

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

By
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INTRODUCTION

The title of this article is purely coincidental and with this contribution has nothing to do with the classic western film 'The Magnificent Seven' together with the well *known* theme tune. In the film the seven characters were part of the team recruited on the strength of their selective individually fine-tuned survival skills and when merged together became an awesome team --- The Magnificent Seven.

What has this got to do with refereeing you may well ask? Well in the case of the referee the integration of the magnificent seven selective skills will have an influential effect on the manner in which he/she performs and controls the game.

The often highly complex and tactical application, associated physical endeavour, speed of both thought and movement displayed by the players during the 90 minutes of today's football dictates that the referee too has an obligation to be both mentally and physically on top of his/her game if management and control of the game in accordance within the framework of the Laws is to be achieved, This requires the referee to call on a level of personal experience and technical know how to cope with whatever he /she may be faced with. In this respect the integration and fine tuning of the magnificent seven skills, highlighted below, will no doubt, have significant roles to play.

The magnificent seven refereeing skill factors, as listed below, will be discussed in terms of brief overviews of the practical significance of such skills.

- **Formulate a game plan and execute without fear or favour**
- **During the game, never wait for things to happen ----- Anticipate and act**
- **Presence is power ----- Be there with an authoritative impact**
- **Be proactive throughout the game**
- **Enforce and apply the laws in a consistent and sensible manner**
- **Always remain one step ahead of the players**
- **Finely ---- Be the Boss**

Therefore, by thinking about, integrating and applying the above skills as part of your on-field refereeing activities you will be sure to bring about a marked improvement in your overall performances.

FORMULATION of a GAME PLAN

When the players line up at the start of the game three things are generally on their mind. They would have 1) weighed up the oppositions strengths and weaknesses 2) decided on what tactics to use and 3) to test the referee's officiating skills and strength of character. In view of these aspects the formulation of a game plan assumes an important role if the referee is to successfully control the game in accordance with the laws.

It is a known fact referees' adjust the way they control the game in response to the way in which the game is being played by the participants. As the players "heat up" during periods of the game the referee will need to amend or fine tune the way the game is officiated. In other words, adjusting the level of control by the assertive and careful application of the disciplinary ladder and managing the game in a flexible and efficient manner. Moreover, the referee may constantly need to vary the degree of involvement based on the fluctuating temperature of the match proceedings and allowance of leniency to the players. Conversely there will be periods in the game when the players are in their most heightened state of agitation and or frustration which the referee must

instantly recognise and be most authoritative. This can be achieved by applying strict law to control the game; for example,

- a) Refrain from allowing the advantage and stop play to award a free kick for every foul.
- b) Increase the work rate and be in close proximity to identify and defuse confrontational areas.
- c) Issue verbal disciplinary warnings to guilty players in an open and public way.
- d) Swiftly deal with any acts of dissent.

Conversely when the game proceedings are in a state of less confrontational periods the referee may relax the control factor by becoming more lenient (increased flexibility for invoking the advantage clause) and become more readily friendly to the players, thus encouraging the game to flow and moreover to encourage fair play.

TEN-MINUTE REFEREEING METHOD

The ten-minute refereeing method is an incremental self assessment technique which becomes a structured and conscious way to gain initial control when it matters most and then to adjust that level of control during each subsequent ten-minute period, depending on the fluctuating tempo and the occurrences of 'hot phases of play' during the progression of the game.

As far as you are concerned the first ten minute period will be the time when you must be fully alert and focused by applying the laws more strictly, being present on the spot and being seen to be every where and into every thing, even if you do not really need to be. Talk to the players, and develop a good rapport with them and verbally encourage them to participate in sporting manner. Blow your whistle with more conviction than you normally would to get that extra impact on the players'. Control all throw-in procedures by being proactive to ensure they are taken from the correct place and manage free kicks by getting there and enforcing the 9.15m requirement.

Consider applying the advantage clause only if it is an obvious one, ball travelling through to the goalkeeper following an offside incident. Be there and everywhere, with an authoritative manner and confident body language, or at least make it look that way to the players. Have no hesitation whatsoever to make use of the disciplinary ladder depending on the misconduct level of severity to consolidate the match control aspect

Having come through the initial ten-minute period, assess and decide how you want to continue the next ten-minute period, repeating the ten-minute incremental process with self evaluations on how tightly you want to control the proceedings. Be sure to avoid the tendency to think the game is under control, relax the authoritative grip and become too lenient. Ideally, discreetly soften your authoritative approach and become lenient without sacrificing your overall control of the match proceedings. Remember to balance your strict control to coincide with the player's attitudes and mannerisms in the way they are reacting to your management skills and technique.

ANTICIPATION and ACTION

One of the ways in which a referee can prevent, or at least, have some significant influence on the outcome of a potential troublesome incident from occurring will be to **anticipate and act**. This will, of course, require mental strength in the form of an active and focused mind which will generate **awareness and alertness** to all that is going on. If and when trouble is anticipated, there is much that may be done to prevent it from becoming a problem ---- even if it does mean elasticising the interpretation of the laws to do so.

During the progression of the game be forever vigilant and leave nothing to chance or take anything for granted. Vigilance will also be the 'pass word' when there are temporary stoppages in the game with players awaiting the restart. This is where anticipation comes into focus for example, at the taking of a corner kick with the attackers and defenders all clustered together pushing and jostling each other within the penalty area while waiting for the corner kick to be taken. Awareness and alertness should kick in at this point, as to what is likely to happen and how to act to defuse the situation. Do use your powers of observation to anticipate the manifestation of any potential trouble spots and defuse them before they become a major

concern. In other words, get to the core of an incident as quickly as possible to create a presence prevents scenario.

Remember, anticipation is a function of watching the player's movements and the development of open play and not the ball. Before the game, do anticipate that you will enjoy the game. You are going to perform well, be in control and you are going to handle any situation that arises in an authoritative and confident manner.

PRESENCE is AUTHORITATIVE POWER

It is a well known fact that the closer you are to judge the legality of challenges the more credible your decisions become as far as the players are concerned and they will then be prepared to accept such decisions without question, as opposed to decisions made from distance, irrespective as to whether the decision was correct or otherwise. Closeness to the action without getting too close so as to interfere with the tactical movements by the players', especially those running off the ball, must be kept in mind. If by any chance you experience this problem of interference with the players' movements, especially if they are running with the ball, your presence in this case, causing them to change direction and or being hit by the ball, then you are "guilty of ball watching" as opposed to watching the players' movements from a clear and wider angle of positioning.

Always be prepared to be moving to keep pace with the play in order to be close as possible when the activity of play dictates your commanding presence. Remember the game will not wait for you.

The presence prevents scenario is one where you are close to an incident in order to assert your authority in a commanding manner without being too officious or dictatorial. Achieving close proximity will also enhance your authority by word of mouth and/or the effective use of the whistle. Intervention without actually indulging in physical contact will be the key to successfully defusing a potentially explosive confrontation in addition to selling any decision made at the time.

Body language conducted in the positive mode will also play a significant role in the manner in which you express your authority and to create a non-threatening relationship between you and the players. For example, the use of the arms outstretched with the palms of the hands facing down will indicate to a player you are not aggressive or confrontational and you do not feel threatened in any way.

So as not to create an intimidating or threatening situation, try to communicate and talk with the players as an equal. Good 'eye-to-eye' contact with the players will show them that you are confident with your decision making and have nothing to hide. However, do be aware of holding the eye contact for a prolonged period as this will give the impression you are staring the player out... When face on to a player lean slightly toward the player which will again show you are confident and comfortable with the situation.

Remember also to adopt a facial expression to suit the situation and if you can get away with a smile, all well and good. Work on your man-management skills and techniques and by exploiting your known refereeing strengths and personality traits, making them work for you.

BEING PROACTIVE

When ever possible be proactive rather than reactive. By integrating 'proactive methods 'into your refereeing techniques you will be clearly informing and motivating the players as to what the next phase of the game will be following a stoppage in play. Proactive refereeing can best be described by projecting a mental picture of three match day scenarios where the referee has become proactive not only for the sake of law enforcement but also for the spirit of the laws and in doing so encouraging fair play.

The first scenario relates the throw-in. Arrive at the scene and takes control of the situation by clearly informing the player to take the throw from where you want the throw-in to be taken. If the player attempts to shuffle along the touch line, a few crisp blasts on the whistle, or if you are

within shouting distance, verbally check the player's progress. Do not be too pedantic about the throw-in being taken from the correct blade of grass. Give or take a metre either side of the position from where the ball left the field of play should suffice. From the first throw-in retain the same consistency for all subsequent throw-in procedures throughout the game, continuing to be proactive.

The second scenario relates to an "off the ball" incident between two players who had been winding each other up; finally confronting one another an action which threaten to develop into a potentially explosive situation. Have no hesitation, think in terms of intervening as quickly as possible, initially blow the whistle really hard then follow up with sharp appropriate words of warning, ensuring your authoritative presence is very close to the pair of antagonists. Defusing the situation in a commanding manner before the guilty players realise what has happened. The 'key' to prevention rather than cure will require total awareness of such situations by instantly recognising what may happen and then arriving on the scene to sort things out before they have time to develop.

The third scenario relates to the manifestation of dissenting comments and actions from different players building up during the game, but yet to be considered serious enough to warrant the issue of a caution. These are the danger signs and if ignored will seriously undermine the match control factor. One solution would be to wait for the ball to reach a "safe zone" in mid-field if possible and then stop play with a strong penetrating blast of the whistle for a significant 'self play act' by identifying and signalling out the latest perpetrator and then administer a "public rebuke" ensuing everyone gets your message, followed by the award of an indirect free kick to restart the game. There will be no justification in the Laws to carry out such action however, but this method when used at the appropriate time, can have desirable results. Do you think you could be brave enough to stretch the laws?

ENFORCE the LAWS

Ideally, the application and enforcement of the "Laws of the Game" will be successful only if they are interpreted in a sensible manner and laced with a common sense approach. In the ideal world, one could expect a 100% uniformity of law during a game which would surly bring about favourable responses from the players, coaches, managers, assessors and those well meaning critics of referees'. Being realistic however, the best one can hope for would be for the referee to be consistent throughout the match during which time he/she is officiating and making decisions. In other words, one should make every conceivable effort to be correct in the application and consistency of law to the degree of practicality and realisation. This can best be achieved by personally increasing the level of knowledge of the Laws of the Game and the manner in which they are interpreted and enforced in practical match play situations. The question you need to ask yourself after each game should be --- Was I consistent in my overall performance today? If the answer is a definitive yes then well done. However, if the answer is less than satisfactory you have work to do.

ONE STEP AHEAD

When any game of football commences unscripted playing events and situations develop as the game progresses and it will be up to the referee to control the players to respond to what you want them to do and in accordance with the laws. You will need to be one step ahead of the participating players at all times during the game, anticipating their actions and tactical movements and to be ready to take decisive action as and when required.

Without doubt a crucial aspect of successful refereeing will be the ability to read the game for without this area of expertise the referee may well be found to be wanting when officiating at the higher levels. You will need to be both mentally and physically fit and alert to retain your powers of concentration during the game to keep that one step ahead. When play commences, mentally record and categorise the players' personalities and attitudes which generally fall into the following type descriptions: aggressive, highly competitive, solid worker, highly skilful, shout and rant, arrogant and finally the whinging and nagging player.

Never be influenced by a player's emotional state or body language reactions. It could be said that the referee needs a "good nose". In other words, you need to be a good psychologist to understand what's behind certain elements of a player's behaviour and attitude in order to work out in advance what may happen as the game develops.

FINALLY ---- BE the BOSS

The key to "being the Boss" at any level of competitive football will be the referee's ability to MANAGE and MOTIVATE players to do the right things within the spirit of the laws. The ability to openly demonstrate effective man-management skills and techniques will, in turn, generate immediate respect from the players, coaches, managers, assessors and spectators.

During the game and under varying types of pressure a strong mental attitude will be an important attribute. Your overall attitude of both mind and body language must always be of a "positive" presentation to the players and to the game.

You must at all times be true to yourself and use your personality and if possible a sense of humour too. Quite often a smile will defuse what could develop into a more serious situation. In addition to this, self enthusiasm can also be an infectious ingredient. If you look as if you are enjoying the game it is most likely the players will also enjoy participating in the game without causing you too much trouble along the way.

To be a successful 'boss' when managing players, whatever the circumstances and situations you may find yourself, a self imposed strict code of practice which dictates that you remain, **calm, composed, confident and courteous**, will be paramount. Not forgetting the golden rule, never get involved in an argument or confrontation with players and club officials.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Magnificent Seven refereeing skills, as discussed, will be significantly capable of promoting a marked improvement of a referee's performance by encouraging lateral thinking and technical changes into the method of refereeing currently being adopted. Are you brave enough to take up the challenge?

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