

Level III  
Referee Coach

MAJOR ASSIGNMENT  
2002

# **THE SUBJECTIVITY OF ASSESSMENT**

BY

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## **1. Background of how topic was decided.**

My original thought on this assignment was a paper based around the DISC model or, Personality Profiling which I now feel more comfortable about some of the issues that arose from Camp 1.

What I have come up with is a more relevant topic, The Subjectivity of Assessment. All referee coaches who are involved in this Level III Course should have a clear and thorough understanding of the process and exactly what is, and what is not "Compliant" with the descriptors.

This year in the NSW Tooheys New Cup, the Referees Board was required to complete a full IRB Assessment document every second week of this competition that started around the halfway mark of the 2002 season.

My concerns begin here as from what I can see, there appears to be a lot of subjectivity, in what is supposed to be a non-subjective process.

## **2. Background of the Assessment Process.**

In the past there was really no analytical way in which to review a referee's performance. Many times it came back to a "gut feel" with no justifications to back up an assessment.

As the game headed towards professionalism and the addition of full time referees, there really was a need for a system to be developed where everybody involved could be held accountable.

This was a major issue for International matches.

My understanding is around 1996-7, Sandy McNeill and Ian Scotney in association with Steve Griffiths discussed a system that could do exactly what was required. They agreed on a set of what is now known as descriptors, gave them a weighting of importance to the game and difficulty of task and made them relevant to the game. It was first utilised on a world scale at the 1999 World Cup.

Last year in Sydney there was a push to enhance and modify the system further to what we are currently working with today.

The "supporting documentation" is now a "must", and the fact that the referee can actually earn a minus or negative (down to -5) points if the referee made more than a given number (7 - 11) of non compliances to the descriptors.

In effect, the referee could have 40 non-compliances all in different areas and still gain maximum points!

### **3. Referees Issues.**

Professional Referees are concerned with this document as to how it is used, as their entire livelihood is dependent upon their scores and how the IRB interpret.

Although saying this, it is abundantly clear that this latest version is a preferred document by the Referee's on the world stage as the scores are mainly justified and appeal processes are available if needed as opposed to the old system that was totally subjective.

Non fully paid professional referees have openly stated when they are having an assessment performed on a given game they will referee differently to how they might handle a non-assessed game.

Do we want this?

It is also clear that if the Referee feels he has scored an acceptable total they will not argue the point over non-compliances even if they feel harshly treated for fear of future appointments/assessments/viewpoints etc.

The Referees that discussed these points with me I felt spoke honestly and have other fears, which I will talk about later in this paper.

### **4. The New Assessor.**

An area which I am the subject.

I was involved in a course that was held mid-year 2000.

There was approximately 6-8 of us and spent the morning in a classroom before going out to a 1<sup>st</sup> grade game.

From there we were given a video copy of game for the assessment process to be completed.

All participants later came back and performed a review on this.

Completed, that was it. I had nothing to do with Assessments again until this year.

So, now I'm an assessor left to my own devices and presumably knowing what I'm doing!

This is where the problems really begin.

For the new assessor going out yourself to "assess" your first game, this is an absolute daunting experience.

The single most important area when assessing is the "powers of observation skills" and where and what is exactly compliant verses non-compliant in any of the given descriptors.

My first Assessment this year I completed was done a NSW Premier Rugby game and took me in the area of about 6 hours to initially complete.

To my horror when calculating the score, it arrived at 96.8 and because being new to this process I wanted to check that "my score" was suitable.

Upon finding out that this score was overly high, I then went back to the video, spent another 4 hours nit-picking beyond reason, to get a more suitable score.

This process had now taken me 10 hours and I still don't know if it was correct, as this goes unchecked by anybody.

The individual referee was more than happy with the total score and was oblivious to my situation.

The situation here as far as I'm concerned is unsatisfactory, as I was able to do all this without really understanding the requirements.

Penalising some of the areas in the assessment amounted to nothing more than me cheering every time I identified non-compliance and being able to dock a point.

Is this what it's all about?????

In conclusions I will come back to this with recommendations.

## **5. Issues**

Assessment tends to position Refereeing as a "Science" when it has long been regarded as an "Art". It encourages the game to be viewed as a series of individual incidents and descriptors, rather than a broad, overall event.

It does not recognise or reward positive or intelligent actions and I believe overly subjective.

At the local competition level through to the International spotlight this document contains no real assistance from a developmental viewpoint, contains no advise or

recommendations and therefore needs to be utilised carefully in the relevant situations.

The Assessment Manual states that a further aim of the process is to "provide a set of descriptors so that international referees know what is expected from them". The descriptors are basically a listed summary of The Laws of the Game. Surely international referees would know what is expected of them as regards compliance with the laws. **Every** referee knows this from day 1. The essence of good refereeing has always been intelligent interpretation and application of the laws. Assessment does not take into account decisions (or non-decisions) made based on the nature of the game, field position etc.

The mathematical basis of the system and associated weightings to me have some confusing validity. Why does the Tackle have a higher weighting than the Ruck and Maul when this should clearly have the same weighting in my view. Why is the maximum score Advantage only 10.00 when this is the very essence of the game (some may argue). Who decided these weightings and what evidence is there to back up their relative importance?

Any measurement scheme needs a majority buy-in by those being measured. This cannot be proven to be the case. Referees would be cautious about being overly critical of the system for obvious reasons.

## **6. Outcomes and Recommendations.**

In relation to the New Assessor there are a number of recommendations I would like to suggest.

a) It needs to be recognised by the appropriate trainers, Chairmen, Board Members and other relevant people that just because an individual sits a training course he is not an overnight expert and should not be let loose to go and complete these documents.

b) A "train the trainer" scenario should be implemented.

c) New assessors should be accompanied to game by experienced assessor and talked through at least an initial game. Then go through the video together. Written report to be checked.

d) The following match, the same assessor to again accompany and to take own notes to compare with new assessor. With discussions on the relevant issues this should at least head the new person in the right direction.

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In relation to existing assessors

As each season tends to bring new interpretations of a given phase of the game, all participants of a given "board" to undertake an assessment together to gain consistency levels and not individual viewpoints.

The referee's should expect 100% consistency in this document and I clearly believe this is not the case, after talking to many Referees and Coaches at all the different levels this document is completed by.

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The Biggest Picture.

My understanding of this document is to be able to quantify a Referees performance in relation to the laws of the game.

As RUGBY UNION at the highest level is no longer amateur, we require a number of professional fulltime employees to sanction these assessments and not leave it to well-meaning volunteers.

I also believe we are somewhat missing the point when it comes to a match spectacle.

No-where does this document reward practical refereeing.

The game is showcased to a world-wide audience, why don't we allow the players, coaches or other officials to have say in to how a referee should "manage or allow the game to flow", rather than this document that has evolved from the referee's panels.

***It is Black and White to some assessors and Highly Subjective to others.***

Regards

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