

Practical Advice for *Referees*

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*Your First
Match as
a Referee*

Congratulations on becoming a referee. The next big step is to officiate in your first match. You will probably be very nervous. However, the practical advice in this guide should help you to meet the new challenge.

- Prepare carefully your kitbag and make sure you have all the essential equipment. You could make a checklist to include:
 - shirt, shorts, socks, footwear, ties for socks
 - whistle(s), watches, notebook, pencils (4–5 but not too sharp – they break!)
 - red/yellow cards
 - don't forget the coin!
 - personal items.

You should consider taking with you a number of optional items: flags – as many provided by the Club are not of a good standard, a ball pump perhaps – it would not be the first time a Club does not have one! Consider taking spare laces, a drink for half time/full time (isotonically balanced) and perhaps something to give you an energy boost at half or full time.

In the long term try to develop a before, during and after match routine starting on the morning of the match (eating, drinking, rest, warm up, etc) through to getting back home (kit routines).

USEFUL TIP

Wash a new kit before first using it. This might stop players suspecting that this is your first or one of your first matches.

- Check the details of your match – date, time, clubs, colours, age groups. Anticipate any potential problems – colour clash. Remember that under 16s and over 45s have age-specific competition rules (eg. they don't have to name substitutes) so obtain and read the rules of competition in advance.
- Find out where the ground is (get a map if necessary). <www.streetmap.co.uk> is a useful web site if you know the address. Plan your journey. Allow plenty of time to get there – try to arrive about one hour beforehand.

- When you arrive introduce yourself to the home team secretary/official. You are already being assessed by the team so be polite but assertive – try to appear confident and don't tell them it is your first match. Find out where your changing room is and where the match is being played.
- When settled in your changing area (often a broom cupboard!) have a walk over the field of play. Do your formal inspection – try to look over the whole surface. Make sure you check the goals and if the nets are up make sure they are properly secured. If anything is amiss discuss this with the home club official you previously met and try to get things made good. Bear in mind that everything is unlikely to be perfect and a common sense approach is often required.

USEFUL TIP

Always make sure that any flagposts at the halfway line are one metre (one yard) from the touchline. Many referees miss this during their inspection of the field of play.

- Get mentally prepared. You can really improve your concentration if you develop a pre-match routine – starting from the moment of your arrival, right up to the point where you start the match. Your mind needs to be fully on the job in hand. It is a good idea to develop a warm up routine before the match (and a warm down routine after the match). This helps you to prepare physically and helps minimise the risk of injury.
- You need to find some suitable match balls from the home club official (if you have not been given any already). Try to get at least two – check the pressure and condition of the ball. Try not to let the match ball(s) end up as pre-match practice balls.
- If you can, tell both home and away team managers/officials that you would like rings, chains etc taken off or taped up to make them safe. Check that the team colours and goalkeeper colours do not clash. Ask for the names of any substitutes.

- Before leaving the changing room make sure you have all the equipment you need (coin!). It is worth having a checklist.
- If the playing field is a long way from the changing facilities – a common problem on large recreation grounds – make sure that all the players have left before you go to the playing field. It is a nuisance to have to make the long walk back to find a team!
- Look smart and confident when leaving your changing area. Carry the match ball (do not kick it!). Do a final check of the nets/goals and see that you have four corner flagposts. Check again that any at the halfway line are 1 metre from the touchline – they may have been moved.
- Identify your Assistants. Brief them together. Greet them warmly and thank them for their help. Say who you are and get their first names (write the names down – some leagues ask you to mark their performance). Go through your instructions – don't be afraid to use a checklist for this to ensure all the points are covered. Explain that you may over-rule them and that they should accept your decisions and not get upset about this.

USEFUL TIP

It is likely that Assistants provided by the Club will be club officials (eg. manager) or substitutes. If so they are likely to coach during the match. Whilst you might not be able to stop this entirely in practice, before the match starts you should ask the Assistants not to coach.

- Go confidently to the centre circle and give a good hard blow on the whistle to call the captains together. You toss the coin and ask the home captain to call.
- Just before you kick off, count the players – but there is no need to exaggerate this action by pointing.
- Give a good blast of the whistle to start the match.

- You do not need to run a strict diagonal, but as a guide, your control path is roughly corner flag to corner flag. However, move off this line to get closer to play. Try to keep the ball/play between you and your nearest Assistant.
- Try to stay approx 10 to 15 metres (yards) from the ball. To do this you need to work hard and sprint when required. A decision given from nearby will have far greater credibility than one given from a distance – players argue with you far less.
- When you see fouls, blow your whistle hard and signal the direction. Try to use only one arm at a time when giving signals. Using both arms at the same time can lead to unclear signals causing confusion. A good blast on the whistle and a ‘crisp’, positive signal will always be more respected than a decision given without confidence (even if you are wrong!).
- You do not need to blow the whistle each time there is a goal, throw in, goal kick or corner kick, but you do need to give a signal to show clearly what your decision is. You can restart the match with the voice or a wave of the hand. We suggest that you blow the whistle to start the match at free kicks near goal.
- You do not need to tolerate dissent. If it happens you could use the approach – first a quiet word, then a public admonishment and if the player does not take notice – caution. Failing to take some action early in the game may lead to an escalation of dissent.

USEFUL TIP

In general, if a challenge looks bad to you it will to others – penalise it.

- Use advantage cautiously at first – when you get confident try it and see what happens! Don’t use advantage for really heavy challenges – unless the team is about to score a goal.
- Most important of all, enjoy the match. Smile and look as though you are interested. Keep your concentration throughout – the moment you relax something might happen, even in very one sided matches.

USEFUL TIP

You should end the match when the ball is in play. Try to be near to the ball when you blow the whistle – you need to take possession of the ball at the end of the match. If it is over a fence or in a garden you might be the one who has to retrieve it!

- After the match, to avoid unwelcome confrontations, it is best not to get involved in discussions about decisions.
- If you have had to caution or send off a player always write the report and send it to the relevant Football Association (usually the County FA). Players or officials may try to persuade you not to send it in – tell them to stop or you will report that incident as well.

If you have not done so already, it is worth joining your local Referees Association – check your County handbook for details of who to contact and meeting dates. As well as being informative – many meetings have guest speakers – society meetings are a good way of informally discussing refereeing problems.

Don't forget – you are not alone. If you have any problems, your refereeing colleagues are more than happy to discuss these with you and what's more some will be able and willing to come to one of your matches and give you some help and advice.

Good Luck and Happy Refereeing

