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Chairman's foreword



Hope you all enjoyed your Christmas break and Happy New Year to everyone.

I think that the December meeting in the form of a Q&A session with Phil Crossley was different to our normal meeting with his extensive experience over many years both as a referee and latterly as a coach at the highest levels coming over very clearly.

In December we saw David Coote, Premier League referee accept his dismissal from the PGMOL relating to the videos and other negative reports. This was a good decision and avoided further haranguing in the media. I hope the PGMOL will keep to their promise of supporting him as he goes through an enforced life/ career change.

For the first time in English football history, referees will announce VAR decisions via the stadium's public address system during a match, with the historic development set to be trialled across the upcoming Carabao Cup semi-finals – both legs - Arsenal/Newcastle and Liverpool/Spurs.



The semi-final referees will be able to directly communicate the decisions they make in conjunction with VAR to fans in the stadium and TV channels. They are currently being trained on doing this effectively and announcements would be made each time the referee is sent to the pitch-side monitor or the conclusion of factual matters, such as "accidental handball, by a goal scorer or offside offences where the attacker touches the ball".



Let's see how this pans out and whether there can be benefits for the wider game!

In January Geoff Turner has kindly organized two guest speakers who are Stewards at Chelsea FC. All their details are included elsewhere in this edition of the Ray. If you have a question /topic that you want to raise with them, then please get it to me before the beginning of the meeting. My email address is dnorman54@gmail.com.

I will also make sure we have some time for match incidents or more general discussions.

Look forward to seeing you on Thursday 9th January 2025 at 7:30pm for a 7:45 pm start

David Norman

Chair

Report of the December Guest Speaker – Phil Crossley

The evening was a Question and Answer session with Phil with our Chairman, Dave Norman, acting as the presenter. As an open forum, the questions (both prepared and raised on the evening) covered a variety of topics which I have attempted to record under suitable sections.





Early days

As a former player Phil's involvement in football had always been in a team environment and he had a goal to remain fit and stay involved which led him to take the Referee course. Phil acknowledged that in the beginning, refereeing at grassroots on the local park is very much a solitary role and whilst he did feel lonely at times he reflected, with hindsight, that this was actually a great opportunity to learn some key skills that actually benefited him as he progressed, ultimately officiating in the Premier League. Some of the key skills cited by him included resilience, communication, commitment and man management.

Phil also acknowledged that he was probably the bane of the referee's life as a player and whilst he had no overriding ambitions in the beginning, in part because he did not fully appreciate what could be achieved, he was able to rely on his key skills and progress.

One of the difficulties that he found early on in his refereeing career was balancing work and family because refereeing was still a hobby and he had a full time role in the City. Support and understanding from the family was also key to enabling him to progress and take him as far as he did.

Whilst there is a feeling that modern day officials are very similar Phil emphasised the need for a referee to show their own character and personality.

Looking back

Phil spent 10 years on the Isthmian League and reflected that he could possibly have progressed sooner if he had “played the system” at times but felt that he refereed correctly and consistently which eventually was recognised.

When he referenced the need for some “luck” in progressing there was a short debate in which it was explained that, especially under the current system, the referee needs to have a competitive game to be able to appropriately demonstrate their skill sets and have an Observer appointed to be able to appraise and reward the performance. This has become more important in recent seasons as the merit tables are more geared towards Observer marks than they are Club marks.

As in all walks of life we often learn more from our mistakes than continually doing the same thing correctly and refereeing is no different; especially as a group, referees are often more self-analytical and critical of their own performances.

One of his biggest mistakes in the professional game occurred due to poor positioning. As his view of play was compromised he gave a penalty and the player reaction saw 2 to be sent off.

He found that managers were more relaxed in person than they are on television and only tended to engage with the match officials when there was a perceived problem. However, often by simply stating the Law there is little opportunity for them to argue the issue further.



His most unwelcome dressing room visitor was at Erith and Belvedere when, upon returning to his room after the game, he found that his clothes etc, had been stolen.

How often have we heard managers bemoan decisions in a post-match interview that, when Law has been applied correctly, are not remotely contentious. For that reason alone Phil is not in favour of seeing referees interviewed immediately post-match. There is always a downside and expecting the referee, fatigued from their exertions, to comment without having an opportunity to review all the coverage is unfair. If there is a genuine complaint then there are channels available to Clubs.

Some of his best memories from his refereeing career included:

- Luton v Ajax with a young Zlatan Ibrahimović playing for Ajax;
- Chelsea legends v Inter Milan legends
- Officiating at Wembley (on several occasions) and standing there as the National Anthem was played

As his wife is a Liverpool fan he would have loved to have officiated at Anfield or Goodson

Park but that was not to be.

Another regret was that he never got the opportunity to referee overseas. When he made the Premier League list he was 45 and the UEFA age limit cut-off was then 45 so he was never considered.

Technology

VAR has provided plenty of talking points since it was brought in and, in response to the question “Is it working?” Phil felt that it was not operating to its optimal level and that, in his view, it was trying to do too much, not focussing on 1 or 2 aspects.

He felt that whilst there is still an aspect of individual interpretation and a level of spontaneity the referee now, on key match decisions, effectively has two bites at the cherry and VAR should never be wrong. As a result it is common for 50/50 decisions not to be given and then let VAR adjudicate.

VAR is therefore still a question of balance between the on-field and off-field officials but it has helped that Howard Webb has been open in explaining decisions and attempting to educate supporters regarding the decision making processes, The ability to hear the communications has greatly helped this.



He would prefer to referee with VAR because overall it helps to make better decisions.

Back in the day the technological advancement for Phil was the introduction of “buzzer” flags and whilst technology has had some impact on positioning it is still important that the referee is fit, alert and aware of play, players and colleagues.

There was discussion around offsides and, especially when the attacker is clearly offside, the delay in the decision being communicated by the Assistant. Phil advised that the PGMOL send clips of match incidents and provide guidance regarding when Assistants should be flagging.

Phil did emphasise his admiration for the job that the Assistants do and the overall quality of the decisions made.

Whilst technology has played a part Phil acknowledged that changes to the Laws of the Game have improved the game by making play safer and having more playing time.

Current coaching role

As well as being an Observer Phil currently coaches one Level 4, one Level 3 and 5 Level 2

Referees. He is working with the PGMOL and was able to provide an overview of the work being done to develop young referees, both male and female, on the various pathways that are now available.

These pathways are fantastic opportunities for advancement and they are beginning to reap dividends. He believed quite strongly that there would be a female referee in the Premier League in the not too distant future.

He did, however, envisage that there could be a bottleneck in the future as, because of the contracts already given, the opportunities to join the Select Group could be limited.

Within the FA CORE groups, young referees that have been promoted in a relatively short period have needed to have expectations managed because of the increased levels of scrutiny (with more observations) and the fact that marks are now a lot more compressed.

That being said, referees now have more resources available to them with video footage and more immediate feedback and updates.

Other issues

In addition to the above issues there were further discussions around the following:

- Substitutions - Phil felt that there should be a limit to the number of substitutions (either the amount or number of “windows” in which substitutions can be made;
- Injury - whilst these are often tactical it could be real and should therefore be treated. Most referees are not medically qualified or competent so let the Club physio deal with it;
- Sin bins - whilst these have been in place lower down the football pyramid Phil did not believe that they would be of any real benefit at higher levels;
- Referee retention - local Societies provide referees with an opportunity to discuss match incidents and other issues and Phil acknowledged that, especially in his early years, his local Society had helped him. He also felt that more money needed to be invested to retain and develop referees.



Stephen Maguire

Footnote:

This was a very enjoyable, interactive evening with Phil providing honest and open responses to the questions raised. This article, hopefully, provides you with a flavour of the discussions but if you want to hear our speakers first hand please come and join us - I hope to see you in 2025.

January meeting – Scott & Emma Freeman

We are delighted to see the return of Scott and Emma to our first Society meeting of 2025. Scott has been a steward for 36 years having started in 1988. He's been going to Chelsea since 1976, when his Dad first took him. His father first attended a match in 1932. His wife Emma started stewarding in 1997. On a matchday at Stamford Bridge, Scott runs the North (Matthew Harding) Stand whereas Emma jointly runs the East Stand.



At Kingsmeadow for women's matches, Emma runs the West Stand and Scott runs the North. When Youth matches take place, Emma runs the West and Scott oversee the 3 usually empty stands. They have also been involved in coaches for away matches and stewarding for away European games. Scott has also been a Tour Guide at Stamford Bridge for the last 5 years. If it's anything like their last visit a number of years ago, it will be a very enjoyable evening.

You are the Ref



We've six questions to test you after the Christmas and New Years celebrations.

Q1. What happens if the two goalkeepers have the the same colour kit?

- a) Home team changes kit colour*
- b) Away team changes kit colour*

c) *The game can take place with matching colours*

Q2. *What is the maximum length of a football pitch?*

- a) *90 metres*
- b) *100 metres*
- c) *110 metres*
- d) *120 metres*

Q3. *What is awarded if a player kicks the ball into their own goal straight from a kick off?*

- a) *Kick-off retaken*
- b) *Goal*
- c) *Corner kick*

Q4. *An attacking player, in an offside position, receives the ball directly from a teammate's goal kick. Is the player guilty of an offside offense?*

- a) *Yes*
- b) *No*

Q5. *What happens if a substituted player wont leave the pitch?*

- a) *Nothing, the game continues*
- b) *The player is cautioned*

Q6. *If at the the taking of a penalty kick, the kicker plays the ball backwards, the correct action is:*

- a) *Retake the penalty*
- b) *Indirect free kick*
- c) *No action, no offence committed*



Answers

Q1 – c, Q2 – d, Q3 - c, Q4 – b, Q5 – a, Q6 – b

Puzzle Corner

Can you name 1996 Euros England line up for the semi-final against Germany (played at Wembley on 26/6/1996)?



Ed's & tales

I haven't seen much football on the TV this season, but I caught MOTD this weekend. I'd also seen some comments about the Brighton v Arsenal match online. I was interested in the penalty awarded against Arsenal. The so called experts in the studio unanimously thought Anthony Taylor had made the wrong call. The reason being that the Arsenal player got the faintest of touch (by a few hairs) and so had played the ball before his head clattered into the side of the Brighton player. Why don't these people understand that a foul can still be given even if the ball has been played. For me that was a foul anywhere on the pitch and so a penalty was the correct decision. I just wish the so called pundits would back up the decisions of our referees, especially our most top officials.

If you have any content for the last 4 Rays of the 2024/25 season then please email it to me by the 22nd of the month. It would be great to see some new reporters in a future issue. Thank you

Steve Watson

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