

DISSENT AND FOUL OR ABUSIVE LANGUAGE- A GUIDE FOR REFEREES

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Ed note: Graham is a founding member of the BCSRA and a Life Member of both the BCSRA and the BCSRA's Vancouver Area branch. He is an Honourary National referee, a retired CSA National Referee Instructor, and has written numerous articles on the subject of refereeing including the book "The Art of Refereeing without Neutral Linesmen". This article, published in 1993, is re-printed with his permission. Although some of the terminology does not reflect that found in today's version of the Laws of the Game, the underlying concepts are still the same.

1. DISSENT

Dissent mean to differ to disagree in opinion: to hold opposite views.

In the game of soccer it is generally thought to apply when a member or members of a team show by WORD or ACTION dissent from the referee's decision. Dissent can be direct or more subtle. Dissent can be loud and explosive. It can be quiet and sneaky.

It is the referee's duty to prevent dissent by preventative officiating and importantly to control the participants in a soccer game to prevent the game from falling into disrepute.

Players often disagree instinctively with how a referee judges or handles a particular incident It is the referee's job and part of his (hopefully) acquired skill to use his judgment in assessing whether a player's reaction (sometimes fueled by being hurt after a tackle) falls under the classification of dissent or not.

The type of dissent that must be prevented or dealt with if it occurs, by the referee, is the calculated type of dissent, where the sole intent, or of his decisions, or the integrity of the laws is in doubt. Such dissent is usually deliberate. It may be made by word or action directly to the referee or linesmen. It may be indirect by being relayed to a colleague of the dissenter and made in the guise of talking to the colleague.

Have you heard the following in a game that you officiated in?:

1. "Hey, Jimmy. Looks like we got a right one today!"
2. "Where did they find one? They get worse every week."
3. "Maybe we'll get one who calls it both ways next time."

and so on.

It is certain that most referees will think of hundreds of similar examples.

It is the duty of the referee to make the players aware that such behaviour is not going to be tolerated. There are a number of tools that every referee should have in his arsenal to deal with dissent, but first it might be worth examining a few examples of direct dissent. Just a few could be:

4. "Open your eyes referee!"
5. "Never! Who's side are you on anyway?"
6. "Are you blind?"
7. "Call it both ways." etc, etc.

Statements (1) to (7) inclusive are examples of DISSENT punishable by a caution.

The referee must distinguish between instinctive comments that bear no malice, in no way lead to an escalation, and in effect are easily controlled with first stage action. (You may have alternate methods of carrying this out.)

First Stage Action

The quiet word.

The louder, direct instruction.

Second Stage Action

When the dissent is immediately considered by the referee as encroaching upon the integrity of the referee or that of his colleagues; or the integrity of the Laws, or the spirit of the game, then he must CAUTION the person or persons involved.

If the ball is in play and the referee decides to stop the game to deal with the player concerned, then the referee would restart play with an INDIRECT FREE-KICK awarded to the opposing team from where the offense occurred.

Obviously, the quick thinking referee may allow play to continue to prevent being advantageous to the non-offending team, and caution the dissenter at an opportune time. **BUT HE CANNOT IGNORE IT. HE MUST DEAL WITH IT.**

Of course, dissent by action is just as bad as verbal dissent.

Refusing to obey an instruction by the referee, waving the hand or arm in an insulting gesture, are examples of dissent by action.

THE REFEREE MUST REMEMBER THAT THE STANDARD HE OR SHE SETS IN ANY GAME ACTS AS A STANDARD FOR ONE OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE NEXT GAME.

IT HAS BEEN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE AUTHOR AND HIS SENIOR COLLEAGUES THAT WHEN A TEAM QUICKLY GETS INVOLVED IN DISSENT, AND IS "SURPRISED" WHEN IT GETS DEALT WITH, THEN USUALLY THE PREVIOUS REFEREE WAS NOT DOING A PROPER JOB.

Dissent must also be rigorously prevented or cut out when committed by team officials or substitutes from the sidelines.

2. FOUL OR ABUSIVE LANGUAGE

Often there is a very fine dividing line between dissent (a CAUTION) and the use of foul or abusive language (a SEND OFF) when used directly or indirectly to the referee.

Each referee has his or her own personal limits regarding what is considered as 'foul' or 'abusive'. The referee must distinguish between the player who uses certain foul word as part of that player's natural terminology, where such language does not in any way prove to be offensive to anyone, and the situation where the use of foul language without question distracts from or goes totally against the spirit of the game, the integrity of layers, officials or, in many cases, the spectators.

The referee can quickly stamp out the use of foul language, so that players KNOW that it is not to be tolerated . It is part of the duties of the referee to PREVENT foul language from becoming a factor in a game.

ABUSIVE LANGUAGE, like foul language can be directed at anyone. It can be directed against the officials, players, coaches, substitutes, and spectators, etc.

FOUL LANGUAGE can be directed at anyone, oneself, and object, the ground, the weather, an animal, etc.

Abusive language NEED NOT BE FOUL. It can be directed in a terribly polite way, but be as equally devastating in its INTENT OR EFFECT as the worst type of foul and abusive language. Abusive language can be the so called “body language” where the gestures and movements of the body, hands or arms are clearly ABUSIVE. Such BODY language must be dealt with as ABUSIVE language.

Wise guidelines given in the past to referees are the three P’s”

PERSONAL, PROVOCATIVE, PUBLIC

Any one or combination of the three P’s can lead the referee to a judgment of FOUL or ABUSIVE (often FOUL AND ABUSIVE).

It is not the job of the referee to act in judgment on the normal language of a player and to attempt to reverse the unfortunate social trends in society.

In their private lives, many officials, under stress, swear like troopers. Of course not in a game or its vicinity!

It is the job of the referee to deal with FOUL or ABUSIVE language directed to anyone, that brings the game of soccer into disrepute.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Would you accept “swearing” with 10 year old players?

... with 14 year old players?

... with 17 year old players?

... with 20 year old players?

... with 27 year old players?

... with 40 year old players?

If you are honest you would most likely say “DEFINITELY NO” to the first three and then hesitate as the players become older. The important point, the very important point, is that you must apply realistic standards! Notice the word REALISTIC.

SUMMARY

If you, as a referee, find the words or actions offensive to yourself, other players, participants or spectators, you must deal with it. You must uphold realistic expectations in keeping with the spirit of the game and the integrity of yourself and your colleagues. In your opinion, if a player (or substitute) is guilty of:

a) DISSENT- THE PLAYER MUST BE CAUTIONED.

b) FOUL OR ABUSIVE LANGUAGE- THE PLAYER MUST BE SENT OFF.

Go to it fellow referees. Remember the spirit of the game and use your mature judgment.

30. The referee must be consistent and uniform in sanctioning the fouls and players from the beginning to the end.

a) Be efficient to immediately stop aggression against skilled players.

31. The individual perception is different in each person. It cannot be influenced to become a uniform perception; however, the interpretation of the Laws are intended to be clear and precise so that the referee makes an effort in applying them with tenacity and courage (and common sense).

32. The referee's opinion on the field of play must always be respected; however, the Laws of the Game are the basic steps to support this opinion. The referee is not there to judge them, neither to interpret them in his own way, but only to know the correct application.

33. The referee must be dynamic. If not, then the referee must act like a dynamic referee. A dynamic referee loves with passion the functions and people around him. That will make the referee a good friend, father, or head of the family and, above all, a better man.