Wednesday 3rd September, 2025

All,
Welcome to a new season. You may have heard on the grapevine that I have been elected as the new Chair of the Northumberland Referees' Society for the coming year. Yes truly a lunatic in charge of the asylum!

I'm hoping to bring a fresh and open approach to the sometimes tense relationship between coaches and referees this season and as such will be open to conversation with you on any aspect of officiating, laws or interpretations of them. If I'm not available then I'm sure another member of our Executive will be happy to help. All of our contact details are available on our website.

The society's referees are always willing to help out at your training sessions and those of you who have taken up the offer will know the benefit of this. If you want someone in to help out at a session then please let me know and we can co-ordinate it.

Before the season gets under way though a couple of things to bring to the attention of your clubs' players and coaches, at all levels**.**

Firstly match official abuse. Unfortunately our round ball colleagues (players, coaches and officials) are failing to get a grip on this and I believe it is now becoming a greater issue for our sport. If we don't tackle the problem now I feel that in the not too distant future we will have the same issues that football has. We had a case last year in Northumberland where a coach at an age grade girls pre-season friendly called the referee a cheat and was quite rightly charged and found guilty of MOA - a girls pre-season friendly!!

One of my aims as Chair of the Refs' Society is to ensure that our referees can go out every game in a safe environment and enjoy their hobby. Yes, just like the players**,** we don't get paid. We give up our time for free to help 30+ players enjoy their hobby each game. Is it too much to ask that we can enjoy ours without being abused by players, spectators and especially coaches?

Can I ask that you stress to your clubs' management that we all want to enjoy our afternoons playing or officiating our great game and that MOA will not be tolerated. The referees will be getting the same sort of message and I'll be encouraging them to act on any abuse they receive.

Secondly studs. A perennial problem that seems to get worse the more the boot manufacturers push the boundaries of the regulations and market their latest technology. We have been in discussion with the RFU about a new boot from Oxen and the legality or otherwise of the metal blades on them. (https://www.rugbystuff.com/products/oxen-metasock-fg-rugby-boots-pink-black). The RFU have come back to us to say that as long as the boot conforms to Law 4.4 then they are ok but then blur the message somewhat by referring to World Rugby regulation 12 which sets the standards for boot / stud designs.

The law provides clarity on the role of the referee, before and during a match:

Law 6 - Duties of the referee before the match

6.4 The match officials **must** inspect the players' clothing **and studs** for conformity to Law 4.

Law 4 - Permitted Clothing

4.4 A player may not wear:
a. Any item contaminated by blood.
b. Any sharp or abrasive item.
c. Any items containing buckles, clips, rings, hinges, zippers, screws, bolts or rigid material or projection not otherwise permitted under this law.
d. Jewellery.
e. Gloves.
f. Shorts or leggings with padding sewn into them.
g. Any item that is normally permitted in law but, in the referee's opinion, is liable to cause injury.
h. Communication devices.

4.5

The referee has the **power to decide at any time** that part of a player's clothing is dangerous or illegal. In this case, the referee **must** order the player to remove the item. The player must not take part in the match until the item is removed or rendered harmless.

4.6

If, at an inspection before the match, a match official tells a player that an item banned under this law is being worn and the player is subsequently found to be wearing that item on the playing area, that player is sent off for misconduct.

The key take out from this in terms of studs / blades is that if the referee deems them to be illegal, especially being sharp or abrasive, then the player cannot play in them.

This link provides the latest RFU guidance on all aspects of players' clothing and equipment. A good read of it before the season starts and making sure the players are aware of it will hopefully minimise any kit non-conformance issues.
https://keepyourbootson.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/RugbySafe-Essential-Guides-and-Templates-2023-24.pdf

Those two are unfortunately the negative aspects of this message but can I finish on a positive note. I really feel we can move forward from an already positive relationship between the referees and coaches, to one where we're all in it together to help us all enjoy our great sport and remember…

"We're not perfect, players aren't perfect but we're all trying to be at our best every game. It's just a game, the refs are human, the coaches are volunteers, it's not the Premiership."

May I wish you all on behalf of the Referees' Society a successful season.

Best in rugby,

Dave Pearson
Chair Northumberland Referees' Society.