

EDITOR'S NOTES

22.04.08

Huw Bowen's email from Australia (Editor's Notes, 15.04.08) brought in two very interesting responses and they deserve a mention here. Are these coaches hitting on a real cause of concern in the game? Where do you stand on their feelings and views?

David Trueman, Rotherham Rugby Club:-

“As a coach who also refereed for 5 years I believe we have lost the plot with regards to application of the laws. Materiality is the new buzz word in refereeing, but think about what you see every week in televised games.

The contact zone is a mess. It is clear that the referees and players are working together to clear the ball, but if players entering the contact area were forced to stay on their feet this would not be necessary.

Back rows are rarely bound correctly at scrums, allowing them to close down attacks more quickly.

The lineout is forever moving closer to each other, allowing the defence jumper to grab the opposite jumper in the air so as to sack him on landing (or earlier), thus nullifying the driving maul.

Straight put in at the scrum is ignored.

Decoy runners in front of the ball are out of control.

All this is policed in the name of continuity - but does it work?

If you read the laws they generally appear to make very good sense. However, it takes a brave referee to apply them to the letter. If this is done in isolation it causes players and coaches lots of problems because as coaches we coach our players what they can get away with and not what the law says.

Rather than introduce ELVs, which increase the likelihood of on-the-floor infringements by devaluing the offence from penalty to free kick, it would be great to see an experimental application of the laws in their strictest sense for a season in, say, colts rugby. The change would initially cause more stoppages in play but very quickly I am sure that players would respond.

I may be wrong, but I'd bet that you would see more turnovers, more strikes against the head and more players required to secure the ball at the ruck – all, therefore, leading to more space and more scoring opportunities.

It will never happen unfortunately.”

Gerry McGuinness, Coach, Hawick Wanderers RFC:-

“As an avid reader of the Technical Journal from north of the Border, my problem is not with the Law being applied incorrectly. It is when it *is* applied correctly that I have the following gripe. I coach at U18 level at club and district level and it is the U19 scrummage variations that cause me grief, especially when a player from either side is carded. Can I start by saying that I am in full agreement with equal numbers at the scrum at all times, but as happened recently to me, the opposition scrum half was yellow carded and they took a forward out to play scrum half. At the next scrum, the referee correctly applied the variation and both sides went to 7 forwards.

I question why this should be. As the non-offending side we had to take our No.8 out, and we were fortunate that it was their scrum half that was carded, because an experienced scrum half could cause havoc at a scrum when the opposition have lost their No.8 to defend - as our scrum half duly did. There was no safety angle with a scrum half being carded, and I fail to see the necessity to reduce the forwards when a back does get carded – as in this example. If the non-offending team is to get an advantage, surely it would have been with 7 backs v 6.

The following week in a cup final, the referee sent off (red card) after our prop and their second row after twenty minutes. We reshuffled our pack and the game continued as 7 v 7 in the scrums, but it was a miserable, wet and cold day with many scrums, which were a disaster for both sides, because it is very difficult to be certain when the ball is out when the second row is the back of the scrum. Is it out when it is between the 2 pairs of second row legs? The referee alternatively penalised or let play go on, as both scrum halves came round to steal ball and the game was diminished as a spectacle.

To make matters worse, both sides had a full set of 7 replacements and, to my mind, if a forward is carded, the opposition should be made to bring the pack back up to 8, thus giving the non-offending team an advantage in the backs. As things stand at U19 level, losing one man to the sin bin doesn't actually cause you too many problems. It may be the skill of your No.8 at the base of the scrum that is keeping you in the game, but if the opposition get a card, he is taken away from there.

My final gripe is with the uncontested scrum. All it says is that the team that puts the ball in must win it and the opposition can't push. But what is winning an uncontested scrum? Is it when the ball is in your side, or at the No.8 's feet, or when the scrum half passes the ball away. Can the opposition scrum half harry the No.8 or scrum half or has he to leave them alone? All it would need is a few words added to clarify the situation. I've had referees say “no contest until after the scrum half passes or No.8 picks up,” yet others allow the scrum half to compete as normal after the ball has been put in.

While we're at it, let's get rid of the bit that says the ‘Engage’ call by the ref is not a command. Just try not engaging when he says 'Engage' and see what happens. Of course it is a command!”

There is a great deal in these two letters and they are valid points that are raised. I intend to pass the contents on to a referee to get his reaction – so watch this space and email any views that you have to keithrichardson@therfu.com

Keith Richardson (Editor).