

The description of the incident in the report of the referee, who merely referred to the "Lydney Head Coach – name unknown. Brown haired gentleman; approximately 5'6"; moustache" read: "Approximately 5 mins after the final whistle (the two touch judges, assessor and referee coach) and I were in the referee's changing room with the door open. The Gentleman in question, who prior to the game had been introduced as the Lydney Head Coach, approached the changing room, leant into the open doorway, looked at me and said: "You were f**king crap". He then immediately walked away towards the Lydney changing rooms.

The brief statement from Simon Burns read: "I can confirm that I was in the dressing room at the time of the incident and also that the words I heard uttered were "You were fucking crap". However, I was seated in the corner of the dressing room and did not see the individual concerned. I was only subsequently made aware of who the individual concerned was."

The Hearing

The coach immediately admitted that it was he who had uttered the words which were the subject of the complaint. However, the words were spoken casually through the open doorway, and not in the referee's face nor in a threatening manner. He was displeased with his team's performance, and had just been telling them so in their changing room; he was accustomed to using the vernacular on such occasions. He was of the opinion that the performance of the referee had not been up to scratch. On leaving the Lydney changing room, clip board in hand, his route had taken him past the match officials' changing room, and, in his frustration, the words had slipped out. He had been involved in the Game throughout his life, and had been coaching for 18 years. As player, coach and administrator, he had an unblemished record. Unusually for a coach at this level, he remained a total amateur, never having been paid for the time and effort he put in. He always endeavoured to be positive with referees and encouraged communication with referees who, he considered, should be proactive with coaches. He was surprised at, and very apologetic for, what he had said, but he considered that a minor indiscretion had been blown out of all proportion. He was supportive of referees, and, as a dentist, had one international referee, and two or three RFU Panel referees, as clients. He was accordingly well aware of the problems faced by referees and supportive of them; referees and coaches had to understand each other's problems and be proactive with one another. It was unfortunate that he was unable to see the referee afterwards, apologise to him and talk through the game with him. He twice tried to see him, but the referee was with his Adviser for a very long time, and when he went to look him out on the third occasion, the referee had left.

Decision and Penalty

To his credit, the Coach had immediately admitted his guilt, and had, in the opinion of the Panel, been engagingly honest throughout the hearing. He had recognised his error and had attempted to seek out the referee to apologise and also to discuss constructively the game which had taken place. The Panel was satisfied that the offence was at the lower end of the scale of seriousness. There were not any aggravating features and all the mitigating factors applied. In the majority of cases, this would have resulted in a period of suspension from the Game on Match Days for three weeks. However, in this instance, the panel was of the opinion that it could properly apply RFU Guidance Note 2 as printed on Page 395 Of the RFU Handbook Season 2007/8. Paragraphs i and ii of that Note applied. In addition, the Panel was satisfied that the Coach was a catalyst for good who passionately believed in constructive dialogue between referees and coaches; he was the kind of coach from whom a sensible referee could learn much. He had given a lifetime of service to the Game as a volunteer and was continuing to do so. He was clearly remorseful that in an unthinking moment he had spoken inappropriately into the match officials' changing room, and the Panel was satisfied that the error was unlikely to be repeated. Accordingly, the Panel resolved that in this particular instance, an appropriate sentence was a severe reprimand, coupled with a warning as to his future conduct.

Costs.

The Panel made an award of costs against the coach in the sum of £150.00 plus VAT.

Signature: *Robert Horner.*

R. W. Horner, Chairman.

Date: 17th December 2007.