



Technical Thoughts –RWC 2003
By
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The Rugby World Cup was a huge success. I could not believe the interest that greeted all of us officials when, after eight and a half weeks Down Under, we returned to Blighty. Every conversation seemed to hinge on various interpretations as rugby-nuts and non-rugby folk wanted to debate the ins and outs of the action that had so absorbed them.

I believe the new rugby crowd at the gates of the school, in the office and in the pub will not always rush to the clubhouses of the country. Some will, of course, but we have a duty to this new audience to de-mystify the complex spectacle. The referee's microphone is paramount in this role – but it is a double-edged sword as it also has the power to inhibit the referee's management of the game. In all our lives, some chats are private and should remain so. In RWC, therefore, we were given a kill switch to allow us to chat briefly to the players without the conversation being transmitted to the wider audience away from the playing area. This was to give the referees time to calm one or two players down, to answer a technical question from a player or simply to pass the time of day in conversation with players during an injury stoppage with both teams standing together. I believe the IRB was correct to allow this experiment and I enjoyed the using this technical development.

Why was the RWC so successful? Firstly, there was the sheer quality of the pitches and stadia, which were totally inspiring to all involved. Secondly, the surfaces were of a very high standard and, from a referee's perspective, it is easier to stay on your feet and officiate when you can see what is going on – not always easy in a foot of mud. And last but not least, the good surfaces made it so much easier for players to run, either to scoop up the ball to carry on the move or to get the set-piece in place without wasting time. These factors can't be over-emphasised.

On the other side of the fence sat a very enthusiastic and positive crowd who also played their part in inspiring the teams. Some of the venues, from Townsville in the north to Launceston in the south, simply shone as the locals took the teams to heart. As our bus drove to the Dairy Farmer Stadium in Townsville, we were passed by hordes of Aussie families who were, for that day, Japanese or French supporters; it is impossible not to join in the party in such an infectious atmosphere.

On a pure technical point, the teams knew how the matches were going to be refereed. This was due to the Singapore Agreement, made two years previously, and the Game Review held after the 1999 RWC; both had been run by the IRB to promote consistency in officiating and these involved elite coaches, players and referees discussing the key issues of the Game. The process is soon to be repeated in New Zealand, where some of the best minds from the game will again debate and formulate the future of the sport. The outcomes of their debates and discussions are all part of the way the game will be played, coached and reffed and we all await their deliberations with great interest. I don't believe much cries out to be altered but, certainly for the benefit of players, referees and both the old and new spectator base, any change will hopefully simplify the Laws without compromising the contest that is the characteristic of our game.