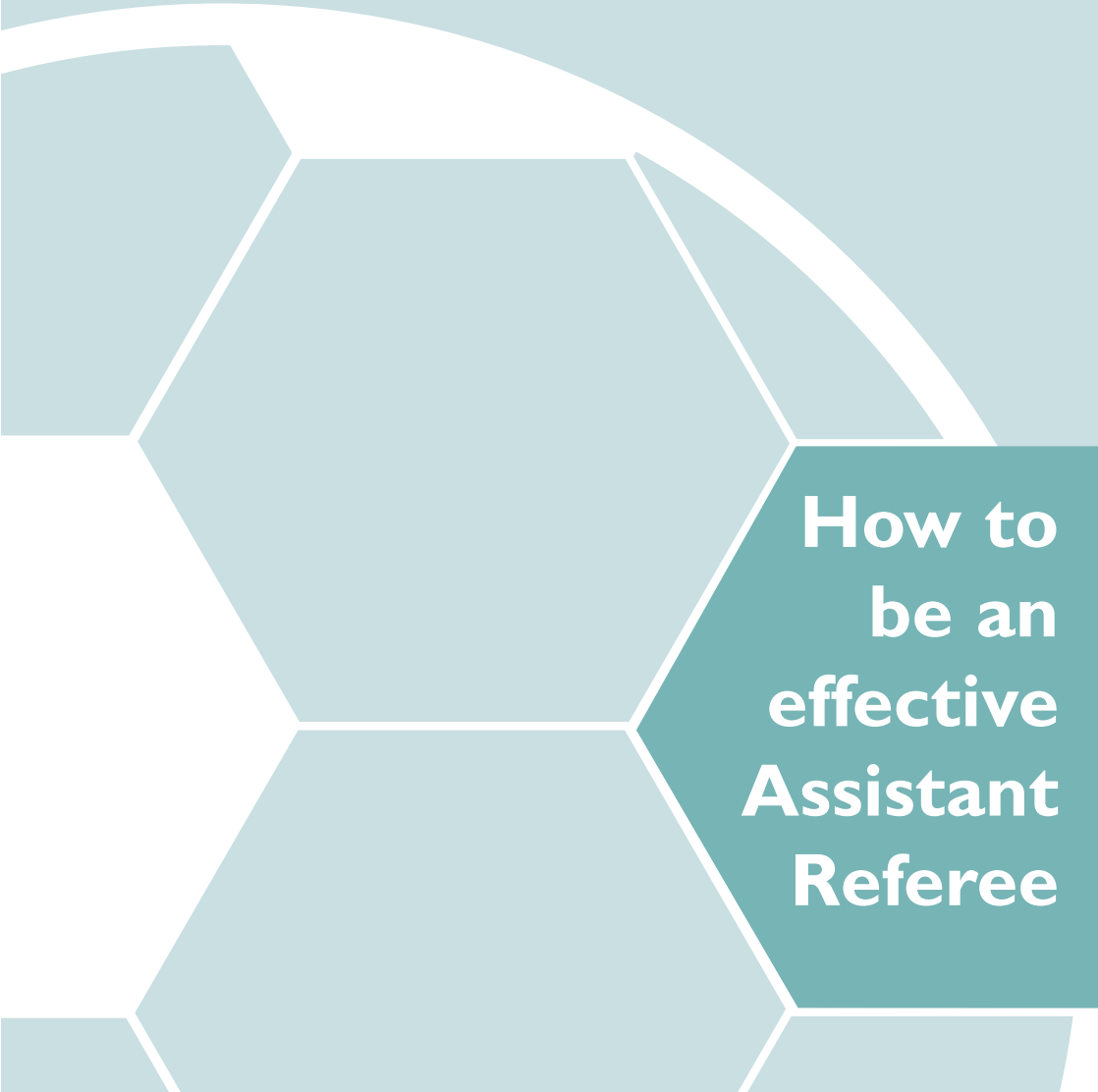


Practical Advice for *Referees*



**How to
be an
effective
Assistant
Referee**

BEFORE the start of play check the condition of the flag and ensure it is securely tied to the stick! It is often wise to take your own flags just in case.

Being an effective Assistant Referee is an art. The skills required to do the job properly are not easy to acquire. It will take you many years of regular practice to become a good Assistant.

The following tips will help you to develop the necessary skills to improve your performance as an Assistant Referee.

GENERAL ADVICE

- Ensure that you listen carefully to the referee's instructions – they are not always the same! Ask questions if you do not understand what is expected of you.
- Warm up before the start of the match – try to mirror the movement that you are likely to make during the course of the game. Doing a warm up with the referee and other Assistant can help to build up teamwork.
- Dress smartly, enter the field of play confidently, with the referee and other Assistant – look a confident team from the start.
- Assistants usually 'break' to check the goals and nets soon after entering the field and then meet the referee at the centre mark. Know which goal you are going to check! Always check the net from behind to avoid being hit by a ball kicked by a player warming up. When returning to the centre circle try to arrive at the same time as the other Assistant.
- Know which line to go to once the start of play ceremony is completed – it would not be the first time both Assistants have ended up on the same touchline!
- As kick off approaches keep an eye on the referee who will probably want to check that you are ready for the start of the match.

- Avoid discussions about decisions with players.
- Give firm and positive signals at all times to gain respect and credibility.
- Concentrate, concentrate, concentrate – the moment you take your eyes off play something will happen.
- Take responsibility for your decisions – never blame the referee or criticise him/her by making comments to others. Remember – you are part of his/her team.
- Try to make regular eye contact with the referee, especially when making decisions.
- Do not try to run the match for the referee, albeit in trying to be helpful. You are there to assist, not to do his/her job and not to be the focus of attention yourself!

FLAGGING SKILLS

- Always have the flag unfurled – never roll it up.
- Remember that the flag is a dangerous weapon – avoid pointing with it or using it to separate players.
- Always have the flag infield, in the hand nearest to the referee so that he/she can see it at all times.
- Unless indicating, try to keep the arm with the flag straight at all times with the flagstick pointing downwards.
- When signalling, face the field square-on, look at the play, do not look up at the flag.
- Try to avoid lowering your head when flagging – you might miss something!
- Flag confidently and briskly, trying to stand still whilst you do so.
- Try to ensure that no-one will be hit by your flag when you use it.
- There is no need to exaggerate your flagging action with an ‘over the shoulder’ action. Simply raise the flag vertically.

NEVER shout instructions to players from a distance (eg. play on) as this may conflict with those given by the referee.

MOVEMENT SKILLS

- When play is in your half, you should aim to be level with the second last defender.
- When play is deep in the opposite half you may find yourself close to the halfway line.
- Always face the field of play, never turn your back on active areas.
- A sideways position, at a slight angle to the line, will help you to watch for the ball going out of play and allow you to check for offside at the same time. Glance continually between where the ball is, where the referee is and where defenders/ attackers are positioned. Adjust your position constantly.
- Avoid ball watching – play moves very quickly, particularly at higher levels. You will be caught out of position and will miss offside situations if you ball watch.
- Avoid running on the line – it wears it out.
- Never run on the field of play – the ball may hit you.
- Sprint forwards and backwards as appropriate – side stepping whenever you can to move freely and efficiently up and down your control path.
- After goals have been scored fairly, move quickly along the touchline towards the half way line. If you stand still the referee may think that you have seen something untowards. If you have observed a problem, stand your ground and indicate this to the referee by raising your flag.
- Never turn to face or talk to spectators or officials behind you – even if they are ‘bating’ – ignore their comments.

THROW IN

You should simply raise your flag to signal every time the ball goes out of play along your touchline, even if it is obvious. There is no need to wave the flag. Always try to make eye contact with the referee, especially before you signal in central areas.

- On all occasions flag confidently; this gives credibility to your decisions.
- Avoid flagging whilst on the move. Stop and then flag.
- The speed of your decision will depend on your own position and that of the referee:
 - when the ball is clearly in your half and nearest to you, flag to indicate the direction quickly and positively
 - when the ball is in the opposite half, nearest to the referee, allow the referee to make his/her decision and then flag to indicate the same direction
 - when the ball goes out near the half way line, and around 20 metres either side of it, always look at the referee (make eye contact) before flagging – even though you may be sure which direction to indicate. The referee will often signal a direction so that you both give the same decision. You could also indicate your opinion to the referee by holding the flag in the relevant hand, ready to give a signal. You can change this without being noticed if the referee disagrees. There is nothing worse than the referee and Assistant signalling opposite directions!
 - if you do signal in the opposite direction to the referee, lower your flag immediately.
 - instructions from referees may vary on how to co-operate over throw ins. Listen to the briefing.
- If a player picks up the ball to take a quick throw in, make sure the player from the correct team has the ball! If not, raise your flag to indicate that the throw in is not being taken correctly.



Use a straight arm and wrist when signalling – avoid the wrist bending backwards (cocked wrist) or the arm over extending (bent arm) – the flag needs to be parallel with the touchline or at right angles to it when raised vertically.

To signal an offside, simply raise your flag vertically. There is no need to wave it frantically!



- If you do not know which direction to flag, a positive, confident decision will often 'sell the decision'. An alternative, but less decisive method is to raise your flag vertically and look at the referee for a clue!
- For a throw in to the defending team, take up an initial position around 2 metres from where the ball went out of play, nearest to the goal line. You can manage the throw in preliminaries from that position and then back peddle down the line to take up your position with the second last defender.
- For a throw in to be taken by the attacking team, back peddle to take up your position with the second last defender.
- Follow the referee's instructions regarding watching for technical offences at the taking of the throw in. Assistants are usually asked to 'watch the player's feet'. Indicate a foul throw by raising your flag vertically in the air.
- If you try to help a player to take a throw in from the correct place, use your voice to tell him/her where to take it from. Do not point to the place as your authority may be undermined if the throw in is then taken from elsewhere.

OFFSIDE

Neutral Assistant Referees will be asked to indicate to the referee that a player is in an offside position. Usually the referee will also ask the Assistant to raise their flag only if the player in the offside position is 'interfering with active play'. In order to judge this, a momentary delay in flagging is required in order to be able to assess the situation more accurately. This often gives rise to the claim by players of a 'late flag'. However, a late flag is better than no flag or a bad decision given in haste.

When indicating offside, raise the flag vertically, in the hand nearest to the goal your end so that your view of

the field is not obstructed. Hold it in that position until the referee acknowledges you. There is no need to wave the flag to attract attention. Do not lower your flag once you have raised it – even if it takes time for the referee to see you, unless so much time has passed that stopping play would clearly be disadvantageous. Tell the referee at the end of the half that this has happened.

Once the offside has been given, indicate to the referee the general position of the offence; face the field and point the flag infield with a straight arm:

- Near-side: pointing down to the ground (7 o'clock)
- Middle of field: horizontal to the ground (9 o'clock)
- Far-side: pointing upwards (11 o'clock).

Hold your flag in position until the ball has been placed to your satisfaction (or the referee has acknowledged you).

CORNER KICK

In order to get a good view of the ball crossing the goal line, the Assistant Referee needs to follow every ball down towards the goal line so that an accurate decision can be made.

Follow the referee's instructions when signalling for a corner. There are two common methods:

- point the flag down towards the corner quadrant on your side (never the far side) and continue your run towards the quadrant, eventually ending up behind the corner flagpost
or
- do not signal with the flag but run towards the corner and continue your movement around the flagpost approximately 2 metres on to the goal line. This indicates your decision to the referee without flagging and attracting players' attention.



Offside – player near to you



Offside – player in central position



Offside – player on far-side of field

If the corner is taken from your side, stand behind the flagpost looking along the goal line. Be proactive and talk to the kicker to gain his/her co-operation.

If the corner is taken from the far side, depending on the referee's instructions, you can walk around 10 metres along the goal line, towards goal, to get a better view. Your duties at the corner include ball in/out of play (remember the swerving ball), the ball crossing the line for a goal, offside and fouls/misconduct on the referee's 'blind-side'. However, once the corner is cleared you will need to move quickly back into your position to view offside (perhaps by cutting the corner to get to the touchline faster).

If you observe that the corner is not taken in accordance with law, stand still and raise your flag until the referee acknowledges you.

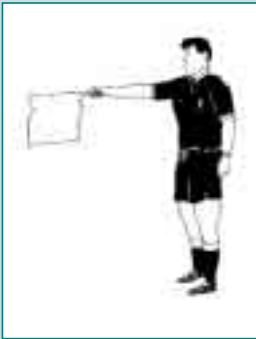
GOAL KICKS

Follow the referee's instructions when signalling for a goal kick. There are two common methods:

- point the flag inwards (horizontally) at the goal area or
- do not signal with the flag at all but stop your movement and turn your back on the goal line, facing up the touchline. This has the advantage of indicating your decision to the referee without flagging and attracting the players' attention.

Once the goal kick has been awarded, quickly take up a position on the touchline, level with the goal area line. Face the goal area and check that the ball is placed within it. Once you are satisfied that this has been done, sprint to take up position for offside. Bear in mind that you may need to stay close to the edge of the penalty area to check that the ball comes into play.

If you observe that the ball is not correctly placed, stand still and raise your flag until the referee acknowledges you.



To indicate a goal kick, point the flag inwards (horizontally) at the goal area.

PENALTY KICKS

The position of an Assistant Referee at penalty kicks may vary depending on the referee's instructions. However, it is important that the kick is taken in accordance with law. The referee and nearest Assistant must act as a team to ensure that this is done. Usually, you will be asked to take up a position on the goal line, near to the edge of the penalty area.

Your duties will include watching for the ball crossing the goal line (including a goal being scored) and watching for any forward movement by the goalkeeper off his/her line. If the kick is taken satisfactorily, you should back peddle quickly towards your touchline. If there has been a violation of the laws you should stay in position – the referee will take this to mean there has been a problem.

FOULS

You can help the referee by signalling when fouls have been committed that he/she may not have seen. This is done by raising the flag vertically and waving it to attract attention. Keep the flag raised until acknowledged – either by the referee stopping play or by a signal to indicate that play is to continue. There is no need to flag for fouls when the referee is closer or has a better view! If play is stopped for the award of an indirect free kick, raise your 'spare' arm in the usual way to indicate this to the referee.

The referee may invite you on to the field to manage a defensive wall. If that happens, stand over the ball and ask players to retreat the appropriate distance (9.15 metres). Keep the flag out of the way when you are doing this. It is best to use the raised palm of the spare hand to encourage players to go back. Keep the flag in the other hand with your arm down by your side. Once you have achieved the desired distance, move quickly back into position on the touchline. It is worth asking players in the wall to 'stay where they are'.

Some referees may ask you to indicate that an offence should be penalised with a penalty kick by placing the flag across your chest.



Wave the flag to indicate fouls.



To indicate that a substitution is required, wait for a suitable break in play and raise your flag. Once the attention of the referee has been gained, hold the flag horizontally above your head – making sure that the flag is unfurled but does not obstruct your view.

Sometimes a referee may miss an Assistant's signals and play continues. If the other Assistant has his/her flag raised and play is nearest to you, you may – in exceptional circumstances, such as for violent conduct – raise your own flag to gain the referee's attention.

SUBSTITUTIONS

The Assistant Referee nearest to the technical areas may be asked to assist the referee with substitutions. This will usually involve the Assistant indicating that a substitute is required. Do this by raising the flag horizontally above the head at a suitable break in play. The Assistant may also be required to check the substitutes name and also to ensure that the player leaving does so before the substitute enters the field of play.

GENERAL DUTIES

The referee will advise his/her Assistants regarding the need for timekeeping and recording cautions/send offs etc. The senior Assistant Referee should keep an accurate record of the game, as well as stop and start his/her watch in case the referee is unable to complete the match and he/she is called upon to take over.

CONFRONTATIONS AND BRAWLS

If a confrontation situation arises where many players surround the referee

- if you are the nearest Assistant, and if the situation demands it, eg. the referee is struggling to control the problem, you should consider entering the field and standing alongside the referee to offer support.
- if you are the furthest Assistant, watch carefully what is happening, get closer if necessary, and identify any troublesome players. Keep a wide view of the active area. Make relevant notes when the situation is under control.

MANAGING THE BENCHES

As an Assistant Referee you need to concentrate fully on activities on the field of play. However, there are occasions when officials and substitutes on the touchline create difficulties for you. You should try to use Management skills to resolve the problem. However, if this tactic fails you can ask the referee to intervene. This is done by raising the flag at a suitable break in play. You will need to present clear facts to the referee about what has happened. Take notes if any disciplinary action is taken as you will need to write a report.

'SILENT CO-OPERATION'

Your teamwork with the referee is important. You should never feel that you have to impose your authority on a match in case you will not be noticed! Do your job efficiently and in collaboration with the referee. Some 'silent' signals often help the teamwork, for example:

- a thumbs up to the referee (low down and inconspicuously) to indicate that the ball is correctly positioned at goal kicks, corner kicks, free kicks or when the referee has decided to over-rule your signal
- an open palm with the non flag hand to indicate to the referee that, for example, the ball has remained in play.

Remember that a flag always in view, but not raised, is a positive signal to the referee that nothing has happened!

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

- Use a mirror to check the quality of your signals. Check (from two angles) that your flag is held vertically without over-extension (ie. the flag is not pointing backwards over your shoulder) and without wrist-cock.
- Practice keeping the arm holding the flag straight at all times.

- Alter your hand position on the flag until you achieve the optimum position. Keep your wrist stiff – perhaps an index finger down the shaft of the flag stick might help you.
- Practice running in one direction along a touch line and then quickly changing direction. Remember to transfer the flag from one hand to the other, at a low level, as you turn.
- Practice side stepping along a line ('crabbing') – do this at different speeds and imagine that you are tracking the second last defender in a potential offside situation.
- Practice changing from the side stepping movement to a sprint down the line – again remembering to change hands to keep the flag in-field.

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Tel: 01483 295910

Email: books@canarybooks.com

The Author

David Hutchinson is an FA Licensed Referee Instructor and FA Registered Assessor based in Surrey. He has compiled this guide, together with the input of a number of national list and other senior referees, to help those who have little or no experience as an Assistant Referee, as well as those who 'line' on contributory leagues and county competitions.