for availability, which is done to determine how many games/fields we can accept, GG does not need to know if you are NOT available. When requesting referees for specific games, please don't say you are available if you are assigned to a game at a similar time already.
 - c) CORE Training - February training took place, this will continue. GG hopes to bring MLS trainers next month.
- 8. Member-At-Large Report
 - a) Supplemental Reports - Please send them to the Member-at-Large, Stephen Resnick and NOT to the leagues. These reports need to be reviewed internally first and must be sent from one point of contact for the leagues.
- 9. Proposed By-Law Amendment - the proposed by-law amendment language and reasons for the proposal as provided by the proposer were displayed for all members to read. Responding to a question as to the background that prompted this proposal, Jonny Joseph opined that it may have been due to the only contract that has been entered into for longer than two years over the past 4^{1/2} years that he has been on the Board. SBS, was a customer once, came back to SBSRA and SBS agreed to the SBSRA proposed 30% increase from what they had been paying their prior referee group but asked for a five year contract. The Board had discussed the deal points requested by SBS vigorously on multiple occasions and negotiated all terms as best it could. While the length of the agreement was recognized as not being ideal, there were various positives that outweighed the negatives and the Board had approved the draft agreement before it was signed. Various members expressed their thoughts with most stating that the Board is elected and entrusted to conduct the business of the Association with external parties. Elections are held every year, with two members up for election this June and the other three the following June. If the Membership is dissatisfied with the Board there is an annual opportunity to elect new Board Members. Members are free to decline assignments for leagues if they are dissatisfied with the referee fees paid by those leagues. A hand vote was taken, the proposal was not approved.



The Flag and Whistle

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10. Board Position Nominations - Treasurer - Warren Howell nominated Bruce Ashton, Veto Galati seconded the motion. The nomination was closed and the vote will take place next month, as prescribed by the by-laws.
11. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.



Refereeing Football Matches is Difficult, But Football's Toxic Culture Makes it Near Impossible

<https://layo-91.medium.com/refereeing-football-matches-is-difficult-but-footballs-toxic-culture-makes-it-near-impossible-f3df547c433d>



A bit of context...

I am a Junior County Referee (Level 7), the lowest level of England's football referees. I am qualified to referee youth football and amateur football outside of the football pyramid. However, I can act as an assistant referee at 'Supply League' level.

I first trained to be a referee in 2011 while at university. Back then, all you needed to pass was a desk exam based on a 'Laws of The Game' test and a "what would your decision be here?" video quiz. I got a mark of 98/100 in the test and caused a bit of a stir. My examiners had never seen a 100/100 before and they thought I might've been on course for it. The two 'incorrect' answers were in the video analysis section and from my recollection, they were two subjective decisions and both my answers and the instructor's answers could be "sellable" (*Football's 'Laws of The Game' are open to interpretation and provide scope for discretion. For example, the difference between a 'careless' challenge, a 'reckless' challenge, or the use of 'excessive force', are often subjective. More on that later*).

Unfortunately, football isn't played at a desk. I soon found out that I wasn't a great referee, to put it mildly. I was prone to getting *flustered* on the pitch and my 'game management' was poor. Back then, I was a far less confident communicator and I lacked authority on the pitch. I only ever officiated campus-league university games and after university, I dropped out of the system.

In autumn 2021, I went and got my qualification again. As I had previously been a referee, I didn't need to go through all the lessons again and I just had to turn out for the practical exam. It was a breeze and despite an extreme variation in the quality of the trainees... everyone passed. Due to a possible administrative error, I never had to resit my laws of the game exam.



I'll be the first to admit that I am not a superb referee ¹. My knowledge of the intricacies of the laws of the game, probably isn't as tight as it should be, particularly regarding the many law changes since 2011. However, I do want to get better and progress and I have applied for promotion to Level 6 this year. My overall goal is to become a Level 5, Senior County Referee (the highest level within county/amateur football). Beyond that, it starts becoming a more serious pursuit.

Just last month...

I was an assistant referee in a match between AFC Kumazi Strikers and Lambeth All Stars in the 'Sunday Super League'. The Sunday Super League is a breakaway standalone Sunday league made up of 'YouTube teams' in London. As their games are filmed, you get a lot of players and coaches acting up for the camera. However, as a referee, those cameras also offer a little bit of protection for you... As no player wants their abuse or their assault, caught on videotape.

This match went as smoothly as anything and the referee in the middle seemed to be taking it in his stride, despite him being a relative novice like me. However, in the final minute, a player on the losing side got frustrated with a decision and completely lost his cool. I didn't hear what he said, but I understand he called the referee a "fucking c**t". The referee, quite rightly, sent him off.

Upon the final whistle this player stormed onto the pitch to confront the referee. He stood close to the referee's face, insulted and threatened him. The referee stepped back and tried to remain cool, explaining to the player that he cannot talk to him like that and his actions will be reported. Both I and the other assistant, stood by our colleague's side, offering our presence as support. The player told us we had "10 minutes to leave... (or else...)". Most of his team mates were embarrassed and they apologised for this man's behaviour.

To be honest, I did dwell on this episode a little bit. I didn't leave the pitch upset, or at all fearful for myself or my colleague. But I did wonder how a man could react in such a violent, almost, unhinged manner, because of a misallocated throw-in and then being sent off? I'd seen a similar outburst once before, during a youth game and I could sense that the kid had 'stuff going on at home' as we'd say, euphemistically. This lad clearly had 'stuff going on'.

And that's what I took away from the episode. I *accepted* the fact that once in a while, you're going to come across a young man with a propensity to completely break down if challenged by an authority figure.

However, I now believe that framing this incident like this, plays into the "rotten apple" theory on institutional problems. This theory suggests problematic behaviour within institutions are isolated incidents caused by individual 'bad people'. The conclusion is often that to solve the problem, all you must do is root out and get rid of these bad individuals. Remove the bad eggs, and then the rest of the team will be a joy to work with, a good bunch of lads, etc.

¹ My match control needs work (clearly) but I am a proficient assistant referee and was awarded a minor cup final as an assistant in my debut season back in officiating.



However, my experience with a match this Sunday has me reflecting on this view. I do not think grassroots football is filled with “bad apples”. Instead, I believe there is a culture that normalises intimidation and abuse of referees.

Our culture, makes good, decent people, think it is ok for them to bully, intimidate and abuse officials in grassroots football.

AFC Wilgar vs Selhurst FC

Fail to prepare is preparing to fail, as they say, and to be honest, my prep for this match wasn't great.

Take any Sunday League game on any given Sunday and there will be banter among the players, in the warm-up or during the game, about their hangovers. But I am here being paid to do a job, so admitting you had one or two vinos the night before, isn't really as acceptable. I'm a junior county referee and this wasn't a world cup final, but my prep wasn't great nonetheless.

A warm-up from the referee gives the players a hint that this bloke is taking it seriously and is prepared and professional. I arrived too late to do my warm-up and looking back, this might've set a tone that wasn't serious, that I could be pushed around. As with most Sunday League games, I do not have any assistants to offer support and 'running the line' will be done by members of each club's respective substitutes or coaching staff.

I will run through some of the key moments of this game, hoping to reflect on my own mistakes while also giving readers insight into just how hard refereeing is. I also hope to offer an insight into the toxic atmosphere that is all too common in grassroots English football.

Two themes will run throughout this summary, 'game management' and 'playing to players' expectations'. As a new referee it is **drilled** into you that you must play to players' expectations. If you don't, you will surprise, and therefore, anger and frustrate players. We are coached as referees to treat footballers as ignorant, irrational children who cannot control their emotions. At a grassroots level, our training is focused not around the question, “how can we, as referees, facilitate flowing entertaining football?”, but instead, “how can we prevent a mass brawl?”

The opening ten minutes are frantic. It's what you'd expect from a competitive cup fixture. I notice that several lads are going **hard** into challenges early on — “letting their opponent know they're there” as they say. They know that they unlikely to get cautioned in the early stages (leniency from a referee is 'expected' early on) so they are taking this opportunity to be very aggressive in their challenges in the hope they can intimidate their opponents.

All the challenges are hard but fair. In an academy game, or even in a game where I was feeling more confident, I would've tried to penalise the first of these heavy challenges — “Yes you got the ball, but I'm not having you use that much force. Calm it.” But I knew these lads would go ballistic if I did that, as it is expected that going to ground to tackle and using force in ball-winning challenges, are fair game in Sunday League. *And remember, if you pick one up for it... they're going to be calling for a free-kick after every slide tackle, no matter how clean.* So I let it slide.



20 minutes in. As soon as the first tackle goes in that's a stonewall caution, I give it. The tackles fly in all game, but I think I've successfully sent the message that you cannot go to ground and not take any of the ball and get away with it.

30 minutes in. A heated exchange. A Wilgar midfielder is being held and is then tripped as he breaks clear. I am *late* blowing my whistle because I want to see if the Wilgar player can maintain possession. I blow my whistle when I see that his touch is heavy after he's tripped and he's about to lose possession. In frustration at being tripped and losing possession, the Wilgar player is late into a challenge onto the now loose ball (he stays on his feet but kicks out, *late*). My mistake here is that the Wilgar player was in his own half, with his back to goal, I should have blown-up as soon as he was held. At a higher-level of football, you want to hold off on the whistle as good footballers are much better at maintaining possession after unlawful pressure (a tug/drip etc) and they will get frustrated if you *blow* and stop them playing when they're able to. My first error here was blowing a whistle *a second too late*.

Now the kick out. It happens in a blink of an eye and I have little idea if he kicked, or stamped. I think it is the former. *There are no replays, no slow-mo's. You must make a call based on an instant moment.* At professional level, if a late kick like that catches a player, it's a stonewall caution. But I know I've caused this clash. I know right now cautioning him will not be expected, and therefore he will get furious if I do it. **He won't understand** that I was delaying my whistle to see if he could break free from being held and to see if there was an advantage.

But now Selhurst are aggrieved because this lad just caught one of their players. There is a bit of pushing and shoving between the two players, but thankfully it blows over. *Game management, game management, game management.* Delay a whistle for a second too long and you've set off a chain reaction that has caused a coming-together and the *temperature* of the game to rise. *Fine margins.*

35 minutes in. My first howler. On the edge of the box, the Wilgar striker is being held and impeded by a Selhurst defender. I wait for a moment to see if the striker will break free and turn him. It looks like he's going nowhere, so I blow my whistle. As I am blowing my whistle, the defender lets go and the striker rolls him, getting onto the loose ball. He sets himself and as my lips leave the steel, he rifles into the bottom corner. I am mortified. The goal won't count. My whistle had gone before he struck his shot.

Lesson learnt. If a player is being held on the halfway line and going backwards, just blow-up. If an attacking player is held on the edge of the box... wait, wait and wait.. until you know there is no chance whatsoever of an advantage. Because stuff like this happens.

I literally, hold my hands up. I apologise. Wilgar's players are furious. They surround me but then consciously back off. The resulting freekick is comfortably saved.

44 minutes in. A Wilgar forward breaks free into the box and is one-on-one with the keeper. He rushes his shot due to the onrushing keeper and he pulls it wide. However, the keeper, despite attempting to (somewhat) pull out from his smother, absolutely clatters the striker to



the floor. He's late. *Very late*. Anywhere else on the pitch and this is the most obvious foul you'll ever see.

Yet. In football, it is for some reason very rare to award a penalty due to a foul which takes place after *a shot has been released*. The laws say it's still a penalty. But because penalties are so game-changing in football, we often place an arbitrary higher bar on penalty-worthy fouls and even if a striker is decapitated in the penalty box... it's fine if they've already taken their shot.

I give the penalty. In part, because I think it is the correct interpretation of the laws of the game. *I am being bold, decisive*. And secondly, semi-consciously, I know this is my chance to "level things up" after I took a goal away from Wilgar. I have been trained not to "level things up" like this. But I can't help it.

Selhurst's left-back loses it over my decision. I've gone against the player's expectations. Screaming close to my face, he questions my decision. I think I explain it fairly well to him. As we line-up for the penalty, I know if this goes in, it will raise the temperature of the game even further. It is saved, and I am actually relieved.

Half-time: Using google, I double check the laws on sin bins as I know I might need to use it in the second half. I also check the laws preventing a player from the attacking team being less than 1 yard from a '**wall**' of three or more men. This had come up in the first half. *There are so many laws we must be on top of*. Before we kick off, the Selhurst lad who screamed in my face after my penalty decision, comes over to apologise for his conduct ².

55th minute. The Selhurst full-back is bursting down the wing and entering the final third, but the Wilgar full back goes over to cover. Selhurst's winger has the pace on him, so the Wilgar defender gets very tight to him and starts to tug and hold him, preventing him from turning him and breaking free with the ball. It's not egregious, but I see the holding. I wait to see if the Selhurst player can break free and maintain possession, but instead, he stumbles and knocks the ball out of play. I blow up for the free-kick. Wilgar are bemused, "he didn't even appeal ref?!!" Appealing is important in football, as minor holding, tugging or tripping is often allowed to slide unless the player on the receiving end of it, appeals (usually, by throwing their arms in the air or gesturing). It is allowed to slide because we play to **player's expectations**. Here I got the right decision, but broke from expected norms. Hence more questioning of me. I think I handle it well. "He was getting pulled and held. I don't know why he didn't appeal, but it's a foul. Free-kick."

65th minute. Another cock-up by me. A Wilgar defender clears it but I hear and see it clip a Selhurst winger before going out for a throw-in. The linesman's signals that it's a Selhurst throw, but it's in my quadrant of the pitch and I am in a more credible position. I go to signal with my linesman but as I do, a Wilgar player goes "oi ref, that's ours". Stupidly, I say "Yes, I heard a nick". Ah crap... it's Wilgar's throw. In that split moment, I've just given it away that I

² Moments like this are appreciated. It's quite common for lads to apologise after a game and it is appreciated. On the flip-side, nothing niggles more than a player who continues to give you stick even after the game is over.



disagree with my linesman. And as I am in the more credible position to give it and referee's call is final, I change my signal — Wilgar throw. Cue outrage and players spitting fury at me (including my 'assistant' who storms onto the pitch to scream at me). Changing my mind like this, has made me look weak. Also, they feel like I am undermining "their linesman".

75th minute: "Club linos, eh?". Refereeing football matches with two assistants is easier. At grassroots level, we have partial players/coaches/fans "assisting" you with throw ins and offsides. They usually get 'busy' — i.e. they start calling throw-ins that you, as the ref, are far closer to and should be calling. This is a nightmare and I am often willing to overrule them if I think they're brazenly cheating.

A through-ball is played to a Selhurst forward. I am 10 yards or so behind him and angled slightly to one side. To me, I can see that the closest centre-half to him is deeper than him when the ball is played. Using his pace, he gets away and scores. 4–0 to Selhurst. The flag goes up. It's not egregious, but I think the assistant is mistaken. I overrule it. Cue more fury "what's the point of us even having a lino, ref?!" I discuss this incident with my referee development coach after the game. He says at 3–0 up I should've just have accepted the incorrect flag. It's unlikely to change the result, after all. We're coached to avoid *controversy*, which means we avoid going against player's expectations. We do this to *protect ourselves* from 'stick'.

85th minute: Another close offside call going against a Wilgar forward. But I go with the linesman this time. Cue more fury, again. I have a hunch the lino has got it wrong, but I am about 40 yards behind the action and in no way in a credible position to call this. *The player claim they want consistency, but they're wilfully choosing not to understand the differing context of the each respective decision.*

89th minute: A shanked clearance sales over the corner flag off the pitch. A swirling ball, 20 feet in the air, has crossed off the pitch just one side of the corner flag. It's my side of the pitch (not the linesman's) so my call to make. I give a corner. Cue fury from the Wilgar defence. *I might've got it wrong but 'come on, this is so hard to tell', I think to myself.* But one thing I know is that once I've given a decision, I can't change my mind. Now, in hindsight, if I was unsure, I should've chosen to give a far less threatening throw-in, rather than corner. Less *controversy* that way. This is an incredibly difficult marginal call, yet I am still called "fucking useless" by a Wilgar defender. 5 minutes left. I can't be bothered to sin bin or caution. I just want this over with now.

91st minute: I raise my hand for an indirect freekick due to an offside. I am tired. The freekick is taken short and in a momentary lapse of concentration, I keep my hand up in the air. A cry from the bench comes out "put your hand down you Nazi c**t". This is meant to be banter. I have a moustache and my arm is raised. But it knocks me. *Such mockery and derision.* I feel ganged up on. I feel bullied.

Final whistle: Relief. Most of the players shake my hand, say thanks and move on. Wilgar's stand-in goalkeeper comes over to tell me that I am an awful referee and that he won't even shake my hand after *that* performance today. He will later eyeball me as he walks off the pitch, shaking his head. After the game, I consider walking by him and telling him "I wasn't the only



one who had a shit game". But it will just escalate things. I am the one being paid to be here and unlike these players, I need to be professional. Deep down, I want to call him a disrespectful c**t. But I keep my head down and leave swiftly, as I don't want any more grief.

Reflections

Football players are crafty.

Throughout the game I received comments such as "you div", "you idiot". My appearance was made fun of "you look like a Guess Who character", and I was mocked for wearing glasses "no wonder you can't see shit". When I'm called "a fucking idiot" or "a c**t" it's muttered, at just a volume that makes it tricky to tell who said it and offers a bit of plausible deniability for the culprit.

Sin bins were recently brought into lower league football in an attempt to tackle dissent. However, there remains a lot of bravado in the referee community about when these should be used. One more senior ref's line was to tell players "he doesn't accept the two-Cs", meaning c**t or cheat. The suggestion being, that's his line. Sin-binning players for lesser offences, such as mocking the fact I need to wear glasses, or for just calling me "a div" is seen as weak from me (*am I soft or summit?*), and two, it will go against **the player's expectations**. Throughout the game I was fearful that a sin bin would just bring more grief on me. In any context, it would be a 'key match decision', a controversy, an excuse for more stick.

The players were clever in that they knew how to stay on the right side of a sin bin. In my opinion, the Selhurst player who shouted close to my face about the penalty, was actually just frustrated and perplexed. While he did rant and raise his voice, he didn't denigrate me or insult me. Personally, it didn't cut me like the insults did. As he shouted at me, Wilgar players said "he can't talk to you like that ref!" Players say stuff like this all the time - not in an effort to call out an opponent's disrespect, but to undermine you. To highlight your weakness for "taking it" and being too weak to sin bin or caution for dissent.

For most of the game, I had a mental note on two Selhurst players who had 'been late' into tackles early on in the game. They were not cautioned due to the location/context of the tackle (they were not during a counter attack, for example), and the fact it was early on and because they stayed on their feet. I am watching them, knowing that if they do it again, I'll caution them. But I also know, that in this game, any decision to caution someone will bring more abuse and hostile-questioning of me. I spend the entire game on edge, knowing whatever I do, I am going to get shouted at, questioned and insulted. I cannot referee well in this climate. Even when I call perfectly acceptable decisions, I am berated for not *blowing my whistle loud enough*.

This climate leads to distractions (for example, me dwelling on errors), it leads to hesitation, it leads to errors. And this in turn leads to more abuse. It is a cycle that leads to bad games and bad officiating.



The problem is cultural

I don't think every player at Wilgar AFC is a c**t. Man to man, they're probably alright, most people are. However the club embodied a wider toxic culture that exists in grassroots football. A culture where being a 'shithouse' is a cheeky badge of honour, where being a 'club linesman' means a chance to slyly cheat for your team, where abusing and intimidating referees is not only normalised, but is seen as good gamesmanship.

The goal of "influencing the ref" is seen at the highest level of the game. From my limited experience of refereeing higher level football, you get more 'questioning' and less direct insults — "what was your thinking behind that one ref, eh?" But the motive is the same, it's about challenging the referee's authority, forcing them to second guess themselves, to doubt themselves... in the hope this will somehow play to your advantage.

Most of us consume football in large stadiums and on TV. Hence our obsession with viewing dissent as players "crowding the ref". If supporters could hear how referees were actually spoken to (at least at a grassroots level), I think they'd be shocked. There are now trials on allowing grassroots referees to wear [body cameras](#). I think this is a good step, as cameras might make player's think twice before assaulting referees. They might also allow referees more opportunities to share their experience to those outside the game, and say, look what we put up with?

Writing this blog has triggered me to reflect on my own behaviour on the football field. I can hand on heart say I've never directly insulted a referee. However, I am prone to letting my exasperation show. Common exclamations include, "fuck sake" or "fucking hell", followed by "how many times ref?!" when I feel like an offender is getting away with dirty or cynical play. I also have a propensity to question officials when I get frustrated, "surely that's a yellow, ref?"

Just look at this [footage](#) of a rugby game between Stade Francais and Connacht last year. "Fucking hell. I got the fucking ball" was a second yellow card and a sending off offence. My behaviour is very mild as a footballer, but it probably wouldn't be acceptable on the rugby pitch.

One day, perhaps this approach would be the norm in football. One day, perhaps football referees will be respected like they are in rugby.

My hopes with this blog

Firstly, I hope I've effectively shown [just how difficult](#) it is being a referee. You need to understand and interpret 17 laws, each with a long list of subclauses. You need 360 degree vision and to always position yourself to be in the optimum position to see the ball, but not interfere with play. Crucially, you need to "manage" 22 people in a hyper-pressurised setting.

The subtleties of body language, of communication, even down to the tone of your whistle, are used to try and shape the game. Why do you need to shape or manage the game? Because we have a contact sport, where people are at risk and can feel vulnerable. Being hurt in a tackle, or the fear of being hurt in a tackle, understandably upsets people. And this contact sport is played



in a highly competitive environment (no matter at what level), and within a culture of hyper-masculinity and bravado, where being a c**t to a stranger just because they're on another team, is normalised. Within this reality of the sport, and within this *culture* of the sport, football matches are always liable to 'kick off'. **Our job is facilitate the game, but also to prevent violence.**

Finally, I also hope I give an insight into the actual reality of football's "disrespect" culture. Our culture of disrespect is perpetuated by players, coaches, parents, spectators and even pundits. The road to changing our culture in football will be a long one.

In my opinion, the FA needs to learn from schooling. The traditional way of tackling bullying is to admonish the individual bully. It is to punish and remove those *bad apples*. But I don't think that works. There is a body of evidence that suggests that tackling "bystander apathy" is the key to tackling bully. Essentially, ['bullies tend to behave aggressively to attain higher status and are reinforced by onlookers' apathy or encouragement, and that when bystanders do intervene bullying tends to stop.'](#)

I believe that to prevent the most egregious examples of bullying, abuse, and violence, we need an awareness campaign that stresses each footballer's responsibility to call out their own teammates. If your teammate or your friend is violent to another player, or purposefully instigates and escalates conflict on the pitch, or is abusive to a referee, you need to call it out. You should not let that slide.

In short, we don't just need bravery from referees to tackle dissent or abuse. We don't need to just throw-out a few bad apples from clubs. What we need is a cultural change that means when a player or coach calls the referee, "fucking useless", "a Nazi c**t", or attempts to undermine their decisions, it is their team mates who stamp it out. ³

³ There was one lad at Wilgar AFC, who seemed to be their standout player, did challenge his own teammates and ask them to focus on their own game and stop constantly moaning at me. "Stop acting like children". Fair play to that lad. But the fact that he stood out, shows what an issue we have.

Warren's Howellers and Some Things to Think About

Definition of a Fan (American Football Referee Jim Tunney)

"My definition of a fan is the kind of guy who will scream at you from the 60th row of the bleachers because he thinks you missed a marginal holding call in the center of the interior line, and then after the game will not be able to find his car in the parking lot."

You Make the Call!



Some Games Are Like That (Attributed to Holiday Mathis)

"You'll find yourself in circumstances that engage the senses and invite you to be fully present in the moment."

Quote of the Month

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment" Buddha

----- Keep 😊 Smiling! -----