

AWARENESS and ALERTNESS

Essential A-A requirements for a Referee

Summarised by Bob Spiller

There is no doubt that a major requisite to becoming a successful Referee will be an individual's ability to fully concentrate in depth throughout the duration of a match when carrying out the specified powers and duties as defined in Law 5. In other words, to have the mental strength of character with a profound degree of **awareness and alertness** emanating from a fully focused mind which we know as **concentration**.

The following guidance notes relating the various aspects of **awareness and alertness** linked with **concentration** will suffice as reminders for both technical and practical acts of refereeing which we should be ready to carry out at any specific time and situation which may arise during the progression of the game. The importance of developing and applying **awareness and alertness** cannot be over-emphasised with both aspects having far reaching implications with regard to your match control and moreover, how the assessor/coach views your overall technical and practical performance.

It's ALL in the MIND

Mental strength relates an alert, active mind, developed through high levels of physical fitness, is essential for good refereeing, because visual problems are fed into the brain at high speed. The process of visually registering any given situation – for example, positions and movement of players at a corner kick and the direction, height and speed of the ball – is observed by the measurement of the action against the referee's understanding of the laws.

- Mental strength encompasses the ability to concentrate intently and in doing so focuses the mind on all that unfolds and develops during the progression of a match. Such levels of intense concentration will, without doubt, be the most important weapon in your armoury.
- Avoid becoming too complacent or over confident, otherwise you will suffer rapid evaporation of concentration.
- Never allow the players, club officials or even remarks from spectators to influence your judgement on a decision or to play mind games in any way. Make your decision in a positive and concise manner and believe in your decision.
- Try to stay detached from stray comments and passing remarks by a player's verbal comments and actions designed to invade you're concentrating mind to disrupt your ring of confidence.
- If during the game, you realise you have made a wrong decision which could invite question or comment, do not let your mind dwell on it. Erase it immediately from your mind and then concentrate and focus on the making of the next decision and getting it right.
- Always be thinking one step ahead of the players and be forever wide awake and mentally prepared to expect the unexpected. Focus the mind and anticipate what is going to happen next. This will be of particular importance when the ball is out of play with a subsequent restart in play to take place.
- Disciplinary sanctions – apply them in accordance with the disciplinary ladder wisely and without being influenced by anyone. Be mentally strong and have the courage of your convictions to do what is required in Law.

To PENALISE or not to PENALISE

The Laws of the Game have been written and framed to ensure that those who actively participate in the game can do so by deriving the maximum enjoyment, equality and safety. However, the competitive manner in which the game is played with players challenging for possession of the ball will inevitably result in various degrees of physical contact. With any challenge, recognise the significance of the following factors. The player's body language and facial expressions, the location of the ball and the players involved, the speed and direction in which the challenge is being made and the challenging player's attitude and deliberation.

- Always endeavour to be close to the active playing situations to heighten your awareness of an ensuing action and, moreover, from a viable position which will allow you to clearly observe the outcome of any individual situation.
- Being in the right place at the right time will give you freedom to clearly view both the offending player and the offended player as the challenge is made.
- Be fully focused and concentrate on the manner of every challenge which is made.
- Try to anticipate and recognise when and where a challenge is to be made by whom on whom.
- Rather than ball watch too much, a common fault, focus your attention on the active play where the players are about to challenge for the ball, at the outcome of a set piece restart for example.
- Avoid penalising offences of a trivial or innocuous nature. For to do so would suffocate the flow of the game, causing players to become frustrated.
- Do think about the wisdom of the application of advantage and will it be successful in the standard of football you officiate in.
- Subject to the tempo of the game, recognise the time when you need to step up a gear and enforce your authority and work-rate or alternatively, ease off and encourage fair play.
- Take time to listen to what the players are saying to each other ---- and to you in particular. The spoken words and the way they are expressed or emphasised may be a wake up call that you need to be less tolerant with the need to tighten up on your control.

REACT quickly but do not OVER-REACT

It cannot be over emphasised for the need to react quickly in a positive, confident and composed manner when the situation demands without over-reacting. Under such envisaged circumstances the potential problems would not become major issues which would otherwise, significantly affect the balance of the match control. Think in terms of prevention is better than cure.

- Being in close proximity to an incident and taking decisive action will help to 'nip the problem in bud' any envisaged or potential trouble.
- Be forever vigilant and leave nothing to chance. Anticipate any potential trouble before it can become a major concern. Get to the core of the incident as quickly as possible to create a 'self presence prevents' scenario.
- Two player's with menace, provoking each other following a hefty challenge ---- whistle as loud as possible to let them know you are close by. Should you be at distance to the flare up, be double quick to get to the scene to assert your authority.

- In situations where acts of serious foul play or violent conduct are committed, arrive at the scene as quick as possible to defuse the problem and to prevent possible retaliation with the situation escalating out of control.
- When two players are adopting niggling tactics against each other, intervene with a word of warning as soon as possible. Be sure to let each player know you are aware of their actions and will be watching them closely.
- Always be on your guard at any stage of the game and ready to act quickly in order to defuse any actual or potential 'off the ball' activities.
- When faced with an eruption of a 'mass player confrontation' ---- stand well clear, use the whistle in a forceful manner, observe the action and try to identify the main culprits. Once order has been restored, seek and administer the appropriate punishment to those players, one at the time, you have identified. Naturally, your two assistant referee colleagues and where applicable, the fourth official, would also be involved in helping you to restore order and to confirm the culprits as agreed in you pre-match instructions.
- Before committing yourself to award a free kick, be absolutely sure an offence has been committed.
- Do not be influenced in any manner or act when a player or players' appeal for a decision to be given in favour of their own team.
- Do not be swayed by players over reacting following a strong challenge and demanding a free kick and in some cases disciplinary action. Judge the situation as you see it.

Talk and Communicate with the Players

Verbal communication is a vital factor which opens up lines of contact between the referee and the players participating in the match. Such communication, can of course, also be linked with the club personal. For example, the team manager, the coach and team trainer. To establish and retain firm match control it will be of extreme importance for you to be fully conversant in the art of vocal communication. You will need to be in command of your vocabulary with a cool head and clear thinking when the pressure is on you.

- Do talk to the players to help them help themselves and interact with them to establish a good rapport at the appropriate times?
- Positive and informative communication with the players will be of paramount importance if you are to gain their trust and respect.
- Always think before you speak. Deliver your message with confidence and conviction in an authoritative manner, firm and friendly in tone and volume. In other words, firm and fearless, but always in a polite manner.
- When you have reason to speak to a player in the normal course of your duties be self composed in mind and body for all to observe. This will generate confidence in those around you as to your ability to carry out your powers and duties.
- Think also as to how you can use the whistle, as an extension to the voice, to talk for you when you are distant from the players and related activity.
- Not only should you think about talking to the players, but also to listen in passing to what they have to say without getting too involved. The last thing you want is confrontation and argument

- Always retain your self control in order to convey verbal messages in circumstances where the tempo of the game has become feisty. Uncontrolled anger or frustration on your part will significantly inhibit positive and clear thinking.
- Be open and honest with the players which will help you to gain their respect and will often develop into an improved relationship and greater understanding of their problems.
- Depending upon the degree of severity of an offence, the application of the quiet word, stern word or public rebuke will generally suffice to inform the offending player that you know what has happened and such conduct will not be tolerated.

Raising the Team's TOGETHERNESS

When the pre-match instructions are conveyed to the two assistant referees' and the fourth official if appropriate, this will be the time to install the need to be completely supportive to each other mentally and physically thus establishing ground rules for the achievement of complete teamwork, culminating in the scenario 'one for all and all for one'.

- Check out beforehand the level of experience your two assistant referees' have accumulated. Are they familiar with the grade of football they are expected to cope with?
- As the team leader use your communication and managerial skills to establish to promote and consolidate 'togetherness' of the members in your team.
- At the half time interval, re-group and discuss the first half events, clarify any anomalies and then be in readiness for the second half.
- As the game becomes heated ---- indicate the need to raise the team profile or to lower it accordingly.
- When two players clash and act in an aggressive manner toward each other ----- ensure the assistant closest to the flare up activity will quickly respond to help prevent the possibility of a mass confrontation developing.
- Always try to retain cross-field 'eye to eye' contact with your assistants and always be conscious of their positioning in relation to the open play and for restarts in play.

CONCLUDING comments

When refereeing a game, never simply wait for things to happen. Anticipate potential problems in order to prevent them. Relating your own experience, draw up a list of situations where disputes frequently arise and try to imagine what you might do to prevent them from happening. Be your own prophet.

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