



The Last Word



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Vague & Almost Resolved



Is it possible to produce anything at the moment that deals with refereeing and not mention VAR? Probably not! It really doesn't matter whether you agree or disagree with the tongue in cheek headline, it is here for the foreseeable future. I have listened to most of the for and against arguments and there is some merit in all of them.

Of course players will look for a way to gain an advantage from the new system, it has always been the case. From the four step rule, when goalkeepers took four steps and then stood holding the ball for as long as the referee would allow, to the decision to allow goal kicks to be taken from either side of the goal area so that the restart of play could be speeded up.

Not surprisingly goal keepers soon learnt that there was nothing to stop them ambling from collecting a ball ten yards to the right of the goal and strolling slowly to the left hand side of the goal area in order to take the kick! Whatever IFAB come up with to "improve" the game it will always be exploited by coaches and players for their own gain. Having listened to Howard Webb talking to Rotherham RA and explain his vision of VAR being used in MLS in America he paints a picture that VAR will be a useful tool for professional football, and as Howard is head of VAR in America he is unlikely to say anything else. There are naturally many teething troubles to address. The Women's World Cup 2019 produced several contentious incidents. One of the most controversial was the interpretation of handball. The way it was interpreted in the Women's World Cup in France was that if a ball

struck an outstretched hand or arm, a penalty was awarded. The Premier League have said that they will not interpret handball offences in the same way. Is it any wonder that players and spectators are confused? The movement of goal keepers at the taking of a penalty kick is also to be interpreted differently in different competitions. Players are already using VAR to try and "buy" penalties in the Premier League.

Offside is another area of debate. VAR is either offside or not, no argument, black or white. Yet still there is debate as to when the ball was "actually" kicked and when the player was the fraction of a centimetre offside that triggers the VAR check. Changes in the law were supposedly brought in to give the advantage to the attacking side. This does not seem to have done so.

Whatever new technology is introduced it will not stop personal opinions being held and arguments in the pub after the game. Is controversy not part of the reason we enjoy football anyway. It seems to me that VAR has not stopped players arguing with the referee, but given them another bone to chew. In the "good old days" when a referee could move away from a player in order to take up his next position, he is now stationary listening to his headset allowing discontented players the chance to gather around him questioning VAR. Is VAR going to help the park referee at the weekend? No! Will it give TV pundits something else to argue about? Yes! Am I for or against it? The jury is still out!!



How you can eliminate Dissent from your game!!



Sorry! The headline above is a lie. You will never eliminate dissent from your game. You can, however, control it. Dissent takes many forms and you must be able to recognise it, in order to remain in control of your game. The dictionary definition is "in sports such as football and rugby the offence of disagreeing with a decision made by a referee". However as we know players can be subtle in their methods. What about the player who is beside you when you make a decision and quietly asks, "Are you sure ref?" Is he trying to place a doubt in your mind and influence future decisions. Or the player who looks despairingly to the skies and spreads his hands when a free kick is awarded against him. What about the disbelieving belly laugh when you have made a decision, or the "well done, at last ref!" How about the player who shouts to his team mates "We've got a right one here lads!" and one of my favourites "Are your eyes painted on Ref?"

Dissent can be personal, (directed to an official) public, (volume and visibility) persistent (continued low level disagreement) and provocative (racial or discriminatory). Of course not only players can be guilty of dissent, substitutes, coaches and team officials and spectators will regularly question your decisions.

If it is not addressed early in your game dissent will have a negative effect on it. What dissent does is to undermine the referees authority. It interrupts the flow of the game. It reduces the enjoyment for players and spectators and if it is not dealt with it will escalate.

There are of course varying forms and degrees of dissent. Players have to be allowed to vent their frustrations and an initial vocal outburst at the moment of the decision is normally acceptable. So take a practical and flexible approach to these

temporary and emotional reactions. Have either a private or public warning and warn about future conduct.

Over the years referees have used various methods to minimise dissent, the quiet word, the public word, a humorous rejoinder, moving away quickly to take up a position for the next phase of play or taking disciplinary action. All of these methods have pros and cons and the personal character and confidence of the referee will influence the success of each. Of course this season we have another tool in our armoury and that is the "sin bin". Enough was written in the last issue of "The Last Word" about sin bins so I will not repeat myself now.

Whatever you do, do not ignore dissent, what you allow you encourage! Always be calm, respectful, courteous and firm. Do not add more emotion to the situation. Explain your decision, outline the consequences of further dissent, make it clear that it will be their choice if they continue. Always ask "Do you understand?" and say "Thank you!"

This season managers can receive red and yellow cards, so discipline is instant for them, and should you not be able to identify the culprit in the technical area the head coach receives the card.

Spectators of course do not come under your jurisdiction, but on occasion prolonged and perhaps abusive comments from them will affect your performance and the players perception of you and their attitude to you. It is highly inadvisable to speak directly to spectators. If they become a problem, and this is most likely in junior football where parents are present, then speaking to the club management is probably the best method of dealing with it. You will probably be able to tell which set of supporters are causing the problem. When speaking to the manager



use the same approach you do to players. Ask for them to moderate their comments or further action will be taken, i.e report to FA or abandon match. Having said that I recently read an article in a refereeing magazine that had been reproduced from an original 1988 article. It went as follows. in the second half the referee gave a free kick against the home side. A spectator ran down from the top of the stand to the boundary fence and shouted, "You are rubbish ref! That was never a foul! I watched you at Leatherhead and you were rubbish there as well." As far as I am concerned these inconsequential outbursts should be ignored. Not by this referee. Smiling he turned to the spectator and said, "Well if you paid money to come and see me again today you must be a bigger fool than you look! Now pull that silly woolen hat over your eyes and go back to sleep." The spectator crept back up to his place in the stand and the game continued. This approach is not one that I would advise referees to take. However some referees have the personality and charisma to make these types of remarks and get away with them. I certainly didn't.

The amount and level of dissent will vary from game to game. The most effective method of eliminating dissent is to get every decision correct and always be up with play. Dead easy, now go and get on with it! No, it isn't going to happen.

How much dissent occurs during a game is dependent on a number of things, the tolerance level of the referee, the importance of the game, (local derby, league - relegation decider - history between these two teams) , quality of refereeing decisions. Football can be a passionate game and you have to be able to distinguish between frustration and dissent. Experience will help you in this and decide if a players reaction is acceptable or not. You will know when a player has crossed the line of your tolerance level. However your tolerance level can be variable too. If you have had an argument with your partner, lost your wallet and scratched the car while parking, your tolerance level is likely to be low. If you have just had a promotion at work and a nice lottery win or Newcastle have won, then your tolerance level will probably be higher. The difference between the two

days is what confuses players when expecting a constant performance from a particular referee.

A stepped approach can usually be used when dealing with dissent. a quiet word to the offender to let him know you are not happy with his reactions. Humour can be useful for low level dissent, but be careful that you do not get back more than you bargained for. Some people will respond and others will react aggressively, so make sure you have picked the right moment and person. The formal rebuke, or public word, is the next step when you isolate the player and make sure everyone is aware of the warning being given. We now have the sin bin to help us in our battle against dissent so use it wisely and I would suggest sparingly. the next step is a caution and if you have used the stepped approach his team mates and coaches will accept that he has been warned and deflect blame from you.

Try to read the signs of impending dissent, a players body language towards you, the opposition and his team mates is a key indicator. There are also times during a game when tension is heightened, at the start of a game and just after half time, when a player has been injured, after a controversial decision, a last minute goal, a red card, or a penalty. All these can mean players lose their self control and leads to frustration and ultimately dissent. Try to intervene early, look for players who are making mistakes, being constantly fouled, being criticised by their managers and supporters. Try to work with these players, show some empathy to them. Do not confuse empathy with condescension. Having empathy means you understand the other persons position, you don't have to agree with it. Always avoid escalation, do not become emotionally involved in an argument, keep calm and respectful, don't let something you say escalate the situation. Don't ignore it, do not try to "win" the argument. In these situations there are no "winners". You are trying to calm down the player and enhance your match control.

Be pro active in your approach to dissent. Don't take it personally and do not allow players to undermine your confidence in your game. Continue to develop your overall game and your ability to deal with dissent and you will become a better official.



WHAT'S YOUR DECISION?



1. How many and what are the minimum distances opponents should be at restarts this season?
2. Reds are attacking in the 8th minute, blue 5 attempts to clear the ball and it strikes the arm of red 9 who is 2yds away with his back to blue 5. The ball falls conveniently for red 9 to pass to red 8 who shoots and scores. Goal or No Goal?
3. While the ball is in play the blue manager is taunting the red winger who has been having a poor game. As the red winger runs past the technical area he runs off the field of play and head butts the blue manager. What action do you take?
4. Assuming that the maximum number are used, how many officials may be appointed to a game?



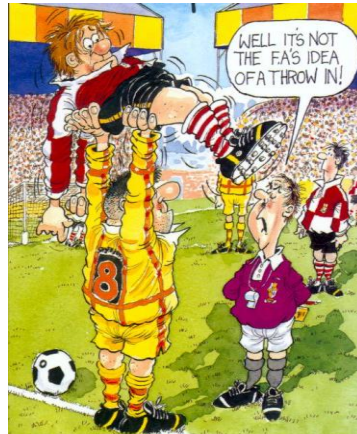
A couple of seasons ago I was an observer at a step 7 game. Blues were attacking and the ball went over the touchline and behind the low one barred perimeter fence for a throw in. The ball had crossed the touch line at a 90 degree angle for a short distance of about 4 yards. The red player jumped over the barrier picked up the ball, and seeing a team mate in a good attacking position, threw it correctly according to Law 15 back onto the field of play, it entered the field of play at the same point where it had left. The referee stopped play and ordered the throw to be retaken. In debrief I asked why he had done this and he replied something along the lines of "Well he can't do that." I asked why not as no law had been broken.

Procedure

At the moment of delivering the ball, the thrower must:

- stand facing the field of play
- have part of each foot on the touchline or on the ground outside the touchline
- throw the ball with both hands from behind and over the head from the point where it left the field of play

All opponents must stand at least 2 m (2 yds) from the point on the touchline where the throw-in is to be taken.



I later checked competition rules and there was no mention of whether throw ins must be taken in front of the barrier.

I took this incident back to my LRA and it produced animated discussion. There were three outcomes put forward:-

1. No action
2. Retake
3. Foul throw

It was generally agreed that a referee could give any of these and not be questioned by players on the day. The question was asked, what if, as at some grounds, there is only a barrier on one side of the field of play. Is it one decision at one side of the field of play and another on the opposite one.

The laws of the game do not say that you have to stand on the touchline, but only on the touchline or on the ground

behind it. Providing that the ball comes back into play at the point it left then law has been adhered to. I am still of the opinion that I am correct and yes I chickened out in the observation and made no written mention of the incident. I would be pleased to receive any other feedback about this incident.

HOW DO YOU IMPLEMENT THE FA'S RESPECT PROGRAMME?

A few years ago I was on holiday in Italy. I went into a cafe and saw a small sign, it read:-

Caffè	€ 3
Caffè per favore	€ 2
Per favore, potrei prendere un caffè	€ 1

I thought, "I'll have the cheapest", but before ordering I asked for a translation. The waitress kindly obliged and it goes like this,

Coffee! 3 euro,
Coffee please. 2 euro,
Please could I have a coffee? 1 euro.

OK it's a pretty weak joke but it does demonstrate how people feel about the way they are being addressed. Politeness costs nothing and in this cafe it might, save you some money. Football players are human too even when they are trying to kick lumps off each other and calling you worse than muck for applying the laws of the game. The way they will react to you will be affected by the way they are spoken to, as I was trying to show in the cafe example!

If you expect players to respect you then you must treat them with respect too. Always stay calm. When someone else is at a boiling point, getting equally angry is only going to make matters worse. Focus on keeping yourself calm, or else the situation might quickly spiral into an argument. This is not to say you should act completely unemotionally, but try not to let your own feelings get too heated.

Respect is not something that is given to you with your refereeing qualification. It is something that must be earned. In the dim and distant past when I started refereeing it was said that the best referees were the ones that you never noticed. They got on and did their job with a minimum of fuss. There were very few well known referees, that may be to do with the lack of TV coverage (1 game on Match of the Day) and the lower profile of the game of football, when it wasn't a business. What you have to remember is that while the referee is an important part of the game, football is there for the enjoyment of players and the entertainment of spectators. What they do not come to see is a referee who thinks "It's all about me!"

Everyone has their own personality that has been developed over a lifetime. It is not going to change quickly

and you will certainly not be able to change it just for the length of the game that you are refereeing on any given day. It is worth thinking about adjusting your behaviour to be best able to gain the respect of players and team officials in order to make your match control more effective. So when you next go into a cafe try asking "Please could I have a cup of coffee?" and you may not get it any cheaper but you might just get a smile and better service!



What's your decision - Answers

1. 5

1m - 1yd	Free kick with a wall of 3 or more
2m - 2yds	Throw in
4m - 4.5yds	Dropped ball
9.15m 10 yds	Free kicks - Kick offs - Penalty - Corner
11m 12yds	Goal kicks & active goal keeper at penalty kicks

2. No goal - It is an offence if a player: gains possession/control of the ball after it has touched their hand/arm and then:

- scores in the opponents' goal
- creates a goal-scoring opportunity

3. Stop play - Send off red winger - restart with an DFK on the touchline closest to where the offence occurred.

4. 9

- Referee - two assistant referees - fourth official - two additional assistant referees - reserve assistant referee - video assistant referee (VAR) and at least one assistant VAR (AVAR)

I hope you have enjoyed the second issue of "The Last Word". Any feedback you have will be appreciated. I would also be pleased to accept any contributions readers may wish to send in. All contributions will be acknowledged and credited to the author (if you so wish). Also if you have any subjects that you would like to be included, please let me know. In particular I would be interested in local news from the Sheffield & Hallamshire area, with pictures if possible.

The last word this in edition goes to mummy Zebra!

