

February 2026 - Issue 717

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Chairman's Foreword



As the country continues to battle its' way through these very wet and wintry conditions we, as referees remain, for the most part, the final decision makers on whether games should go ahead. Even though I know I am repeating myself – but please re-read any of the articles we have previously circulated on evaluating pitches and conditions for a decent match.



Our next Society meeting on Thursday 5th February will feature Kirsty Dowle as our Guest speaker. Kirsty has a great refereeing career at the top level with many honours and appointments in women's and men's competitions both in the UK and internationally. More details can be found later in this Ray. Please try to make it to the meeting, as I am sure it will be a very informative evening.

This time of year, we also get to hear about the officials who have been appointed by the Surrey FA to their competition finals this season. It seems from what we have heard so far that many members of our Society have done well in both the male and female competitions. Congratulations to all of you who have received one, we look forward to hearing about how you get on in due course.

Looking forward to seeing you at the meeting

David Norman
Chair

Report of the January Speaker – Steve Worsley

We began 2026 with a return visit from Steve Worsley, a member of Kingston RA who has been an RA Developer for the last 14 years and is an avid trawler of the web for clips that demonstrate aspects of decision making and the Application of Law.

This season he has been focussing on what the pundits and those armchair experts on YouTube have been saying and, as a consequence, is highlighting the lack of knowledge of the Laws and, in some, their downright ignorance.

Steve acknowledged that Ref Watch on Sky Sports with Dermot Gallagher was a form of inspiration as, in Covid, Steve set up a channel “What would Dermot do?”. This evening Steve was asking “What’s everyone saying?”.

When presenting the various clips Steve initially asked the audience for their thoughts on the action and whether it was a goal/no goal or foul/no foul. Not surprisingly, the audience was often split because, as we know, different officials have different tolerances and views of the nature of challenges.



After that he then clearly illustrated that the pundits (including former players and referees such as Keith Hackett and Mark Clattenburg) could not agree on the correctness of the decision made in the instant.

Gerry Hemment bemoaned the fact that the pundits are seen by many to be “experts” and Steve showed, with various YouTube comments, that this enables the armchair warrior to justify their own biases.

Steve also highlighted the fact that many media outlets will focus on one officiating error (or supposed error in the case of the “foul throw” clip) irrespective of the impact on the result of the game - in this instance the final score was 4-1.

Steve ended the evening with three observations:

1. Increasing calls for ex-players to operate VAR

As we saw with the clips, ex-players turned pundits do not know the Laws in detail and they are a lot more opinionated than match officials. In my view, if you think it takes some time for VAR to complete the process now, it would be a lot longer if ex-players are involved.

2. Social media

Steve tells new trainees that “If you wouldn’t say it to someone’s face don’t put it on social media” and not to go looking for comments on your games because, inevitably, they will generally be critical and focus on what may have gone against the writers own team on the day.

Steve highlighted the need to “Protect Mental Health” and referenced a recent interview with Anthony Taylor on BBC Sport (see later article).

3. The Referees’ Association and local RAs

As an RA man throughout his career, and in many ways already speaking to the converted, Steve highlighted the importance of membership of the RA and the support networks that are available through local RAs.

As we have highlighted previously, the wealth of experience within the Society

means that whatever challenge or match incident you may have faced it is very likely that someone has already had to face the same and will be able to provide words of advice.



The Vote of thanks was given by Alan Donovan (Article written by Stephen Maguire).

February Meeting - Speaker Kirsty Dowle

Our next meeting is on Thursday 5th February and we are very pleased to Welcome Kirsty Dowle as our speaker.

Kirsty is a FIFA, WSL and National Group Referee. She began refereeing in 2013 after previously playing the sport and became encouraged to take up officiating when completing her masters in sport psychology.



Kirsty has taken charge of major domestic finals, including the 2022 Women's FA Cup Final and the 2023 FA Women's League Cup Final at Wembley. In 2020, she was added to the FIFA international referees list, allowing her to officiate UEFA and FIFA competitions.

She also referees across England's men's games, including Conference, Premier and EFL appointments.

What would you do?



In each instance (except Q2), what do you give, what if any disciplinary action do you take and how do you restart?

Q1. You start a match with 8 players from red and 7 for blue, although the start sheet has 16 players on each side. As you toss the coin with the 2 captains, red 3 punches blue 4 on the nose.

Q2. In the 11th minute there is a stop in play at which time all the missing players have arrived and ask to enter the field of play. How many from each side do you allow onto the field of play?

Q3. In the 23rd minute the blue team have a throw in and the blue player throws the ball in accordance with law towards his own goalkeeper. It bounces over the goalkeeper into the goal.

Q4. In the 81st minute a blue player receives the ball and runs into the opponents half. A red substitute (14) runs onto the field of play and kicks the ball away stopping a promising attack.



Anthony Taylor Interview

When talking about the protection of mental health in the digital age Steve Worsley referenced an interview that Anthony Taylor gave to Dan Roan of the BBC in which he reflected on the growing pressures and hostility directed at match officials, explaining that the sport’s increasingly “win-at-all-costs” culture is damaging both the mental health and on-field performance of referees.

It piqued my interest and I have watched the 12 minute interview which can be accessed at Premier League - [Abuse Stopped My Family Coming to Games - Anthony Taylor – BBC iPlayer](#)



I did not appreciate that Anthony has now officiated in over 400 Premier League matches – a testament to his longevity and means that his comments come from a place of considerable experience.

Some of the key points of the interview are:

1. The “Win-at-All-Costs” Culture

Football’s increasingly ruthless mentality is creating a hostile environment for referees. Taylor argues that this culture fuels aggression, blame, and unrealistic expectations of perfection.

2. Impact on Mental Health

Taylor highlights how constant scrutiny, criticism, and abuse take a real psychological toll on officials. The pressure affects confidence, wellbeing, and ultimately performance.

3. Abuse Affecting Family Life

One of the most striking revelations is that the abuse has become so severe that members of Taylor’s own family no longer feel safe attending matches. This personal cost underscores the seriousness of the issue.

4. Performance Under Pressure

He explains that hostility and intimidation don't just hurt referees emotionally—they directly influence decision-making on the pitch, making the job harder and increasing the likelihood of mistakes.

👉 5. Need for Cultural Change

Taylor calls for a shift in behaviour across the game:

- Players
- Coaches
- Fans
- Governing bodies

He stresses that respect for officials must be rebuilt if football is to remain healthy and sustainable.

🏆 6. The Human Side of Refereeing

The interview emphasises that referees are people with families, emotions, and vulnerabilities—not faceless figures to be targeted.

Article by Stephen Maguire



Meet the Ref (No. 6) – Gerry Hemment

Well, where do I start.....

I have been a South London lad all my life, living in Brixton until I was 12 years old, then the family moved to Croydon, where I've lived ever since. I started playing football at Primary school and remember playing a game at Kennington Park (near the Oval) on a 'cinder' pitch. I played football whenever I could and wherever I could

After finishing school, I attended teacher training college (St. Luke's), in Exeter, studying chemistry & physics. I played in the college football teams (it was, actually, a main P.E. college) and played on heavy, muddy fields of Devon, which is an experience.....!! After qualifying, I returned to Croydon to teach and completed 20 years in main stream (what I call 'big school', boys & girls, 11-16 years old) then a further 20 years in 'special' education with children having learning difficulties, slow learners and children with autism.

Whilst teaching, I continued to play football for local teams and advanced to a higher level of football, for two seasons, playing for Merstham when (I think they were in the Surrey Senior League). One biggest memory was playing for Merstham 1st team and receiving 'expenses' (whereas, normally, I'd be paying subs to play) as well as the trainers massaging our legs...!!

Whilst teaching at 'big' school, I had some responsibility for running after school football and basketball teams. I realised that I needed to be more knowledgeable and completed necessary 'basic' coaching courses in both sports.

With this in mind, I took & qualified for the FA Preliminary Coaching Badge (it has a different name now). My memories of taking this qualification include the fact that Steve Perryman (Tottenham & England winger) was also attending the course, as well as Alan Smith (I believe, ex-Charlton player and later, Crystal Palace manager)...just love to name drop!! During this course, I was paired with Steve Perryman and he was very, very fast indeed (or I was very, very slow). Another experience of the course was that we met league coaches...two of them being Malcolm Allison & Terry Venables (again, name dropping).

During this time, I took the referees course lead by Joe Chambers & Ray Hearn. Unfortunately, I was in my mid-20's and continued playing football.....so my refereeing qualification lapsed.

When I was 39, I played a game at Cane Hill Hospital. I complained to the referee that I was continually being 'fouled'. The referee replied that I was too old, too slow and should give up playing and become a referee. The referee was Dave Roper and we have been friends ever since I re-qualified as a referee.

Unfortunately, age & lack of experience were against me, so I wasn't able to advance, being happy to referee at local levels and be an assistant referee on Combined Counties matches. I retired from refereeing at the age of 63, having completed 24 years.

When I re-qualified, I was encouraged to attend my local RA, Croydon. It was at the monthly meetings which helped me to develop even more, by listening to experienced referees talking about game management, incidents and being available to listen to the younger referees. In those days, attendance figures at meetings were as high as 50-60.....!!

My style, when refereeing at local level, was to talk to both teams in an honest & friendly manner (I'm not sure what the advice is these days about talking to the teams pre-match).



I always explained to players that they were out to enjoy themselves, they were also paying for the privilege and I wanted them to enjoy themselves. I also asked that, if needed, they talk **to** me, not **at** me.....also, I reminded them that they would make more mistakes than I would, and I was always proved correct.

One memory I still have of 'man management' is of a game at Herne Hill.....one of the teams was made up of "Italians". I knew what would happen during the game...I would give a decision and someone from the Italian side would say something in Italian (rude of course) and I would need to take action. So, I gave my basic pre-match talk and then, at the end, I dropped into speaking Italian and explained I could understand them!!! Mouths 'dropped' and the whole team were extremely thankful that I'd let them know and I had not one argument from them the whole game.

My mother was Italian, born in Naples, with maiden name 'Donnarumma' (and yes, if you recognize the name, same family, on my grandfather's, brother's side..!!) Also, my nickname was/is 'Luigi' After I retired from refereeing, I missed being 'fit' (as well as the camaraderie of the referees), so continued to attend a local gym to work out.

Unfortunately, this slowly fell by the wayside and I took up gardening, having a small 'raised' plot plus small greenhouse. I've grown a variety of vegetables, to include sweetcorn and melons. My favourite crop is tomatoes and, guess what, I make a brilliant Italian bolognese sauce...!!

I still attend the Croydon RA meetings, delight at listening to the various 'speakers' and how the game has changed. I believe that referees have often been maligned and, as someone once said, "Without referees, where would the game be?" (Remember when managers complained about refereeing decisions, so VAR was introduced.....now, guess what, managers complain about VAR..!!

Puzzle Corner – Name the line up



For our February puzzle, can you name the starting England line up for the Euro 2024 final against Spain?

- 1
- 2
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 26
- 4
- 3
- 11
- 10
- 9



End of Season Meal

Our Social Secretary Dave Roper has organised a Society meal to be held towards the end of the season at Combe Wood House Restaurant, Combe Lane, Croydon on Thursday 30th April. Please make a note in your diary. Partners are very welcome.



Full details will be available in the March Ray.

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The Early Years of Football (Excerpt 3)

A further set of football **regulations** were created in October 1863. Members from six schools met up to discuss a united set of rules, Eton, Harrow and Westminster favoured the dribbling game. Marlborough and Rugby favoured the rugby code with Shrewsbury undecided. The result was to ban some of the rugby features, this being hacking, tripping and running with the ball. The rugby schools continued with their own rules.

Crystal Palace started in 1861 for the workers at the Palace. There is no connection to today’s club.

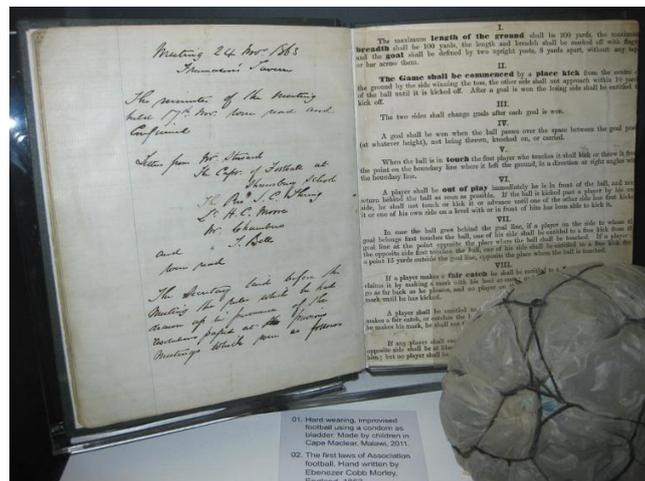
Notts County were founded in 1862 and games were played amongst themselves initially. County did well in the FA Cup, losing in the semi-final in 1883, losing finalists in 1891 before winning the cup in 1894 beating Bolton.

Stoke City were formed in 1863 playing a modified form of rugby, their ground was Sweetings field. They won the Staffordshire cup in both 1878 and 1879. In 1883 they moved to the Victoria ground. Later they adopted the professional code and were admitted to the League in 1888.

Two other dribbling clubs were formed in 1863, they were **Barnes** and the **Civil Service**.

In 1863, the formation of the **Football Association** was close at hand. Representatives from eleven London clubs and schools met in London in the October to establish a national set of rules. They agreed to be known as “The Football Association”. Several stormy meetings were held to come to some sort of compromise. It appeared as though Blackheath rugby club were having their own way with hacking and running with the ball adopted as rules, so more your Rugby rules.

The FA found out that the Cambridge Dribblers had drawn up their own code with all the Rugby rules excluded. Cambridge were invited to the next meeting. This was a bad tempered meeting and risked a split amongst the parties. Eventually the rules were settled with hacking and running with the ball removed from the rules. The Football Association was formed on 8th December 1863.



Early handwritten draft of the ‘Laws of the game’ from 1863

Blackheath, resentful that the Rugby features were removed, then asked for their name to be removed from the Association members.

In 1865 the first “cross bar” was introduced in the form of tape across the goal some 6 feet from the ground. Goal kicks were introduced in 1866.

By 1865 Sheffield FC were playing matches outside of the city, against Lincoln, Nottingham and Manchester. Sheffield had issues with the very restrictive offside law, anyone in front of the ball was offside. Sheffield dropped that rule only for the FA to follow suit some time later.

Nottingham Forest were founded in 1865 and on inception wore red caps. Forest lost 2 FA Cup finals before winning 3-0 against Derby County in 1898

Sheffield Wednesday started in 1866 and were formed by a group of cricketers called The Wednesday. This was their day of recreation. Initially they played at Bramall Lane then moved to the Olive Grove ground. Wednesday were initially in the Football Alliance but joined the League when it was extended in 1892. They first won the FA Cup just 6 years later beating Wolves 2-1 with another 2 wins following.

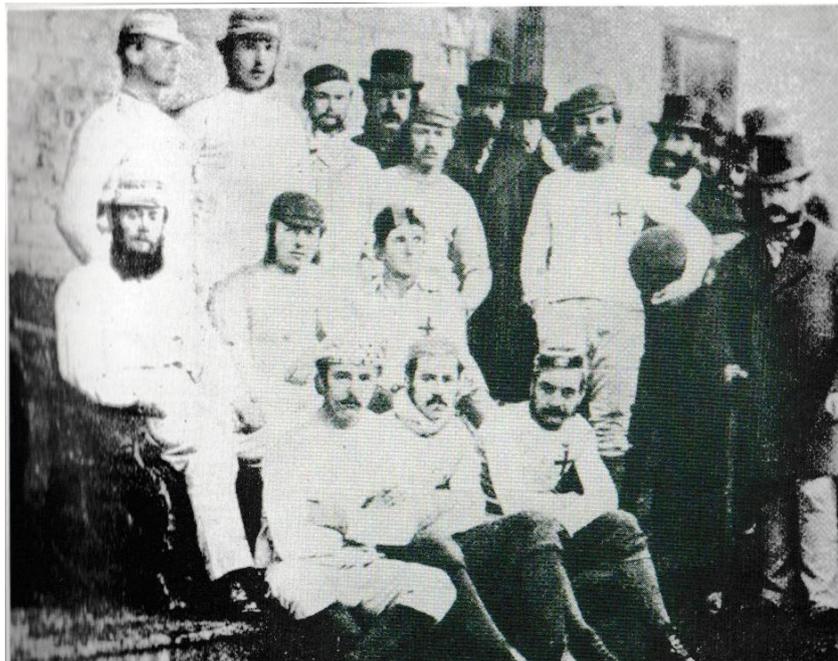
Chesterfield was another club formed in 1866 though no rules were drawn up until 1871. They played friendlies against other northern sides. In 1892 they won the Sheffield Cup. They joined the Midland league in 1896 and were elected to the Football League Division II in 1899.

In 1866 Sheffield FC wrote to the FA to suggest a match between London and Sheffield. There was one main difference in the laws for the 2 cities. The Sheffield rule required only one attacker between the attacker and the goal. The 11 a-side match was played at Battersea.

Some of the rules agreed between the 2 sides were:

- The ground to be 120 yards long by 80 wide
- Dress of the London team to be white jersey or flannel shirt and white trousers
- The ball to be a Lillywhites No. 5
- Play to commence at 3pm and end at 4.30
- Notice of the match to be sent to *The Field*, *Bells Life*, *Sporting Life* and *the Sportsman*.

This was a first for the type of ball used and the match duration as it was played under FA rules. These series of matches were played for the next 30 odd years.



London Team c 1874

Ed's & tales

In January I refereed after one of those very cold Saturday nights and luckily my pitch was playable after a pitch inspection. It was a very cold morning and I wore my three layers. The home team of red and black had black under garments. Some of the yellow team had yellow under garments yet two players had black. I told them that wasn't acceptable. They rolled up their black sleeves past the elbow so that most of the arm was now bare.

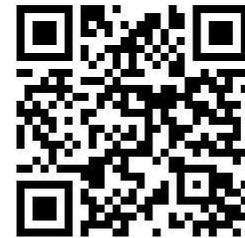
On the next pitch was a senior cup match which had originally failed the pitch inspection as it was deemed too icy. This kicked off half an hour after my game with red versus yellow. I watched some of the play after my game. The red team all had red under garments. The yellow team had yellow under garments..... except for one player. He had red! I thought that was pretty disappointing and did us referees who applied law correctly no favours at all. It was also asking for trouble. I didn't stay for the extra time so I don't know if he got away with it.

If you would like to make a contribution to the links page on the website or have an article you would like to share then please let me (the Editor) know. Articles by 27th Feb please.

Have a good month.

Steve

Stephenwatson1616@gmail.com



Scan this for the Croydon Referees Society Website >>>

Answers

What would you do?

- Q1. Delay the start of play, Send-off (red 3), Kick off (having completed the toss of a coin).
- Q2. 4 from each side
- Q3. Disallow the goal, No disciplinary action, Corner.
- Q4. Stop play, Caution and report as misconduct, Indirect free kick where the incident occurred

Who am I January – Andre Mariner

Geoff Turner

- 1 B side – I know you
- 2 Who - Ron Davis
- 3 Goals - 43
- 4 Team – Manchester City
- 5 Player - Terry Paine
- 6 Six teams – Blackpool, Sheff Utd, Sheff Wed, Stoke, West Brom, Southampton