

December 2024 - Issue 706

Chairman's foreword



Well, the winter months have truly now closed in on us with the arrival of Storm Bert. Fortunately, the South East of England seems to have come off relatively lightly compared to other areas where pitch flooding is causing the not only the absence of football but potentially the future financial wellbeing of clubs due to a lack of income from spectators. I hope that your season has continued without too many weather impediments.

Assessing pitch conditions remains an important part of our job as referees. I would refer you back to Steve Maguire's article on this subject which was published in the Ray last season.

This month Geoff Turner has kindly organized Phil Crossley as our guest speaker, and it promises to be an interesting meeting. All his details are included elsewhere in this edition of the Ray. We are planning to have the meeting more as a Question and Answer Session where, time permitting, you will be able to put your questions to Phil. We have pre-prepared some questions to get it started – but your input to the evening is important and if you have a topic that you want to raise then please get it to me before the beginning of the meeting. My email address is dnorman54@gmail.com.

I hope you will be able to make the December meeting, but if not, then may I take the opportunity to thank you for your support during this year and wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

David Norman

Chair

Report of the November Guest Speakers – Steve Oakey and Jamie Beal

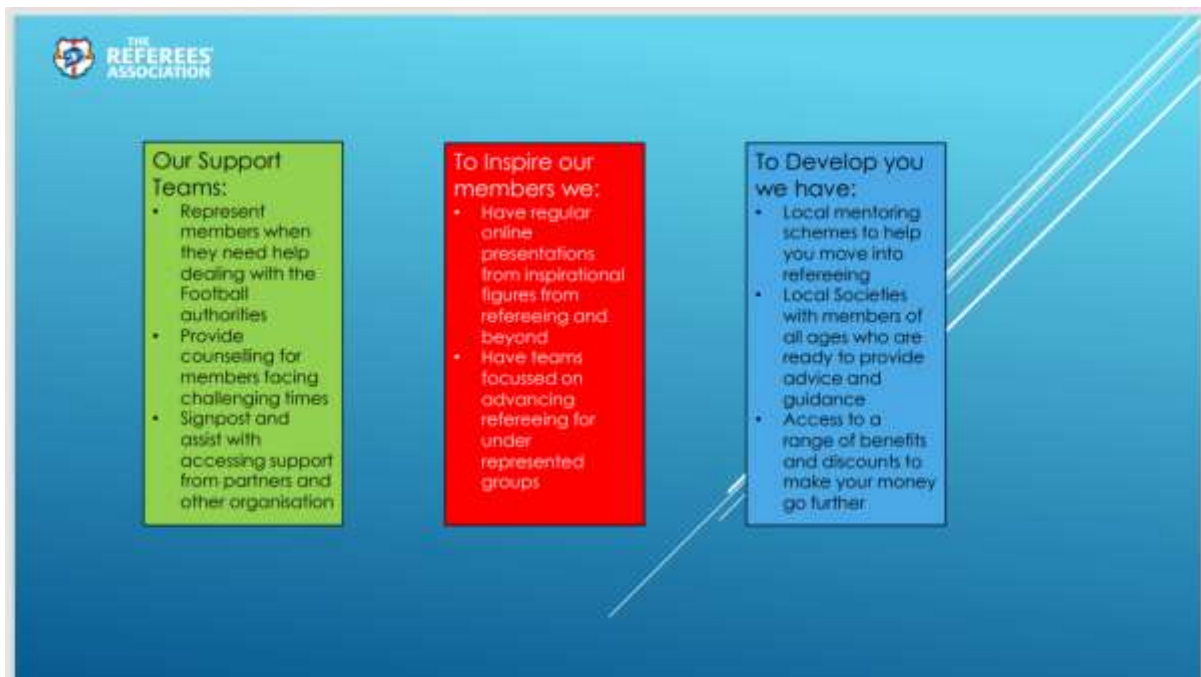
Although our scheduled Guest Speaker, Harry Lennard, was unable to join us we were fortunate to have a distinguished visitor who agreed to speak on the evening and our Training Officer who provided decision making challenges to the audience.

Firstly, we were welcoming Steve Oakey, Chair of the Referees' Association and Board Member for QUEST.

Steve began by providing an overview of his own career which began in 2001/2 and whilst he progressed to be a L3 Referee he had to step back to L5 due to asthma brought on by Covid in 2022. He now referees in the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire County leagues so has a good understanding of the challenges faced by the grassroots Referee.

He is a member of Cheltenham RA having previously served as the Chair of Cheltenham RA and Training Officer. He joined the RA Board in 2022 and was elected Vice Chair in 2023 and then Chair.

He demonstrated his desire to see the Referees' Association provide a voice for Referees and provided an insight into the work that the RA is doing to Support, Inspire and Develop members.



The RA has an Internal team of legal professionals and an agreement with the barristers group, Advocate, that is able to provide support to Referees that may be involved in legal cases (e.g. following an assault) or subject to disciplinary action (e.g. use of inappropriate language or social media posts).

Steve emphasised, like we have previously stressed to members, the need to contact the RA at the earliest opportunity so they can help to support, not after the event when it is often too late to do anything meaningful.

Other benefits and support have been arranged in part, because of the reach of the RA including discounts on equipment (Boot Buddy, Ref Six etc.) and access to more specialist services (such as Mind).

Other benefits in recent seasons have been free tickets to FA Trophy and FA Vase finals and some England Games.

The RA has been able to utilise members operating at the highest levels to help inspire and develop Referees with Zoom calls with FA Cup Final officials (both male and female), Premier League officials (such as recent “Evening with Peter Bankes”) and specialist groups such as football officials from Futsal and the RA Women’s Group (of which 2 audience members were part of).

Steve spent a little time talking about the recruitment and retention of referees and informed the audience that in 2023/2024 nearly 10,000 referees were trained yet the overall number of referees, season on season, is not improving because so many are not re-registering.

Based upon the limited analysis that he has been able to do (surprisingly there is no historical data) Steve was able to advise that there was an inverse relationship between dropout rates and RA membership (i.e. fewer RA members fail to renew).

However (which certainly surprised many) for the first time ever, all 50 County FA’s have the same strategic framework to follow so there is some hope that the registration and retention of new referees will be improved going forward.

Steve was keen to advise that whilst the RA can do some things centrally it is the Local RAs that can steer members at an early stage through the use of WhatsApp and virtual meetings.

This is something that we have been looking to develop further.

A vote of thanks was given Alan Donovan.



The second part of the evening saw Jamie Beal ask the audience to watch a selection of match incidents and make decisions in respect of challenges as to whether they were:

- Careless - just a foul (and blue card)
- Reckless - warranting a yellow card
- Serious Foul Play / Violent contact - warranting a red card

Jamie emphasised the need for officials to have a strong process so they are able to make consistent judgements, often at times of heightened pressure. This came through as:

- See - analyse what has happened
- Recognise - the nature of the challenge
- Think - take your time and decide what action is required
- Act - Apply Law correctly and with confidence

This part of the evening clearly demonstrated the benefits of talking through match incidents with colleagues and seeing how different opinions shape the decisions made that can help referees develop further



December meeting – Phil Crossley

We are delighted to have Phil Crossley as our forthcoming speaker

Phil first got into Refereeing in 1990 after seeing an advert in a match day programme after watching Crystal Palace v Liverpool. He had just finished playing local parks football after an achilles injury and wanted to stay active, so he thought I'd give it a go. He took some night school classes to pass the test and then embarked upon his career by joining both the Metropolitan and Sportsman Sunday Leagues. He admits he had no idea what so ever about the Refereeing and pyramid systems. He went from Level 3 to Level 1 in consecutive seasons.



He then joined the Suburban League and after a short period of time got promoted to the Isthmian League where he stayed until the age of 40. That season he achieved the double jump i.e. being promoted to Referee on the Conference and be an Assistant Referee on the Football League. He then achieved promotion to the Football League in two seasons at the age of 42. Within 3 Years he had refereed on the Premier League. He continued combining both his Refereeing career with his personal career in the City, as at that stage they didn't have professional full time contracts. Throughout his career he endured several bad injuries i.e. Knee surgery, shin splits and a very serious collision on the FOP whereby he ended in intensive care having broken 9 ribs in a game between Derby County and Leeds United. He is very proud to say that he never failed a fitness test in the various guises they took place.

In 2011 he decided it was time to retire from the game, finishing on his own terms at the top level. His last game was Leeds United v Burnley. He still felt that he had something to offer therefore trained to become an Observer, something he continues to do. In recent years he has also taken onboard coaching roles, he currently coaches one Level 4, one Level 3 and 5 Level 2 Referees. He has been to both India and South Africa several times working for the FA delivering coaching courses.

His major achievements read as follows :

- Refereed London F.A. Senior Competition Cup Final
- Refereed the Suburban League Cup Final
- Refereed the Isthmian League Cup Final
- Refereed FA Sunday Cup Final
- Refereed Women’s FA Cup Final
- Refereed FA Vase Cup Final
- 4th Official FA Youth Cup Final
- Refereed Johnson’s Paint Trophy Final
- Refereed FL Division 1 Play Off Final
- 4th Official Carling Cup Final

Ed - On trawling the internet (I hope these stats are correct) his matches at the top level were:

Premier League	2004/05	2
Championship	2002-2011	86
FA Cup	2003-2011	11
League Cup	2003-2011	11
League One	2003-/2011	68
League Two	2004-11	35
Playoffs	2005/06	1

Safeguarding

The FA seeks to build a safe, fun, and inclusive environment for all children and young people, and for adults who may at times be at greater risk of harm, whatever their role, for example players, coaches, and referees.

The FA provides various safeguarding children courses which we, as Referees, are required to have and maintain. The Whole Game System (‘WGS’) details your “Safeguarding” qualifications and their expiry dates.

WGS WILL NOT issue reminders regarding the upcoming expiration of these so it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to check WGS and ensure that your “Safeguarding” is up to date.

Please log onto the WGS and check your “Safeguarding” status.



Safeguarding		
Qualification Name	Completed	Expiry

Fans' Forum Article

Here are some letters from last month's publication

FANS' FORUM

SEND YOUR VIEWS TO: FANS' FORUM, THE NON-LEAGUE PAPER, TUITION HOUSE, ST GEORGE'S ROAD, WIMBLEDON SW19 4EU or e-mail nlp@greenwayspublishing.co.uk

CAN WE DARE TO DREAM?

LIFE as a young York City fan hasn't exactly been a bed of roses but, at last, it seems like good times are ahead.

Adam Hinshelwood was, perhaps, a surprise appointment as manager back in February, but he has slowly pieced together a team to give the long-suffering fanbase something to cheer.

There's a long way to go yet, of course, but we're enjoying the ride and daring to dream of a Football League return after nine pain-staking years away.

SCOTT BAILEY, York



AIRBORNE: York City's Alex Hunt celebrates a goal in their 5-3 win over Hartlepool
PICTURE: Tom Poole

We must help and protect referees

AFTER reading last week's letter from Sean Birchall about refereeing standards (NLP Nov 3), I assume he is critical because his team was on the wrong end of some decisions.

Of course, referees will make mistakes, after all they are only human, but it's a hard job. You hear it all the time, managers especially, berating the referee's every decision.

It has also been reported of referees being assaulted so it's no wonder recruitment is down.

It's because of this that referees need protecting and it's down to the assessors to help referees improve and improvement also comes with experience.

Would Sean be a referee? I think not.

KEITH ALLEN
via email

Refs 'protected' for good reason

I NOTE a letter published in the November 10 edition of *The NLP* which described referees at Non-League level as "the world's most protected species," and that many of us "lack the requisite management skills and the ability to successfully implement the Laws of the Game".

As a match official at Non-League and grassroots football, I am well acquainted with both the challenges and issues which come with my role.

Many fail to realise the serious challenges which come with attempting to officiate a football match in real-time. We are only able to look at an incident once - at the speed it

happens in real life, and we are only able to look in one place at a time. We do not have VAR or goalline technology to bail us out of a mistake.

Many choose to judge a referee having seen a replay, often in slow motion - this is something to which we are not privy in the moment, and this has only been made worse by the numerous camera angles and video speed that have become prevalent with the advent of televised football.

If the professional match officials of the Premier League and the highest levels of the game make errors, often very publicly, with this technology available to them, it falls to occur to

me how people expect those at Non-League level - who are amateur or semi-professional - to officiate to the same, if not a higher, perfect standard.

This opinion also fails to recognise the many hours of training and development outside of a matchday to which officials must take part, but are often uncredited for.

At grassroots football alone, the promotion criteria as it stands requires referees to attend theory and fitness development sessions throughout the season. On top of this, many dedicate themselves to further development, such as joining a local Referees' Association.

Many fans at every level mistake perceived knowledge of the Laws of the Game as fact, and the majority have never actually read the laws. This, as well as the fact that fans, as a matter of course, will have their own opinions on decisions which are purely subjective, serves to make our job harder.

I would also, finally, note that the laws as they are written now are generally geared towards higher level football, where replays, technology, and numerous match officials are more likely to be present - making them harder for us to consistently enforce.

NAME WITHHELD
via email

Hot-shot Ross is the goal king!

IS Ross Allen one of Non-League's finest ever goalscorers?

I'd put forward a very strong case for the Guernsey FC striker.

Last week he reached the 300 goal milestone for the club, remarkably, in just 337 games.

Allen's form in front of goal has been a huge part of Guernsey's initial success in the National League System and holding their own at Step 4. Congratulations Ross!

JAMES CARTER
via email

NLP 17th NOVEMBER 2024

Mentoring

You may have seen from the Surrey FA website that they are looking for mentors, observers and tutors. If you feel you have some time to help then please contact them at referees@surreyfa.com.

Looking Ahead

Please be aware that January's meeting is actually on the **SECOND** Thursday of the month, that being 9th January 2025. The committee thought it best not to have a meeting the day after New Year's Day. Please make a note in your diary.

Ed's & tales

When I accessed the Whole Game System last month, it was brought to my attention that the system we be closing for the 2025-26 season.



From my experience, WGS has been very poor, I can say that with 44 years experience in software development within IT. The layout is mediocre, the performance poor which has deteriorated in recent years. Saving is hit and miss, and unreliable. Some players are listed under clubs more than once, one in mixed case and one in capitals. That should not be possible.

The text box for dismissals and general misconduct will not save the text properly. I've tried to add small bits of text and repeated it but it still doesn't seem to save everything.

Last season when I only managed to save part of the text for a violent conduct report, I was contacted by County and then I emailed the whole report. I was notified some weeks later to say the red card had been quashed by London FA with no explanation. I asked on what basis the decision had been reversed but they refused to explain.

Let's hope the replacement is fit for purpose.

If you have any content for the Ray then please email it to me by the 22nd of the Month. Thank you

Steve Watson

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