

# CHAPTER 3

## REFEREEING

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Continual growth and interest in sport has created enormous demand for high quality sport officials. This has resulted in administrators, at all levels of sport, constantly seeking people who are competent at officiating. However, it would seem that the determination of what constitutes a competent official, and their subsequent identification and development, is far more complex than simply finding someone who exhibits a thorough knowledge of game rules. Skills related to communication, athleticism, decision-making, legal responsibilities, and player management are increasingly being viewed as necessary. Additionally, issues such as referee training assessment, stress, and referee retention are now inextricably linked to modern officiating” (Dickson study, 2000: personal e-mail).

Mascarenhas, Collins & Mortimer (2002: 328) quoted *The Guardian* of 29 October 2001 as follows: “As sport becomes more pressured, referees are ever more accountable for their decisions and, reflecting this performance demand, governing bodies now sanction, or even demote, referees when they apply the laws inconsistently”.

Expert referees must make decisions that are appropriate to the nuances of a particular game, allowing the game to flow, using the whistle only when necessary and when not doing so may adversely affect the tempo or temper of the game (Mascarenhas *et al* 2002: 328). This is an aspect of game management.

Bracewell (2001: <http://www.rfu.com>) is of the opinion that it is too easily said that a match cannot take place without a referee. He emphasises that there is a difference between a game and a match. A game is the type of sport being played,

whereas a match is the fixture taking place. He is of the opinion that referees are trying to manage matches for the enjoyment of all participants, from players to spectators. Bracewell (2001: <http://www.rfu.com>) wrote that for referees to manage a match effectively they will have to make decisions that reward constructive, legal play and they will have to punish negative, illegal play. The referees must decide what is acceptable and what is not.

In an interview with Jerry Seeman, the United States National Football League's Director of Officials, he was asked what it takes to be a good official. Seeman's response was: "Someone who can be decisive in a professional manner, a person who isn't on an emotional roller-coaster. The official must be the ultimate professional" (Hartill 1998: 22). He continued that good referees must have good people skills and they must have the courage to make the tough calls at the right time, and a strong conscience to believe in what they are doing.

The role and importance of rugby referees increased when the sport turned professional. Although most referees in South Africa, and the Blue Bulls Rugby Referees' Society, operate on an amateur level, their role is nonetheless highlighted by all the attention the top referees get in the media. It is, therefore, important to consider those aspects that might influence, or have a bearing on, refereeing in general.

Stress, burnout and giving up refereeing are some of the aspects that might influence referee performances. Crowds can also play a vital role in the decisions referees make, while decision-making itself will always play a big part in refereeing. These aspects, among others, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **3.2 REFEREE STRESS, BURNOUT AND RESIGNING**

Stress, burnout and referees that resign can have a negative impact on rugby refereeing. This section discusses various aspects of stress, burnout and resigning of referees in general.

### **3.2.1 SOURCES OF STRESS, BURNOUT AND INTENTION TO TERMINATE**

In a study done by Rainey (1999: 578), 721 of 1500 questionnaires sent to basketball referees to assess sources of stress, burnout and intention to terminate refereeing were completed. In this study, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed five correlated sources of stress factors namely:

- Performance concerns
- Fear of physical harm
- Lack of recognition
- Time pressure
- Interpersonal conflict

Research on stress indicated that interpersonal conflict, fear of physical harm, time pressure and performance concerns are sources of stress for sport officials. Burnout in sport officials is often related to performance concerns, time pressure and interpersonal conflict, and burnout is a consistent predictor of the intention to terminate.

Rugby referees, especially the referees at a more senior level, are under pressure to perform. Rugby is such a popular sport in South Africa that it attracts a lot of attention which adds to the stress upon the individual referees. The public, the

coaches, the management of teams and the players themselves are the parties responsible for placing the referees under the most stress to perform at their optimum levels for big occasions.

Fear of physical harm should not be overlooked as a factor, as was illustrated in 2002 when Mr. Dave McHugh of Ireland was tackled by a South African rugby supporter during a test match played in Durban between South Africa and New Zealand.

### **3.2.2 INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF RUGBY UNION REFEREES**

Stress will always be a component of refereeing performance that must be considered, because there will be interpersonal conflict on and off the field of play.

In a study by Rainey and Hardy (1997: 728), the purpose was to examine stress experienced by rugby union referees during their season. This study supported the growing conclusion that most sport officials do not experience much stress associated with their duties.

Six hundred and eighty-two rugby referees from the rugby unions of Wales ( $n=126$ ), Scotland ( $n=140$ ), and England ( $n=416$ ), participated in this study. The mean number of years of refereeing experience was 8,5 years. There was no significant difference among the three groups in years of experience. A 3-item rating scale which measured the referee's general perceptions of the amount of stress they experienced while refereeing during the ongoing rugby season was used.

The three items the referees rated were:

- i. How much stress was experienced while refereeing this season?
- ii. How much pressure was experienced while refereeing this season?
- iii. How much tension was experienced while refereeing this season?

Participants responded on a 5 point scale, whereby a response of one meant “none” and a response of five meant “a great deal”.

Rainey and Hardy (1997: 728) found the mean score for the entire sample to be 2,5 (SD=.6), indicating stress between the “very little” and “moderate” amounts. Only 5% of the respondents had mean scores of “quite a bit” or a “great deal” of stress. These results proved the notion that referees do not experience high levels of stress over an entire season.

However, studies to date have required respondents to rate stress across all or most of a season, and the ratings were not in response to specific game experiences. It may therefore be useful to have officials rate their stress one match at a time before coming to any conclusions. The level of officiating also influences the end results. Specific game situations and the buildup to certain big matches were not considered in the final results.

In a South African context the stress levels of referees might differ according to certain matches. In general the same results might be obtained if a similar study were to be done under South African conditions over an entire season. It is, however, important to note that certain “big” matches can influence the way the referees think, e.g. a referee refereeing the Currie Cup final in front of 60 000 people, will obviously experience higher stress levels in the buildup to the match than under ordinary match circumstances.

### **3.3 CROWD INFLUENCE**

The influence crowds have on referees is sometimes neglected, although it can be an important factor in the final performances of referees.

Serb (1999: 32), in an interview with Jerry Markbreit, one of the United States best-known National Football League officials, received the following response to a question about the inevitable criticism received when officiating a popular sport: “No matter how a call goes, the crowd is going to boo. So when you make a call, the important thing is to know you made the right call, even if it ends up being wrong. You can’t hedge or be uncertain about things – you have to be clear”.

#### **3.3.1 ASSAULT ON REFEREES**

A factor of crowd interference that is not always considered is the threat of assault of referees. Assault of referees can also be a source of stress as previously mentioned under 3.2.1. During a rugby test played in Durban between the Springboks and New Zealand in August 2002, a South African supporter ran onto the field of play and tackled the referee Mr. Dave McHugh of Ireland (<http://www.supersportzone.co.za>). Mr. Van Zyl, the supporter, was charged with common assault and found guilty by the court. Another example of crowd influence occurred when seven fans were arrested at Ellispark during a test between the Springboks and Australia, in 2002, for throwing beer bottles onto the field, and endangering both the players and match officials (<http://www.supersportzone.co.za>).

Rainey and Hardy (1999: 105) undertook a study to examine assaults against sport officials by a survey of rugby referees. The following hypotheses were stated before the results was analysed:

- i. Only a small percentage of responding referees would report that they have been assaulted at some point in their career.
- ii. A sizeable percentage of the assaults could be considered dangerous and serious.
- iii. Most of the assailants would be adults.
- iv. Alcohol consumption by assailants would be a factor in a moderate percentage of the assaults.
- v. A sizeable percentage of the assailants would go unpunished.

The participants in this study were 682 rugby union referees (678 men and 4 women) from Great Britain. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 65 years, with a mean age of 41 years (SD=7,8 years). Their refereeing experience ranged from 1 to 45 years, with a mean of 8,5 years experience (SD=6,5 years). Questionnaires were mailed directly to participating referees.

The results of the study by Rainey and Hardy (1999: 105) revealed the following:

- Players were the most common assailants (71%), followed by fans (24%).
- Only one referee reported that he was assaulted by a coach. The overwhelming majority of assaults (79%) occurred in adult competitions, and adults carried out 84% of the assaults.
- Many of the assaults were relatively minor incidents, such as pushing, grabbing or shoving (42%). However, many others (47%) were more serious attacks, such as punching, kicking or choking.
- Four referees (11%) reported that they had been “head-butted” by their assailants. Almost one third of the assaults were associated with special game circumstances, e.g. 11% of the assaults occurred in matches with

“special rivals” and 19% occurred during championship matches. Another special circumstance investigated was the use of alcohol by assailants.

- o Eight of the referees (21%) reported that their assailants had consumed alcohol, and seven of those assailants were fans or spectators.

From the results of this study it is clear that most assailants are the players, with the crowd also playing a role in a high percentage of assaults. Referees must consider this aspect of crowd behaviour and be able to deal with it if they are to successfully cope as a referee at the highest level. Another factor of crowd behaviour that might influence a referee is crowd noise.

### **3.3.2 CROWD NOISE**

Nevill, Balmer & Williams (2001: 261-272) undertook a study regarding crowd noise and years of experience upon refereeing decisions in football. They feel the existence of home advantage in sport is well-known and that there is a growing evidence that crowd noise plays a crucial part in this phenomenon. They undertook a quantitative study to examine the influence of crowd noise upon refereeing decisions in association football, or soccer.

The results of the study showed that the presence of crowd noise had a dramatic effect on the decisions made by referees. Those viewing the challenges with background crowd noise were more uncertain in their decision-making and awarded significantly fewer fouls (15,5%) against the home team, compared with those watching the recordings in silence. The conclusion, therefore, was that the noise of the crowd did indeed influence the referee's decisions to favour the home team. The authors suggested that referees decisions are influenced by the salient nature of crowd noise, the potential use of heuristic strategies, and the need to avoid potential crowd displeasure by making a decision in favour of the home team.

For the execution of this study, Nevill *et al* (2002: 261-271) used recorded videotapes to investigate whether the presence or absence of crowd noise might influence qualified referees when assessing various tackles or challenges. Binary logistic regression was used to assess the effect of crowd noise and the years of experience on the referee's decisions.

### **3.4 DECISION-MAKING BY REFEREES IN RUGBY UNION**

One of the most important aspects of being a referee is the ability to make decisions. MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002: 570) undertook two studies regarding decision making of experienced rugby referees.

The conclusion of the studies of MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002: 570) were:

- Study 1 yielded no differences in the detection of infractions as a function of experience; however, referees of high experience used significantly more sources of information than the group with low experience across all categories of information.
- In Study 2, there were no significant differences between referees and players, with the exception that referees displayed greater use of episodic memory information in decision-making.

MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002: 570) questioned referees, 12 with high and 12 with low experience, to make decisions concerning various videotaped rugby plays and to report verbally the information they used in this process, to provide measures of declarative knowledge base and accuracy in detecting infractions. In a second study, they matched 12 of the referees with 12 players in terms of playing experience. All were tested using the same materials and procedures.

The first section of each videotape sequence consisted of a freeze frame of a rugby play. Following this, 5-6 seconds of footage was shown with the screen going blank before the completion of the action (section 2). In the third and final section of the tape sequence, the same action was shown, however, it was viewed in its full completion. At the blank screen juncture at the end of section 2, participants were asked:

- i. What action do you think will follow?
- ii. What would you call on this be?
- iii. What information did you use to formulate the action and call?

After the third section of the test item was shown, the decision was made as to whether an infraction was present. Participants also indicated any additional information used to make the infraction decision at this point.

MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002: 570) noted that the scarcity of experienced referees for recruitment necessitated a loosening of inclusion criteria for the studies, with referee groups classified as high in experience (10 years or more) and low in experience (5 years or fewer). This lack of a clearly drawn distinction between groups may have adversely affected the results of the testing, where the “expert” samples may not have truly been experts.

This study proved that, with experience, the decision-making of referees will improve. The experienced referees base their decisions on more sources of information and will therefore make correct decisions most of the time. There are certain functions of rugby union referees that have stayed the same over the years the game has been played. During the early stages of rugby union Marsberg, Twentyman-Jones, Carolin & Heatlie (1933: 62) described the functions a referee should perform according to their studies.

### 3.5 FUNCTIONS OF RUGBY UNION REFEREES

Referees have various functions to fulfill in a wide variety of sports. Every sport has its own rules and regulations and the officials (referees) are there to make sure these rules and regulations are forced onto the participants. The functions of referees also change over time, although the basis for refereeing will stay much the same as in the formative years of each sport. Rugby union is no exception. The Laws of the game have changed dramatically since the game was first played, although the functions of rugby referees today are still much the same as in 1933. Marsberg *et al* (1933: 62) described the functions of a rugby union referee in 1933 as follows:

- The referee is the sole timekeeper and judge of fact.
- The referee is the sole judge of the Laws.
- The referee is not allowed to contract out of the Laws of the game by agreeing with both teams to vary, or not to recognise, any of the Laws.
- The referee may not give any instructions or directions to either team prior to a match.
- The referee may, before arriving at a decision, consult with the Touch Judges on any point of fact related to their function, or with regard to time.
- The referee may not consult with anyone else except with regards to time, and then only if the information supplied by the Touch Judges is insufficient.
- The referee may allow extra time for delays.
- The referee has the power to stop a match before the time has expired if, in his opinion, the full time cannot be played.
- In the case of his being unable to officiate the whole period of a match, he shall have the power to appoint a substitute to take his place, failing an agreement by the captains of the respective teams.
- The referee cannot alter any decisions once given.
- It rests with the referee to impose penalties for irregularities, and to give all necessary directions within the Laws. The referee has full power to decide if

- any parts of a player's dress, including boots and projections thereon, are dangerous, and in that case must order such a player to remove the same and not allow him to take further part in the match until after such removal.
- The referee must not allow anyone but the players on to the playing enclosure during a match, except with his permission.
  - The referee must not allow any player to leave the playing enclosure without his permission, which should only be granted in special circumstances.
  - The referee must carry a whistle. The whistle, when blown, stops the match for the time being.

Most of the above functions are still valid today, and not only for rugby union but also for various other sports.

### **3.6 FUNCTIONS OF REFEREES IN OTHER SPORTS**

Healy (1999: <http://www.olympichandball.org>) developed a guide to refereeing in handball, which is available on the Irish Olympic Handball Association (IOHA) refereeing index website. The following are some of the generic guidelines that could also be applicable in other sport codes:

- Before the game the referees are responsible for:
  - Inspecting the playing courts, the goals and the balls
  - Deciding which balls shall be used (two balls must be available for each match)
  - Ensuring that both teams are wearing the proper uniforms
  - Ensuring that the number of players and officials in the substitution area is within the set limits
  - Establishing the presence and identity of the "responsible team official"
  - Conducting the coin toss to establish choice of sides

- During a match referees are responsible for:
  - Ensuring the game is played in accordance with the rules, and penalizing any infractions
  - Keeping note of score, and also any warnings, suspensions, disqualifications and exclusions
  - Controlling the playing time
  - Ensuring that after the game the score sheet is completed correctly
  
- Referees have the right to suspend a game temporarily or permanently

Even less well-known sports have some kind of refereeing guideline. The following are guidelines to which all referees in Canada must adhere during arm wrestling tournaments (<http://www.canadaref.tripod.com>):

- In order to referee an arm wrestling tournament in Canada you must be certified by the Canadian Arm Wrestling Federation (C.A.W.F.).
- Referees must conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. They may not drink alcohol during the competition, smoke in the immediate area of the arm wrestling table, use any profanity, be abusive toward anyone or make any kind of offensive gestures.
- Referees cannot compete in the same competitions in which they are refereeing.
- Referees must wear a striped referees shirt, black pants, socks and shoes. C.A.W.F badge must be worn on left sleeve. Level badge on right sleeve. Both must be one inch from top of black band.
- Referee may not congratulate a competitor during the competition. They may, however, congratulate both competitors at the same time.

### 3.7 SUMMARY

Sport has become very popular worldwide and with this growing interest the demand for high quality officials has increased. Mascarenhas *et al* (2002: 328) quoted *The Guardian* of 29 October 2001: "As sport becomes more pressured, referees are ever more accountable for their decisions and, reflecting this performance demand, governing bodies now sanction, or even demote, referees when they apply the laws inconsistently".

The role and importance of rugby referees has increased as the sport turned professional. Although most referees in South Africa, and the Blue Bulls Rugby Referees' Society, operate on an amateur level, the importance of their role is highlighted by all the attention the top referees receive in the media. It is, therefore, important to consider all the aspects that might influence, or are relevant to, refereeing in general.

Research has consistently indicated that interpersonal conflict, fear of physical harm, time pressure and performance concerns are the main sources of stress for sport officials.

A study by Rainey and Hardy (1997: 728) demonstrated that referees in general experience moderate levels of stress when measured during an entire season. However, it is important to note that the stress levels for different matches can vary, and depend on the importance of the specific match.

Crowd influence, which is often neglected, can also have an important impact on the performance of referees. A study by Rainey (1999: 578) indicated that although players are the more common assailants, crowds are responsible for a high percentage of assaults on officials.

Nevill *et al* (2002: 261-272) did a research study regarding crowd noise and years of experience upon refereeing decisions in football. The result of this study showed that the presence of crowd noise has a dramatic effect on the decisions made by referees. The authors suggested that referees decisions are influenced by the salient nature of crowd noise, the potential use of heuristic strategies, and the need to avoid potential crowd displeasure by making a decision in favour of the home team.

MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002: 570) made a study of the decision-making of rugby union referees. The study proved that, with experience, the decision-making of referees will improve. The experienced referees base their decisions on more sources of information and will, therefore, make the correct decisions most of the time. There are certain functions of rugby union referees that have remained the same over the years the game has been played.

Some generic functions of rugby union referees have been listed, as well as some generic functions of sport officials in general. This chapter has focused on the importance of officiating (refereeing) in sport and, in particular, the importance of refereeing in rugby union, which has become one of the most popular sports in the world.