

Hi Referees,

I am concerned about the 'reading of the game' of the modern day referee and would like to express my concern with regards the issuing of general warnings and subsequent yellow cards.

Allow me to put my thoughts in chronological order for clarity purposes:

- I believe general warnings are given too early and
- That the consequence is the issue of YC's that produces a mismatch.

I put it to you guys that:

- You all count PK/FK's and for some reason then issue warnings.
- The repeated infringement general warning is supposed to be implemented when:
 - o a Team infringes negatively and repeatedly in order to spoil possession. For example - when team A attacks wave upon wave and set up multiple phases just to be stopped by a PK given way almost on purpose by team B.
 - o It is not negative to concede PK's when one is defending. (To Use Tappe's words - the game is not meant to be played faultless. The aim is not to have a game totally free of PK/FK's.)
- For some weird reason, you as a group of referees are 'counting' PK's and then after X-number - issue a warning.
- Often - if not in most cases - once the warning is given, you (as Referee) are painted into a corner and then end up having to issue a YC.
- Please watch my lips - "It is ok to award PK/FK's as it is part of the game. What a referee should not allow is negative play that is clearly intended to spoil."
- I would much rather see 3 or 4 more PK/FK's than a player sent off for 10 minutes unnecessarily.

I respectfully request each and every Provincial Referee to call either myself or Tappe before the start of the weekend in order to chat philosophically about this issue as it cannot carry on as it is at present.

For further clarity, please read the pasted article I wrote last year as it appeared in our newsletter.

Pasted article:

One of the management tools available to referees is the yellow card, but it's a subject that continues to cause debate, with two schools of thought prevailing.

Those against its use claim that:

- the team with a player in the sin bin concedes an average of 10 points during that period,
- the outcome of the game is changed when a player is sent to the bin, and
- referees play cards and, like a card game, they make a lottery of the game.

Proponents maintain that:

- if a player plays dirty or negatively affects the game, he needs to be yellow-carded, and
- players transgress the Laws, not the referee - the latter simply has to apply the Law.

SANZAR, the body governing both Super

Rugby and the Tri-Nations competitions, is considering proposals that will see 15 players from each team on the park at all times. This will mean that should a player be sent off by the referee, the player will be replaced from the bench in order to ensure equality in numbers. I can already hear the shouts of victory from the one camp! But what about negative play, for example, if the coach instructs his

second-best flanker to go onto the field and late-tackle the opposition star fly half and 'write him off'? The referee will order him off but we'll then send our best flanker on and have a better chance of winning the game as their star number 10 will be off the field due to injury. Clearly this is not the objective of maintaining the 15-vs-15 status. In order to stop this, it's proposed to severely punish

the player sent off to discourage both players and coaches from being party to this type of behaviour. Those supporting the retention of the current system would argue that one should not point fingers at only the referees but that the players and coaches are equally, in fact, more responsible for what happens on the field. Referees are human and will miss infringements but players also make mistakes.

It's clear that both camps' viewpoints have merit. I probably won't change your particular viewpoint but I do want to talk to the family of match officials of which I continue to be a proud member. The referee should:

- protect the ethos of the game, as it is bigger than any coach, player, administrator, referee or supporter; ensure a fair contest, never an equal one, as the players determine the latter; and
- apply the Laws according to the game in front of you, not the Law book. We've had almost the same number of yellow cards this year compared to last year, yet some of the cards issued this season created confusion, anxiety and even anger. In my opinion, some were ridiculous. My view is shared by the chairman of WP Referees' Society, Dan de Villiers, a top Currie Cup referee in the '90s. I quote part of an article he circulated to his Society: 'Don't get me wrong: foul or dangerous play must not be tolerated and those players intent on ruining the game as a sport must be removed from the field and dealt with through the correct channels. But I'm concerned that some referees use the yellow card to control players instead of brushing up on their people-management skills.

'What it comes down to is communication. Within the Laws, it's our job as referees to keep everyone on the field playing within the bounds of a fair contest. The action of removing one player from the field is severe and in many instances can swing the game completely to the advantage of the non-offending team. This is fine if the sanction is warranted; let's just ensure we've done our part before the card is used.'

I could not put it better, Dan - well said, my friend and colleague! So, what can we do about this? While understanding and accepting that the man with the whistle - and his assistants on the side - will make errors from time to time, we all need to keep in mind the following regarding the issue of cards:

- Do not enforce, rather adjudicate.
- Do not issue a card when you feel you need to take control - you probably have already lost it.
- Do not take player infringements personally - if they don't listen, they need to feel the pain.
- Do not issue a card for repeated infringements too quickly. It's part of the game that players will infringe. They don't always infringe in order to spoil, but in desperation to defend, for example. Simply penalize the infringement.
- Do not be scared or hesitant to remove from the field players who're guilty of foul and dangerous play. The game doesn't need this and no-one will blame a referee who's hard on foul and dangerous play.
- Do not always nail the retaliator harder than the instigator. Why not penalize both equally?
- Do not be a bean counter and keep score of the number of infringements. It will colour your water and, in fact, paint a picture in your mind that is inaccurate. It might just be desperation, which is as much part of the game as missing a short putt is part of golf.
- Do not get involved in debates on the field of play.
- Use downtime to communicate with teams - use the captain - when a negative tendency develops. (Note that I say 'tendency' and not a one-off incident.)
- Do manage and communicate to an offender when he's foolish.
- Do distinguish between blatant intent to spoil (deliberate infringement) and over-eagerness.
- Do ask yourself whether the game of the day actually deserves the card or not.
- Do distinguish between a blatant infringement for negative play and a technical infringement.
- Do realise that the players and spectators are looking to see a contest, and don't spoil this contest unless the infringement leaves you no option.

I know it's not easy, but like the application of advantage, I believe the excellent refereeing performance separates itself from the average performance when the referee and not the cards manage the game.

Happy reffing!

kind regards/beste groete,

Andre Watson