

EDITOR'S NOTES

29.04.08

David Trueman's letter last week certainly drew a response from the refereeing fraternity – especially as the Editor attempted a bit of Devil's Advocacy and invited replies. I have added Referee A's (numbered in text) comments below the piece.

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. (1)

The contact zone is a mess (2). 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. (3)

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. (4)

Straight put in at the scrum is ignored. (5)

Decoy runners in front of the ball are out of control. (6)

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 (7) 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. (8)

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.”

1. I can't make comparisons with the game on TV. And which game are we talking about? Super 14, Premiership, Internationals, Heineken Cup, Magners League?

2. Too general.
3. Debatable.
4. Cannot agree. Sack on landing is legal.
5. What are the priorities at a scrum? I believe that one distinguished coach suggested that a scrum is a pushing contest, not a hooking contest.
6. Great exaggeration. Who coaches them, anyway?
7. A brave referee – or an idiot referee? You would end up with 50+ penalties and many yellow cards.
8. Referees only apply laws – they don't make them.

Referee B suggested:-

“The first article is true but we all know the better referees are able to manage to the correct degree and apply materiality sensibly for the benefit of the game.....the laws as they stand are too complex to *not* manage.”

He also said, “Some excellent points in the second article by Gerry McGuinness... why disrupt an 8 v 8 scrum when a back goes off....?”

Referee C:- “I have sympathy for the first letter writer (David Trueman) and agree that if referees were to apply law we could in certain areas have a better product, however which ones!?”

I think the issue is less with materiality and more to do with referees being too lenient, I have had it said from at least 4 coaches that they want referees to apply law and then they expect their players to adapt - easier at the top level for a number of reasons.

The second letter I can find little to disagree with!”

So there is not total agreement - even in refereeing circles - but that is surely to be expected in a game as complex as the one we are all bound-up in.

Where do you stand? An email to keithrichardson@therfu.com would be welcome.

Keith Richardson (Editor).