

Refereeing the Modern Game

INTRODUCTION

The way the game of rugby is being refereed at the top level has altered significantly over the past couple of years.

The way and style in which we referee the game in Ontario needs to be examined and possibly altered if we are to ensure our referees advance to their rightful position at the top table of rugby refereeing.

Not only has the modern referee to understand what the players are trying to achieve, the referee has to give the impression of being in control and looking to be in control throughout a match. the referee has to encourage the positive aspects of the game and penalize the negative.

Although preventative methods by use of communication, which includes voice and body language, must be encouraged, the referee must ensure that these areas are not overplayed

The following is designed to help referees and referees coaches understand the current practice of refereeing the modern game.

Thanks go to Jim Fleming of the Scottish Rugby Union who prepared and presented the document. There have been minor edits by Dave Swift, ORRS Director – Development, to suit Canadian conditions. Also a summary of standard preventative phrases has been added.

THE MODERN REFEREE

Referees should be encouraged to use a preventative style rather than being reliant on the laws of the game. This does not mean, however, that the referee should intentionally ignore the laws of the game.

If referees display the correct attitude before, during and after the game, they should gain the respect of the participants.

In communicating with the players, referees need to ensure there is a correct balance between the whistle, the voice and body language.

When a referee makes use of the voice, it must not be overdone. The voice should only be used in material matters, not constantly and certainly not by shouting. A calm, collective manner will achieve maximum benefit.

Mental fitness as well as physical fitness is essential for the modern game. Referees have to ensure they are properly prepared for the match.

Being in a position to ensure that the correct decisions are made to ensure continuity in the game is essential. Positioning, particularly at ruck/maul requires fitness and concentration.

ATTITUDE

The correct attitude both on and off the park is essential in the making of a good referee. The attitude of the referee is paramount in gaining the respect of the players, the coaches and indeed spectators.

Referees should not be passive or compliant; neither must they be arrogant or aggressive. A balanced approach is what the referee should be attempting to achieve. There is nothing wrong in saying “please” or “thank you” when talking to players; neither is there anything wrong in being assertive when the need arises.

Referees must be confident of their law knowledge and fitness. Explaining why decisions were made from the correct position will assist in displaying an acceptable attitude.

Getting the balance right in all respects, before, during and after the game is what the referee should be attempting to achieve.

COMMUNICATION

General

Communication is vital to ensure that players can participate in a game that allows them to perform their skills within the framework of the laws.

Referees must understand the difference between coaching players and preventative refereeing. By warning players of the possible consequences of their actions should they take them, the referee can participate in a more fluid and entertaining match.

Referees must look at the balance between whistle, voice and body language/signals.

- Too much whistle becomes an irritation and can cause friction.
- Too little whistle or incorrect use of the whistle tone can lead to confusion and confrontation between players.
- Too much voice can lead to frustration and irritation. If there is no need to say anything - keep quiet. If there is a need to say something – be brief. The modern trend in refereeing is for referees not to make overuse of the voice.
- Too little voice can lead to confusion a less fluid game. This must be balanced with the previous point.
- Players appreciate advice not coaching.
- The use of the voice should always be with a clear, respectful, calm and polite manner. Refrain from shouting and “spitting out” instructions.
- If the referee has to chastise a player or players, this should be done in the presence of the captain and, although with authority, without histrionics and without giving the impression of a teacher/pupil relationship.
- Correct body language can indicate to players the intentions of the referee and allow players to continue playing with confidence in the competence of the referee.
- In communicating decisions, the referee must use the recognized signals. It is essential when making use of body language that it is done correctly.
- Signals should be given slowly and “gracefully”. Signals given with staccato movement *may* give the impression that the referee is panicking or is too autocratic.

Kicks

- **Kick-off** – The referee signals the kick-off with the whistle, but beforehand should use voice and body language to ensure the attackers are behind the ball and the defenders are behind the 10m line.
- **Kicks at goal** – The referee uses the whistle to indicate when a player is taking a penalty kick at goal and should use voice and body language to ensure that the offending players are 10m back from the mark and the non-offending players are behind the ball.
- **Penalty kicks, free kicks** – The referee uses the whistle to indicate when a penalty kick and free kick is given and should use voice and body language to ensure that the offenders are back 10m without delay and ensure that any non-offenders in front of the ball at a quickly taken kick are not interfering

with play. At a tapped kick, the referee should indicate with voice and body language when playing advantage for non-compliance by the offending team in not retiring, indicating when advantage is being played and when advantage is over.

Lineout

The referee should use voice and body language to obtain and maintain the correct gap in the lineout. Incessant whistle blowing in an attempt to achieve the gap must be discouraged.

In the modern game it is essential that the referee takes responsibility for setting and maintaining a “good” gap. The easiest way of achieving this is for the referee to be at the front of every line out as players arrive. It is difficult to open a gap once players have set it.

The referee should use voice and body language to remind non-participants of the offside lines.

The referee should use the voice to remind players within the line out of their obligation not to interfere with opposition jumpers until legally entitled to do so.

If a ruck or maul forms at a line-out, the referee should indicate that the lineout is still in progress. This should be done with a raised arm. Dropping the arm indicates the line-out is over.

Scrums

The referee uses the whistle to indicate when an infringement has taken place resulting in a scrum.

The referee should use voice and body language to ensure correct procedure in the engagement process. First, make a mark and say “crouch and hold” as the players are in the process of binding. Then say “engage” only when satisfied that players are complying with law and all front row players are comfortable and in the crouched position.

When U19 scrum laws apply, the referee should make a mark and say “crouch” as the players are in the process of binding. When satisfied that the players have complied with Law, the referee should say “touch and hold”. After the props have touched each other on the upper arm, the referee should say “engage”.

It is essential that the referee ensures that the correct formation process is followed. Failure to comply should result in an immediate free kick or penalty award.

The referee should also attempt to reset scrums on as few occasions as possible. This can be achieved by voice and punitive action.

The referee must ensure that the ball is put in fairly and that participants in the scrum are reminded of their binding requirements.

The referee should use voice and body language to remind non-participants of the offside lines.

Using voice and body language, the referee should advise the back row players and scrum half of the side that have won the ball of the “use it or lose it” law when it is applicable

When the ball is clearly out of the scrum, the referee should indicate that the ball is out and the scrum is over.

Ruck/Maul

Using voice and body language, the referee should remind participants to carry out their functions legally and use preventative methods to ensure the ball is gained and play can continue.

The referee should use voice and body language to remind non-participants of their offside lines.

When the ball is clearly out of the ruck/maul, the referee should indicate that the ball is out and the ruck/maul is over.

Advantage

It is essential that referees, by using their voice and signals, advise players when advantage is being played. It is equally vital that referees advise players that advantage is over. In deciding whether advantage has been gained, the referee must differentiate between a technical infringement and one that has a more material effect on the game.

The referee should signal immediately when playing advantage. If stationary or walking or jogging slowly, the referee can continue to signal advantage so long as it is comfortable. Once the referee starts running, the arm should be dropped even though advantage is being played.

For technical offences, advantage should only be played for up to three subsequent phases of play. If the non-offending team kicks the ball away, without being put under undue pressure by the opposition, advantage will be over.

For more serious offences, the referee will decide what constitutes advantage.

Referees must be aware of the materiality of playing advantage.

POSITIONING

General

Due to the demands of the modern game, the referees' positioning at various phases of play has altered, in particular the dynamic areas of the game viz. tackle, ruck and maul.

It is important in all stages of the game that the referee gives the impression of being in total control. As such, referees should give consideration as to whether or not they should be continually on the move. Continual fast movement around static or slow moving situations could convey to the players and others a sense of panic or lack of control.

The following are recommended:

Kicks

- **Kick-off** – The referee should stand with the kicker on the centre line on the other side of the kicker from the forwards. The referee should move as the ball is being kicked - not before, to ensure that no interference with any sudden change in direction of the kick.
- **Kicks at goal** – the referee should stand with the kicker slightly to the rear of the kicker and take no action that will interfere with the concentration or run up of the kicker. The referee should follow the ball in on all kicks. The referee's shadow from the sun should not fall over a player's run up or the ball.
- **Penalty kicks, free kicks** – the referee should be in a position to indicate the mark for the kick using the foot, and then move away. The referee should be in a position to ascertain that the defenders are 10m from the mark, that the ball is played correctly and that the non-offending team is behind the ball or do not take further part in the game until placed on-side.

Line-out

With the law allowing pre-gripping, supporting, movement before the ball is thrown in and players being allowed to peel within 10m of the lineout, the referee should be in a position to regulate the throw and to ensure that there is fair contest for the ball down the line of touch.

The referee's position should vary at the lineout but should always be in a position to see down the line of touch to observe the actions of the participants in the line-out.

At the front of the line-out, the referee should stand on the attacking side close to, but not interfering with, the hooker throwing in the ball. The referee may on occasion, especially in the early stages of a game, stand in a position to observe both the thrower-in and the jumper simultaneously.

At the rear of the lineout, the referee has 2 main options. 1) stand close to but not interfering with the last player in the attacking lineout, or 2) stand close to but not interfering with the last player in the defending lineout. As a third option, the referee can, on the odd occasion, stand directly at the back of the lineout looking down the line of touch.

The “tail gunner” in the line out often moves in field before the line out has ended. The referee should take note if this happens and subsequently take the appropriate measures to prevent it occurring again.

It is important that the referee is in the correct position to ensure jumping players are not interfered with illegally and to make the correct decisions.

At line-outs close to the goal line, the referee should preferably stand on the defending side at the front of the line out always ensuring no interference with play.

Scrum

The correct process for engaging the scrum is vital. This must be at the forefront of the referees positioning.

Once the scrum has engaged safely, the referee should stand behind and slightly to the right of the scrum half putting in the ball and move with the ball as it goes through the scrum observing the binding of all players and the off-sides of the non-participants. The referee should not interfere with the scrum-halves competing for the ball or the pass to the backs.

- Ideally, the referee should be a couple of metres away from the scrum level with or slightly behind the scrum half. From this position, the referee’s movement depends on the channel through which the ball is presented. If the ball is on the far side, the referee can follow it around. If it is on the referee’s side, the referee can move further from the scrum staying level with the scrum half. This allows space for a pick up and drive play. It is important that the referee checks the defending offside line at the moment that the ball emerges.

On occasion, the referee may stand on the opposite side of the scrum to that where the ball is put in. The referee should move with the ball and not get in the way of the scrum halves or a number 8 pick up and drive.

Tackle/Ruck/Maul

The modern game involves many continual phases of play in the same passage of play, which involve 2 or 3 players of either side with the rest being used in a spread defence. Referees must be in a position to control these phases of play without interfering. The referee must be aware at all times of the location of the ball and the position of the players not involved in the tackle/ruck/maul.

Although there is no specific recommended position, it is essential that the referee takes up a position from which the ball can be located, continually observe the participants in the phase of play, monitor the offside lines and be in the best position to follow the next phase of play.

While there is no longer a “preferred” position, thought should be given to standing

- In field some 3 to 4 metres away from the tackle, ruck or maul on the attacking side level with or slightly behind the scrum half. From this position, depending on how the ball is presented, the referee can either follow round on the narrow side or, if the play is coming open, move into a pocket on the defending side just as the ball emerges. Timing is of the essence and as such, junior or less experienced referees might have difficulty with this position. It is important that the referee checks the defending offside line at the moment that the ball emerges.

- On the narrow side i.e. the side nearest the touch line of the ensuing phase of play, the referee should locate the ball, ensure that the participants are performing their functions legally and then move to a position beside and slightly behind the scrum half of the attacking side, in order to follow play.

It is strongly recommended that referees do not

- take up an initial position on the defending side
- adopt the “chariot” position
- stand square on to the tackle, ruck or maul.

General

Referees must be in control of the game. They must have the ability to be the “31st player” but be able to take charge of any given situation if or when the need arises. Correct positioning in general play to observe offside lines, running lines and “off the ball” incidents will ensure control.

CONTROL

General

If a referee has to dismiss a player from the field either temporarily or permanently or issue an admonishment, it must always be done in the presence of the players' team captain. It is the team captain's responsibility to control the team members.

Prior to issuing a yellow card, red card or admonishment, the referee should ensure that any "fracas" has died down. On no account should the referee attempt to physically restrain players in such a situation.

The discussion between the referee, the player to be admonished/cautioned/ordered off and that player's captain should be conducted out of earshot of other players and indeed spectators. The red or yellow card should be shown to the player with a minimum of fuss.

Red Cards

Having to dismiss a player from the field of play for an act of foul play requires a great deal of self-control and concentration. The referee must not become involved in a confrontational situation. The referee must stay calm and perform the necessary functions with the minimum of fuss (see communication). It is only necessary to advise the player and team captain under which law the player is being dismissed i.e. Law 10. The referee must obtain the player's name. If practical, the player's address may also be sought, but this may be obtained from club officials after the match.

Yellow Cards

Yellow Cards are shown where a player receives a caution under Law 10. The referee should be aware under which sections of Law 10 a yellow card may be issued. The referee may wish to consider using a yellow card earlier rather than later in a game in an attempt to prevent repeated and/or professional infringements.

The yellow card is not an alternative to a red card. If a player commits an act of foul play, which warrants dismissal, the referee should not 'opt out'.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Referees are expected to

- Give preventative and informative messages to players
- Use brief positive messages.
- Use the standard phrases given below
- Use team colour and player number if possible and appropriate
- Remember “less is more” – the less said, the more is understood.

“**Play on**” – advice to players that no offence has occurred.

“**Advantage Red**” - playing advantage from an offence by Red’s opponents.

“**Advantage over**” – no longer playing advantage.

“**10 metres Red 12**” – retire to a point 10m back from where the ball is going to be played to avoid being called offside in open play.

“**Back 10**” – instruction to non-kicking team to retire 10 metres at a penalty or free kick.

“**Tackle**” to indicate that a tackle has occurred.

“**Let go Red 12**” – instruction to the tackler, Red 12, to release the ball and the tackled player

“**Release it Blue**” – instruction to ball carrier after a tackle to release the ball

“**Roll away Red 12**” – instruction to move away from the ball after a tackle

“**Stay on your feet**” – instruction to players entering the tackle zone not to go to ground.

“**Round the back**” – instruction to players to enter the tackle zone from the back

“**Ruck**” - a ruck is taking place.

“**Maul**” - a maul is taking place.

“**Round the back**” – instruction to players to join a ruck or maul level or behind the back foot of their team

“**Bind on, Red 7**” – instruction to player to remain bound to a ruck or maul (or retire immediately)

“**Keep it up**” – instruction to players not to collapse a maul.

“**Back foot Red 12**” – retire immediately behind the back foot of a ruck or maul to avoid being offside.

“**Use it or lose it Red**” – advice to team with ball to move it out of a stationary maul

“**Crouch and hold**”- instruction to both packs to prepare for scrum engagement. The word “crouch” may be said quietly if both packs are already in the crouch position.

“**Engage**” – invitation to both packs to engage.

“**One metre**” – instruction to scrum half regarding positioning when putting the ball into a scrum

“**In straight**” – instruction to scrum half to throw the ball into the middle of the tunnel

“**No delay**”- instruction to scrum half to throw the ball in as soon as the scrum is stable after engagement.

“**Push straight**” – instruction to front row players to push straight ahead and not bore in.

“**Stay bound**” – instruction to players in a scrum to remain bound until the ball emerges

“**Bind on the body Red 7**” - instruction to back row players to remain fully bound in the scrum.

“**Bind on the body Red 3**”- instruction to prop forward to bind on the back, not the arm, of the opposing prop.

“**Arm up Red 3**” – instruction to prop forward not have an elbow pointing at the ground, a hand on the ground, or arm on the thigh.

“**Use it Red**” - advice to team with ball that a wheeled scrum is approaching 90 degrees.

“**Use it Red**” – advice to team holding a ball at the back of a scrum that the ball must be played without further delay

“**Back foot Red 12**” – retire immediately and stay behind the back foot of a scrum to avoid being offside.

“Gap” – instruction to line-out forwards to move out to give a 1 metre gap

"In straight"- instruction to thrower to throw the ball down the middle of the gap.