

ASSOCIATION OF ELITE SPORTS OFFICIALS (AESO)

The four major team sports in the United Kingdom have come together to establish the Association of Elite Sports Officials (AESO) to help raise standards of officiating and work towards an improved perception and appreciation of the vital role played by sports officials.

AESO was launched at Twickenham in October and its main aims are to:

- Improve standards of officiating through inter-sport exchange of ideas and practices
- Develop a more positive image of sports officials
- Engender a greater appreciation of the dedication of sports officials and their key role in sport
- Assist sports governing bodies in recruiting and retaining sports officials, especially females, young people and ethnic minorities

Initially, AESO's activities will be led by the full-time referees and umpires from Football, Cricket, Rugby Union and Rugby League. The governing bodies of these four sports support the initiative and through regular communication between the sports it is intended that AESO will make a significant contribution to raising the standards of officiating, recruiting and retaining sports officials and changing the public's view of referees and umpires.

AESO will provide opportunities for full-time officials of the different sports to exchange ideas and share their experiences by arranging conferences, seminars and workshops. This inter-disciplinary approach is an innovative way of ensuring that professional officiating skills can

be shared and developed to enhance the key role that officials play in their sports. Improving the standard of officiating in sport through the exchange of ideas and practices will underpin all the work that AESO undertakes.

The media's portrayal of officials significantly affects the public's perception of the competence, dedication and role of sports officials. At times, the media's negativity and criticism (sometimes ill-informed) contribute to a poor appreciation of the dedication and professionalism of sports officials and the vital role they play in sport. AESO aims to be the voice of officiating and to work actively to present a balanced response to events and controversies, ensuring that the officials' perspective is represented. To be effective in presenting and explaining the officials' line, AESO will be proactive in addressing the issues facing all sports and will foster links with other established sports officials bodies to provide responses to key events.

AESO will challenge the often negative caricature of the official and work with governing bodies and all other stakeholders to tackle the abuse and lack of appreciation and respect which discourage people from taking up or continuing with their officiating, ultimately to the detriment of the sports concerned.

AESO hopes to play a key role in assisting the recruitment and retention of sports officials by making available high profile officials for recruitment/retention campaigns and arranging for elite officials to visit schools, youth clubs, universities etc... There will be a strong focus on recruiting and supporting female, young and ethnic minority officials.



THIS INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH IS AN INNOVATIVE WAY OF ENSURING THAT PROFESSIONAL OFFICIATING SKILLS CAN BE SHARED AND DEVELOPED.

The Active Members Group (AMG) is made up of two active full-time officials from each sport and will meet on a regular basis, working in an advisory capacity and at an operational level.

At their inaugural meeting, the Active Members' Group focussed on a number of key areas:

- Opening up the officiating profession by removing the mystique surrounding the official.
- Highlighting the positive contribution made by officials.
- Emphasising and supporting the opportunities officiating brings (especially to young people), in particular the chance to be actively involved in sport at the highest domestic and international levels.
- Ensuring that current officials accept their responsibilities as role models.
- Working with the media to try to develop a more positive image of the sports official.

AESO also has the potential to act as a 'think tank' for sporting bodies to debate, assess and propose amendments to laws etc...

Through hard work and inter-sport co-operation, AESO aims to make a significant contribution to sports officiating in the UK resulting in higher standards of officiating, a greater number of active sports officials, and an improved perception and appreciation of the vital role sports officials play.

AESO Executive Board

Chairman

David Elleray (Football Association)

Vice Chairmen

Stuart Cummings (Rugby League) and Ed Morrison (Rugby Football Union)

Chief Executive Officer

Chris Kelly (England & Wales Cricket Board)

Technical Director

Keith Hackett (PGMO)

The Active Members Board

Football

Mike Riley and Howard Webb

Cricket

Nigel Llong and Richard Kettleborough

Rugby League

Steve Ganson and Phil Bentham

Rugby Union

Wayne Barnes and Chris White

There follows a series of articles showing how the four different sports approach dissent.



IN TODAY'S SPORTING CULTURE PLAYERS ARE NOT QUITE AS QUICK TO ACCEPT A RULING.

Nigel Llong (left) taking the field at Lord's with Darryl Hair

DEALING WITH DISSENT

CRICKET

Nigel Llong

ECB Full List Umpire and ICC International Panel Umpire

For clarification, dissent, as written in the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Team Officials, is divided into two levels; with the same code used at First Class Level.

1. Dissent of an umpire's decision by word or action
2. Serious dissent of an umpire's decision by word or action

Many officials of all sports will contest that dissent is dissent and will be steadfast in upholding their views. On occasions when dealing with (non serious) dissent, a quiet word with the player or his coach is usually more beneficial than the heavy handed approach, however serious dissent should always be reported. The protocol we use at first class level is that the player and his representative (captain, coach) are required to attend a hearing held by the two umpires at the end of that day's play. A Code of Conduct report form is filled in stating the events that took place, with the accused having the right to reply through the form. The offence is graded over four levels. Players can acquire a series of points through dissent and other offences. A player who acquires over nine points during a two year period will face a disciplinary panel. Any umpire of the International Playing Control Team (of which there are four) can lay a charge against a player or team management. The match referee will then hold the hearing and lay down the penalty as per ICC guidelines.

Failure to report an incident is letting your colleagues, the governing body and the game down. Not only does dissent undermine the Official, it also can severely disrupt the atmosphere and even the flow of a game. It is important to deal with all incidents, ensuring that you are not allowing the player to become a serial offender.

In today's sporting culture players are not quite as quick to accept a ruling. Many of the problems regarding dissent arise from a lack of respect for the official and the game. Added to that, players' earnings have increased hugely over the last decade, which in itself creates a great deal of pressure to perform. Players are much more likely to argue a ruling if they know their place in the squad and earnings will be affected through a poor performance on the field. Fortunately officials now have televised replays showing the dissent, making it more difficult for the players to contest the decision or gain the crowd's sympathy when the big replay screen captures the play in question.

However, it is important to remember that officials and equipment are not infallible and genuine errors can be made. The governing bodies and officials will always act in a fair and just manner and attempt to resolve issues in a professional environment and further the development of the game.

UMPIRE FACTS

Nigel Llong is an ECB Full List Umpire and ICC International Panel Umpire. He played for Kent CCC and his highest first class score was 130.

1996
Played in the Benson & Hedges Final, Kent vs Surrey

2000
Started umpiring on the ECB Reserve List

2002
Promoted to the ECB Full List

2004
Appointed as ICC TV Umpire

2006
Appointed to the full International Panel

WE HAVE THE USE OF THE "SIN BIN", WHERE A YELLOW CARD IS SHOWN TO THE PLAYER AND HE IS ORDERED OFF THE FIELD FOR A PERIOD OF TEN MINUTES.



DEALING WITH DISSENT

RUGBY LEAGUE

Ashley Klein
Rugby League Match Official

Rugby League has always been in a unique position, where the respect afforded to officials is something instilled into the mindset of players at grassroots level. This does not mean that it doesn't crop up throughout the course of a match as, like all professional sports people, Rugby League players are also passionate and sometimes overstep the mark.

One of the strengths of our sport is dealing with dissent, with the RFL handing down the appropriate disciplinary action to offenders and supporting the Match Officials and their actions during a game.

In Rugby League, we look to pick up any direct dissent directed at any of the on-field officials (referee and touch judges). The first type of dissent is where players are mouthing off in an aggressive manner directly at the official/s; this differs from a player asking a question. Our approach is purely on a respect basis, if a player shows the official respect then the referee will show that player the same level of respect back. However, if the player is only going to be aggressive and unmanageable then the referee must deal with this form of dissent. The other form of dissent that is required to be dealt with is visual where a player makes gestures through use of their hands to display frustration; this form of dissent is a greater indicator to the fans as it's visual dissent for all to see and it's important that it's dealt with.

As officials we have the initial penalty if a player disputes a decision either verbally or visually. If a penalty has already been awarded we are

afforded the opportunity to advance the mark 10 metres, once. This is a huge advantage for the non-offending team, as figures suggest that on the back of a penalty being awarded points are scored between 60-70% of the time.

In most instances the penalty and/or the advancing of the mark is enough to ensure that players immediately stop, either through showing their own self control or having a teammate step in to assist and ensure that the player goes no further. If, however, the player continues to display dissent, we have processes in place after giving the player two opportunities to show control, we have the use of the "Sin Bin", where a yellow card is shown to the player and he is ordered off the field for a period of ten minutes. This is a huge loss for a side, as defending with a player down not only has an adverse effect during that ten minute period but also for the remainder of the game as a result of the extra energy expended by the other players covering from being a player short.

In rare cases, if the player continues with dissent after being sent to the "Sin Bin" the referee can dismiss the player from the field for the entire match, by producing the red card.

A lot of preventative measures are taken by the referee during the course of a match by engaging the captain. Making it the captain's responsibility to control his players, usually works in that it shows that the referee is attempting to work with the players and is not looking to react hastily. Our working relationship with the captains is one of our main strengths when stepping out onto the field.

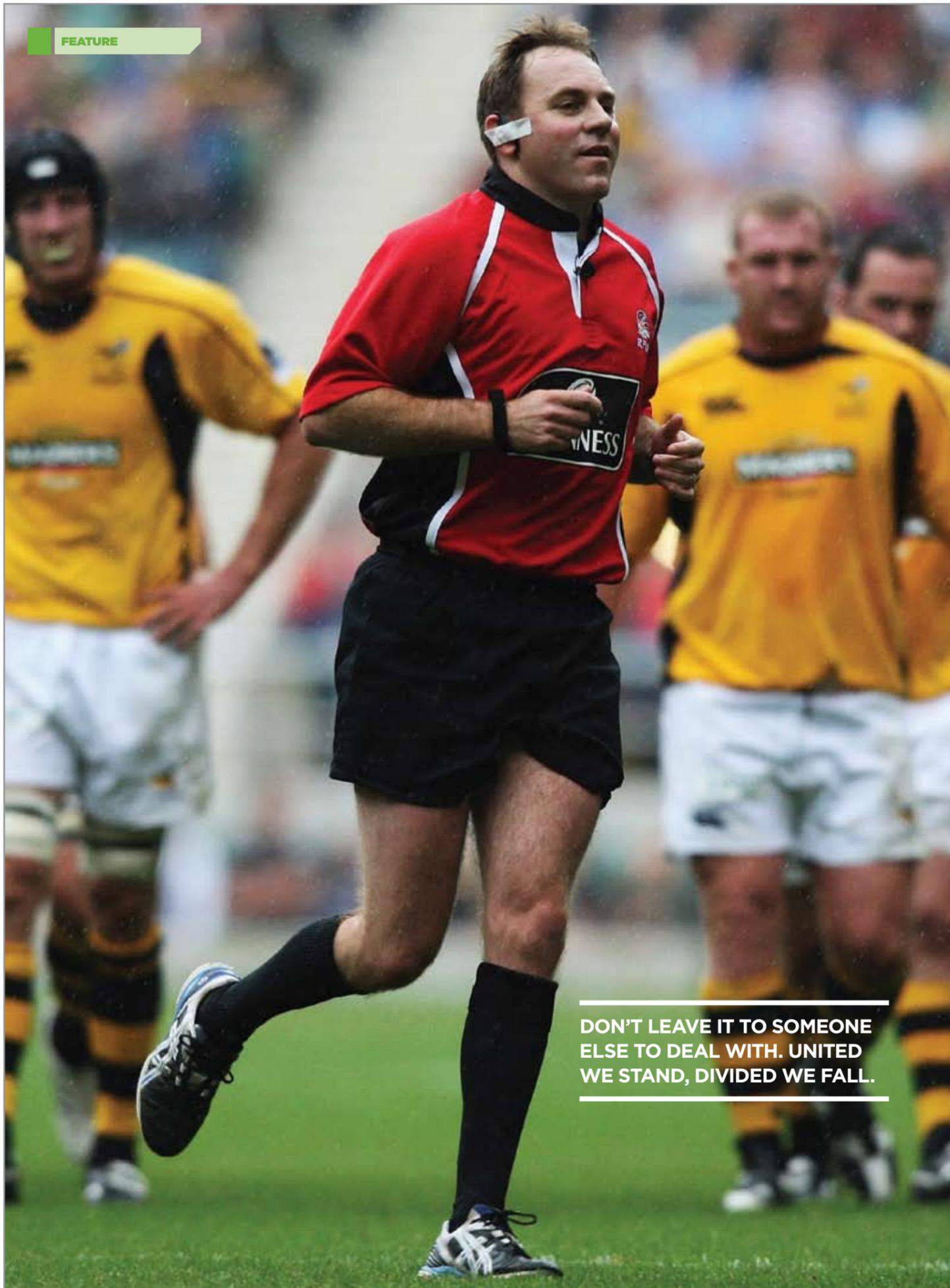
REF FACTS

Ashley Klein is a full-time rugby league match official. He was educated in Australia and previously worked as a Systems Test Analyst before moving to England and becoming Match Officials Development Officer for the RFL.

2005
Named as the Powergen Referee of the Year

2006
Gillette International Referee of the Year

2008
Rugby League World Cup Final Referee



DON'T LEAVE IT TO SOMEONE ELSE TO DEAL WITH. UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL.

DEALING WITH DISSENT

RUGBY UNION

Andrew Small
Rugby Union Match Official

Within rugby circles we have always looked on and thought how other sports were so envious of rugby referees and how much control they have over the players during any game. To a certain degree this is a positive approach by referees to the game and the players, but a tremendous deal of credit must go to those players, coaches, supporters and administrators in the English game.

We as rugby referees do not have the same issues as football when dealing with dissent, as cases and actions by players are few and far between. A referee is expected to communicate with players as he/she would wish to be communicated with. We have very good relationships with players and coaches across several divisions and the players are taught from an early age to respect each other, respect the game and respect the referee.

As a former Head of Sport in a Prep school, I know our values in the game are bought into by all. As an elite match official I have a direct responsibility to the game, to ensure that it is played in the right spirit. To this end the players also have to respect their responsibilities towards the match officials.

The Captain is the first member of the team to deal with. We often inform him/her of issues relating to their team, including vociferous players. The second option is to communicate with the player and or penalise him/her.

Often a quiet word with them directly can appease the situation. Thirdly, a player can be yellow carded; within Rugby Union this carries a penalty of ten minutes in the 'Sin Bin'. This gives the opposition a numerical advantage for those ten minutes. And finally a red card can be shown to a player for depending on the degree of the dissent.

Within rugby we have no hard and fast rule on the use of sanctions and cards. Every referee understands the spirit of the game and the way it is to be played. We also believe that we should not leave the issue of player dissent solely to the referee. As elite match officials we share a collective understanding of our role in the domestic game.

One issue we experience is that of microphones. Several grounds around England use RefLink. The system allows spectators to hear the referee directly and also the players can be heard through the unit as well. This places more responsibility on us to deal with dissent and the way the players talk to each other and the referee. Televised matches see the referees voice broadcast to the viewers at home. The pressure on the referee's management can be the difference between good and very good officials.

With the very nature of our physical game there are flash points that can occur in a variety of situations. The IRB (International Rugby Board) has increased the role of Assistant Referees which gives us two more sets of eyes when it comes to managing difficult players in the game.

REF FACTS

Andrew Small is a full time Rugby Union referee.

1993
Began refereeing

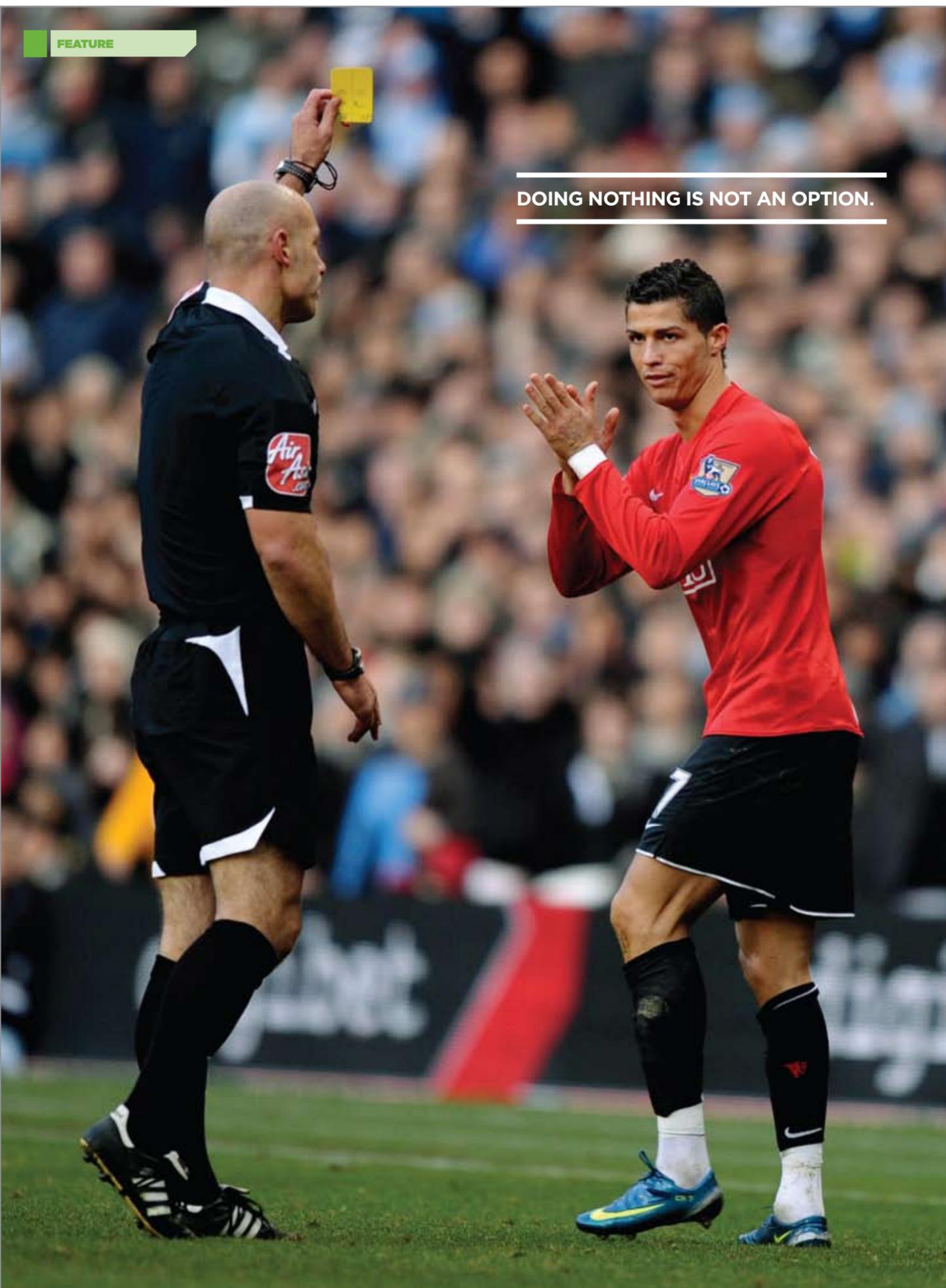
2002
Continued referee career in England

2004-2005
U19 Rugby World Cup Referee

2006
Refereed The Churchill Cup Made Guinness Premiership Debut

2007/8-2008/9
Refereed IRB International Sevens Series

2007
Made Heineken Cup debut



DOING NOTHING IS NOT AN OPTION.

DEALING WITH DISSENT

FOOTBALL

Howard Webb
FIFA and Select Group Referee

Passion plays a big part in making Association Football the popular sport that it is. The game provokes feelings of happiness and disappointment, joy and frustration. Emotions are stirred - the organisers of the Euro 2008 Finals told us to 'Expect Emotions' when adopting this phrase as the tournament's official slogan. And of course the game creates debate - not every decision is clear cut. Everybody is entitled to an opinion but The Laws of Association Football dictate that it is only the opinion of the referee which matters, and it is final. However, the passionate nature of the game means the participants' opinions are sometimes made known to others!

It's generally accepted that it is reasonable for a player to show mild disappointment without the need for formal action by the referee. We all know how much the game matters to everybody involved but any show of disappointment needs to be instant and not excessive. A key task of the referee is to recognise and distinguish between reasonable disappointment and acts of dissent which challenge the match officials' authority.

Dealing with dissent/disappointment is a little like dealing with fouls - the severity and the degree of intent are important elements to consider. Sometimes, a 'stepped approach' (quiet word - public rebuke - caution) can be used, although not every 'step' in the 'disciplinary ladder' has to be taken. The referee needs to react firmly but appropriately.

Consider a scenario where a player makes critical comment - loud enough for those in immediate earshot to hear (including the referee) but not beyond that. He is not acting out of disappointment and action is needed as unchecked, his comments are likely to escalate. A quiet word may be appropriate. Should he repeat these actions, a public rebuke and/or use of the captain to assist in managing the player can have a great impact as any subsequent yellow card has credibility in everyone's

eyes - "well, the ref did warn him!" The yellow card has a real deterrent value, even though the player's actions seemed relatively minor and may not, in isolation, have undermined the referee's authority.

However, had the player, in the first instance, waved his arms in the air demonstratively, slammed the ball into the ground in disgust or angrily kicked it away, run to an assistant referee to remonstrate or suggested that he needed glasses then this public challenge to the match official's authority must be immediately sanctioned with a yellow card. This sends out a clear message that such actions are not acceptable. Doing nothing is not an option.

Referees should be pro-active and identify at an early stage when players are becoming frustrated. Well chosen words at the right time can assist in calming a player or in gaining their co-operation. Communication is vital in gaining players' trust and respect. However, talking too much or at the wrong time can be seen as a sign of weakness/uncertainty thereby encouraging dissent. When making key decisions use strong body language and clear signals to let everybody know that the decision is not open to debate. After the incident you can do your talking 'off the ball'. Don't be afraid to acknowledge from time to time that a mistake may have been made or that you can't see everything as this will show your human side. Players will generally respond positively to this if you don't do it too often and wait for the outcome of that phase of play before admitting your mistake!

All dissent needs to be addressed. The Laws of the Game give you the powers to take disciplinary action but you can also use a wide range of management skills to ensure that your actions have credibility and are accepted. By distinguishing between disappointment and dissent, dealing strongly with public shows of disagreement, taking a stepped approach to less public acts, and being pro-active too, you should be able to maintain your authority.

Remember, if left unchecked, dissent is like a cancer which will grow and undermine your control.

REF FACTS

Howard Webb

2001
Promoted to National List Referee

2003
Promoted to Select Group Referee

2005
Promoted to FIFA Referee
Community Shield Referee

2007
FIFA World U20 Finals Referee
Worthington Cup Final Referee

2008
UEFA European Championship Finals Referee