

PLAYER MANAGEMENT

Introduction:

Admittedly, we sometimes encounter behaviour that is so unreasonable or inexcusable that our initial response may need to be that of a dismissal and we must accept and respond to that responsibility when the need arises. There are however, other valuable tools available to the referee that should be considered as part of the overall man management process that we call refereeing.

The "Word on the run":

At the lowest end of the response scale we have available to us a discrete but effective tool in modifying players' behaviour hopefully before it escalates further. This simple tool is best described as the "word on the run" and is not a public sanction by the referee but rather, as the name implies, a few well-chosen words to the player while play remains continues. This option can be used in two very effective ways.

Firstly it can be directed specifically at the player involved. Careful consideration should be given to the words used in administering this "word on the run" as it must be quick and irrefutable in its result and not generate further discussion or argument on the part of the player.

Many referees often make the mistake of reducing the process of cautioning or expelling players to the level of a personal confrontation between themselves and the player. This can easily occur, often without the referee realising what is happening, simply by the type of words used in issuing the various forms of sanction. This level of intervention is quite wrong and grossly counter productive to effective match control.

Let us examine the phraseology a little more closely to discover what we can do to shift the dynamics of the situation back on to the player who committed the offence. This is after all where it rightly belongs. Many referees tend to use sentences such as "If you keep that up I will caution you", I know I did when I first started refereeing. This immediately puts the situation into one of confrontation between you and the player, you are now responding to the player on a personal level. A more suitable response may be "if you keep that up, as a consequence of your actions, you will be cautioned". This shifts the responsibility for the outcome back to the player and requires them to consider the consequences of their actions.

Alternately, or in conjunction with this direct approach, you may choose to direct the comments to the player's Captain. The Captain sees their role as important and he is often selected for his leadership qualities. Simply saying, "you're the Captain. If your number 7 keeps that up he will get himself cautioned, you're the Captain, you fix it". Most Captains will take this on board and speak to the player themselves especially if the match is closely contested.

The Public Warning:

The next step on the escalating scale of response is the "public warning". Play is stopped and the player concerned isolated by the referee in order to reduce the chance of confusion on the part of spectators and coaching staff and to make your intentions obvious to all. Move away from the situation at an angle so that you can maintain a view of the area as well as taking the player with you until you are a little way from the incident.

Keep the player at a comfortable distance by using the standard stop signal with your open hand and take special care not to invade the player's personal space. Be demonstrative with your hand signals being careful always to maintain an open hand and never "finger wag". Your facial expression is important too, as it will convey to the player your level of disapproval in his behaviour. Maintain control over the situation by speaking clearly and in a measured voice.

Deliver the message quickly making sure to place the burden of the sanction onto the player, and leave the area just as quickly. If you are not there you cannot be argued with and the option for further conflict is greatly reduced.

The Caution (Yellow Card):

After having explored the "word on the run" and the "public warning" options we have now reached the first of the formal sanctioning processes which we are required to master in our efforts to improve as match officials. The caution or yellow card is the first of the formal processes at your disposal and correctly managed can reduce the need to move to the more final solutions.

The caution is similar in process to the public warning but has a greater level of significance attached to it and as such needs a slightly more stylised approach in its use. Offences requiring a caution will usually be accompanied by a vigorous blast on the whistle and a more serious facial expression and arm signal indicating the applied level of severity.

The Yellow Card should usually be withdrawn from your pocket as the whistle is being blown and held in your extended arm down by your side. Doing this achieves two important things for you with almost no effort on your part, firstly, it indicates to the players that you have the situation under control and intend to take action on it. This reduces the likelihood of retaliation from the players. Secondly, it eliminates the question as to whether or not the referee was reacting to the feelings of the spectators or the various benches. The decision to caution is made early and is now irrevocable.

Get quickly to the scene of the incident and again isolate the player to be cautioned to avoid confusion and to add effect to the process. Maintain your space from the player and extend the arm carrying the card directly above your head with a snap of the elbow. Move quickly away from the area and record the details you require while keeping an eye on the surrounding area for further problems. Should the cautioned player seek to follow you move away at an angle telling the player that his behaviour is making the situation worse. If he continues to pursue you stop your run and turn towards the player with your arm extended in the stop signal pose.

You should endeavour not to produce the Yellow Card to a player who is still on the ground following a challenge but rather allow the player to rise and proceed as previously described.

The Send Off (Red Card):

The Red Card or expulsion is the ultimate sanction available to a referee and is merely an extension of the procedure used for the Yellow Card. It is just as important that the card be produced early in the incident as tempers are often more inflamed during situations involving the dismissal of a player and you need to maintain control over the match. The whistle blast should be as vigorous as possible and the facial expression the most serious available to you. Ensure the player leaves the field of play and its precincts quickly and do not restart the match until he has done so.

Conclusion:

As you can see we have progressed along a path that has seen each level of sanction build on the preceding level. Clearly there may be occasions where you will be required to go directly to an expulsion where an offence is of sufficient seriousness and you must be prepared to act accordingly if necessary if you are to earn the respect of the players and your peers.

It is not possible or advisable to move backwards down the scale, i.e. moving from a caution to a "public warning" as this reduces your perceived control over the players and the match.

Remember it's all about effective control over the players and the match and it is what separates good officials from elite referees.