What a New Referee Really Needs to Know

Level 3 Major Project

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This paper is prepared as part of the Level 3 referee program to assist those people that are involved with new referees with the development of these new referees to ensure their peak development and assist in the retention of referees within various state associations.

This paper is in the context of a new referee who has just completed their level one referee course and will be actively involved in refereeing Juniors', who has a desire to improve themselves and their development. There is the presumption therefore that the referee will be willing and open to coaching and development advice as well as to partaking in activities. As with any generalised statements many of these principles will need to be tailored to the specific abilities and needs of each new referee.

This paper is written on the basis of the structures that existed for the 2004 rugby season and although some of the referee accreditation structure is due to change in the 2005 season the underlying principles of this paper will still be relevant.

This paper will firstly outline the important things that the referee needs to know followed by the things that are needed to support a new referee and will conclude with an outline of the major recommendations made from this paper.

What the referee needs to know

In rugby union the referee is the sole judge of fact and law and is held accountable for all decisions that are made or not made during the time that they are the referee of a game. Unlike many sports that have more than one referee, umpire or other official in which to share the burden of responsibility as referee of rugby union this responsibility lands firmly on the shoulders of one person and it is extremely important for the development of the game and the referee individually that they are adequately prepared to take on that responsibility when it is passed on to them.

What the referee course doesn't teach a new referee and important things to do each game.

The level one referee course is the first serious step in becoming an accredited active referee. In practice there is only a small percentage of participants in the level one referee course that continue on to complete and pass the law examination and five game practical experience before they are recognised as a level one referee.

In general terms the level one referee course "has been designed to give the participant an introductory knowledge of the game. The course is based on four units of management, communication, decision-making and game understanding. Each unit is serviced by specific modules including; philosophy of officiating, management of players, safety, continuity and game phase management, tools of the trade, consistency and positional play. Each aspect of the course also has a basic law focus. A range of learning and assessment tools is utilised to enable use and development of the skills of participants. The course provides a framework for the further development of refereeing skills. Participants will be expected to complete a workbook including a range of assessment tasks during the course, complete five (5) matches and satisfactorily complete a practical field test that includes safety outcomes, in addition to a take home examination."

Those referees that complete the level one referee course are provided with a large amount of information that covers a wide array of situations and issues that may arise during a game. Although there are any number of situations that may come up during the game if the referee attempts to attain test referee competency on all of these areas in their first game they will end up putting to much pressure on themselves and will fail. It is therefore important for a referee to prioritise the knowledge and application of laws to gain the best outcome for the games that they will be appointed.

The need of the referee to prioritise their knowledge and application of the law is further emphasised by the fact that as referees start their development they will commence with refereeing games at a junior level such as an under 12 or 13 game in which the skills required of the referee will be vastly below the senior grades for which the application of some the laws is more applicable. It is far more

 $www.rugby.com.au/community_rugby/officiating/accreditation_courses, 577.html \#Level\%20I\%20Referee and the contraction of the$

¹ Quote from ARU website:

important for the referee to gain knowledge of some of the techniques and skills of refereeing outside the scope of the law and to build self confidence and experience that will allow them to not only to 'survive' the referee experience and build a strong foundation for their refereeing future.

The first impression that a new referee will make on a team is when they perform a book check and talk to the team before the game. The impression that the referee gives at this first point of contact will have a big impact on the perception of the referee by the players, coaches and spectators and will affect the referees own expectations of the game and ultimately the outcome of the game. The importance of this initial contact in often overlooked during the referee course and by the referee coach who may be assigned to assist the referee through his first game. In most cases the referee does not have, and will not have considered, a checklist to go through during that team chat. It is therefore recommended that prior to the referee going to do a team chat that assistance is provided to the referee do develop their checklist for their first team chat and practice going through this checklist with a referee coach through role plays and observation.

The skill set of a referee is very different from that of a player or other participant. New referees often come from a history of playing or other involvement in the game which has very little application for refereeing and therefore are often placed into a situation of being the sole authority controlling a game of rugby without an adequate skill base. Currently there is little emphasis placed on active observation of experienced referees by a new referee.

One method to develop a new referee's skill base is to have them shadow an experienced referee during a game or number of games until their confidence and understanding develops. This will allow the referee to observe and duplicate the experienced referee's actions at each phase, where they stand and what they say. When the new referee feels sufficiently capable the roles can then be reversed and the experienced referee can 'shadow' the new referee. This will provide a safety net for the safety of the players and equity of the game. Once the referee feels adequately competent, and in consultation with the shadowing referee, the new referee should then be given control of their own game under observation of a competently training referee coach.

Another method of improving the referee's skill base is through actual training. Often new referees go from skill, the level one referee course, directly to game, as a result of the five game practical experience requirement, without any practicing their skills through drills. It is recommended that a comprehensive training program be developed that will assist the referee in their development. This issue is discussed further in the supporting a new referee section of this paper.

The new referee and interaction with the referee coach

Due to the assessment and evaluative role that a referee coach performs in the development of a new referee, the position of referee coach may be a scary thought to a new referee. It is therefore extremely important to alleviate these visions and it is the responsibility of the referee course presenter when they present the level one referee course to communicate the positive relationship that should be fostered between the referee and the referee coach.

A strong relationship between a new referee and the referee coach built on mutual respect is essential for the referee to continue to develop and improve. New referees should be provided with additional care and attention during their first season to assist in their development and improve the possibility of retention to future seasons. Possible methods of providing this additional care and attention via non-traditional referee coaching resources is discussed further in the supporting a new referee section of this paper

In most cases the first game that a new referee referee's is likely to be a blur and the new referee is likely to make so many mistakes in their first game that each incident can and should not be recorded or discussed. The talent of the referee in applying the laws during the first couple of games is secondary to the need of the referee to feel supported and encouraged by the referee coach to build up their confidence. The important thing that most new referees wish to receive is encouragement regarding their 'survival' of the game with emphasis placed on areas in which they performed well to

convince them that they didn't completely ruin the game. A good referee coach will apply an appropriate means of encouragement and support depending on the DISC² profile of the new referee.

Mentoring is another method of developing a strong relationship with the referee and assisting the referee to have an open line of communication. A mentor can often develop a more personal relationship to a referee than a referee coach due to a different focus on understanding and solving a referee's problem. Mentoring is "an educational process where the mentor serves as a role model, trusted counsellor or teacher who provides opportunities for professional development, growth and support to less experienced individuals" compared to a coaching which is a "technique of cognitive apprenticeship whereby the instructor observes students as they try to complete tasks and provide hints, help, and feedback as needed". These definitions illustrate that mentoring focuses on the values and whole person growth while coaching is much more task oriented. The appropriate use of mentors and coaching is discussed further in the supporting a new referee section of this paper.

What the new referee needs when everything goes wrong

Referee abuse from players, coaches and spectators is part of the consequences of being a match official. Like any course, participants of the level one referee course will never be prepared for the day that everything seems to go wrong however it is at this point that the referee is at their most vulnerable from a development perspective and the referee will require an additional level of support and encouragement to support them through this phase of their development.

The timing of the bad game is often at the point in time that a new referee begins a transformation to "knowing that they don't know" as they begin to doubt their own ability to learn and adapt to the skills and knowledge that they require to be unconsciously competent as a referee. It is at this point the referee is more susceptible to the comments from players, coaches and spectators about their performance and therefore need the support and assistance of referee coaches, peers and mentors to assist them in building up their confidence in their own ability.

After a really bad game there are a number of reactions that a referee may have to assist them in coping with their performance. On the two extremes the referee may withdraw into themself and try and deal with the issue within their own mind, alternatively the referee may seek out as much information from as many different resources as possible to try and assist them in solving their problem. As a new referee the referee themself does not have the knowledge or skills to analyse their own performance and develop techniques to improve themself for the next game. Therefore the main need of the referee at this point is identification from their support network of referee coaches and mentors that the issue exists and needs to be addressed appropriately in accordance with there DISC profile by those whom they trust. Appropriate methods of assisting the referee should focus on the development of checklists and strengthening of law knowledge and application through an increased skill base to turn this weakness into a refereeing strength.

Supporting a new referee

The support that is provided to a new referee is critical to the new referee's ability to develop and improve. The role of supporting a new referee is not confined to one person or group of people but extends to the whole refereeing community.

The referee support network

The support that is provided to a new referee is essential to ensuring that referee's ultimate success and continuation in the game. The support that is provided to the referee comes from a number of sources both directly and indirectly.

² DISC Profile resources can be located: www.discprofile.com

³ Definition from: www.google.com.au

⁴ Definition from: www.google.com.au

⁵ Unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence model resources can be located: www.doceo.co.uk/tools/knowing.htm

Directly support of a new referee comes from the referee development officer (RDO). The RDO is often the first point of contact that a referee will have with the refereeing community due to the fact that it is often the RDO who runs, or is instrumental to, the level one referee course that is attended by the referee. The RDO therefore has an important liaison role and it is important that the RDO has the skill to correctly direct the needs of the new referee to appropriate resources within the referee association so that the new referee feels supported and can continue to develop without tying up the RDO resource to a single or number of new referees who are attention hungry.

Although the structure of the referee association is different for each association its ultimate function remains the same, which is to be the representative voice of its members, the referees and referee coaches. This differs significantly from that of the RDO who is focused on the development and support structures that are provided to the referee. The association plays an active role to ensure that its members are being properly looked after in much the same way that a trade union looks after the interests of its members. In recognition of this role the association therefore plays a critical role in the development of new referees by ensuring that enough attention is provided to these new referees by its available resources, i.e. its members the referee coaches and referees.

The referees within the association are the peers of a new referee. These peers fall into two categories;

- equals, those referees that are on the same level as the new referee and that have recently completed their referee course, and
- seniors, those experienced referees who have more experience and better knowledge of the game. Referees are able to derive immense benefit from peer to peer learning so long as a supportive environment is created to assist the learning of the referee. The creation of this supportive environment is the responsibility of the RDO.

Equal peers can discuss issues that arise for their particular level and as such may provide a learning tool for the referee to consider how they would address and issue prior to the incident occurring and consider various alternatives from others. Learning at equal peer level means that discussion is not monopolised by more advanced referees and referees may be more inclined to raise an issue that they may otherwise may not feel comfortable raising in the company of more senior referees. It is important that these discussions are kept within the context of best practice principles and therefore it would be suggested that the RDO would be responsible for keeping the discussion and agreed outcomes on track.

Senior referees can provide an incremental learning aid for new referees to learn from discussions with referees who are above their current level and are able to explain how they dealt with certain situations, problems or issues and can suggest possible alternatives that the new referee can apply. Stepped increases in learning can occur through the observation of more senior referee's discussions with their equal peers or as part of a debriefing after a match by a new referee where the new referee has shown a strong propensity for quick learning and application.

Referee coaches provide the most direct support to a new referee and will have the greatest impact on the new referee's advancement as they can provide a direct cause and effect conclusion about specific areas of the referees game that require improvement.

The principles of the One Minute Manager⁶ outline a basic approach to referee coaching at various levels of referee development:

Development Level
Low competence, high commitment
Some competence, low commitment
High competence, variable commitment
High competence, high commitment

Appropriate Development Style Directing: Structure, control and supervise

Coaching: Direct and support Supporting: Praise, listen and facilitate

Delegating: Turn over responsibility for day-to-

day decision making

All new referees who complete the law exam and actively take up practical refereeing fall into the low competency, high commitment development level and therefore should be developed through a directive style. This means that that referee coaching advice should focus on providing the referee with a high pass on of knowledge from the referee coach to the referee. At this level of development the best methods to achieve the pass on of knowledge is through directly cause and effect training and

⁶ Leadership and the One Minute Manager, K Blanchard. Published by HarperCollins Business

illustration focusing on the development of specific areas such as the position to stand at scrum, lineout, tackle ruck and maul etc. Although the referee may be given alternatives the referee coach should provide a recommendation that best suits the strengths and weaknesses of the individual given his physical and mental characteristics and these should be backed up by reference to 'role model' referees, preferably with video evidence.

As a new referee develops they begin to develop his competence and begin to "know that they don't know". This often leads to a drop in commitment to development as the gap between themselves and they level they would like to achieve seems too wide and as such a need for the referee coach to take a different approach to the referee's development. Here the development style of the referee coach is more of a traditional coaching role of directing and supporting the referee which has moved more towards a process of leading the referee to a degree of self discovery. The structure and control provided over the referee is more relaxed and some options are made available to the referees which are discussed together through directed focus provided by the referee coach. Further techniques apply to more advanced referees that are outside the scope of this paper.

In mentoring it is the role of the referee to seek out the assistance and advice of the mentor however new referees "do not know what they do not know" and therefore are unaware of the problems that they have and so do not ask the right questions until they have already developed, often bad, habits. It is therefore important that the emphasis of referee development is placed on referee coaching and mentors should act more in the role of building the referees self confidence.

Referee coaching

The problem with focusing on refereeing coaching as the main technique of referee development is that requires a large commitment and direct assistance to the referee by the referee coaching group. This commitment is often well above the traditional referee coaching resources available. At this point it is important to remember that new referees are coming in with a relatively low knowledge and practical skill base and as a result they don't require extensive technical tools to provide the best development opportunities, in fact new referees are often looking for role models to assist them in their development. In this case it would be appropriate to use the current senior referees within an association who have attained a certain level, i.e. premier grade referees, and who are willing to give back to the association to go and act as the referee coaches for new referees. This provides a larger referee coaching resource at a level that is suitable to the needs of a new referee who will require coaching on the core outcomes of refereeing each game.

One of the key areas that should be used to train new referees that is severely lacking is referee specific training that focused on the application of the principles of "Skill, Drill, Game". The process of referee specific training will provide a strong building block to build referee confidence and experience without having the referee in charge of a game. A number of referee specific drills are outlined in Greg Hibberson's level 3 paper⁸ however these drills have not been pushed down to the referees who need them the most, the new referee.

There are a number of drills that should be developed and practiced by new referees prior to their commencement of practical refereeing that will greatly improve their knowledge base and confidence before they start refereeing. In addition to the direct benefits to the referee in building confidence the use of training drills will mean that referee coaching resources will not have to fix problems on the run between games but will be able to provide practical coaching tips in a skill, drill, game situation to develop good refereeing habits and practice there application.

Additional emphasis should be placed on position development to get the referee in the right position so that they can then make the decisions that they need to make. This is a key area of focus because it gives the referee the best chance of seeing what is going on at each phase.

As a practical example of these drills to a new referee is the use of an adapted visualisation drill using markers such as chairs or other objects that are positioned in a certain angle that prevents the referee

⁷ Unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence model resources can be located: www.doceo.co.uk/tools/knowing.htm

⁸ Resource can be found on ARU website:

www.rugby.com.au/community_rugby/officiating/level_iii_major_projects,11670.html

from seeing the ball except for if they take up the correct position. A group of referees and a referee coach can go through a series of drills for various situations i.e. a tackle, ruck, maul, line-out, scrum, kick in general play etc and the referee can be specifically coached how they should approach the phase, where they should stand, what they should say, where they should direct their focus and what they should do as the phase ends. This form of checklist development can be practiced initially as skill development specific to a certain aspect of a phase and then, as the referee's skills develop through drill practice over a range of skills of the phase ultimately into a game situation. These drills should at minimum be done on conjunction with the referee's first year as a new referee and would optimally be performed prior to the referee refereeing there first game.

In addition to the development of the referees skills it also provides a good opportunity for referees to begin self analyse and peer development under the watchful eye of the referee coach who can direct the referee in a supportive environment amongst equal peers who are able to learn off each other and self improve. The provision of coaching advice in this fashion can then be tailored as the referees improve and more variables added to make the situation more like a game.

Referees each have their own styles and no refereeing style has proven to be superior to any other style. It is therefore important to assist in the referee to understand their own personal style and one method to achieve this by a referee coach is to provide a role model comparison of a new referee and their style to a professional referee with a similar style. This can then be used to assist the referee in understanding the strength and weakness their style through such tools as video analysis of the professional referee. This does not mean that each referee should be a clone of the current professional referees, but this can be a tool that will assist in the referee's development by visually illustrating the effects of each of the strengths and weaknesses that are discussed on the referee's performance.

Referee appointments and assessment

Referees should commence their refereeing at a grade at which they are inside their 'comfort zone' to allow them to build confidence that they will need as they advance through the grades. This will also mean that the referees knowledge and application will almost be in parallel to that of the skills of the players and as the referee develops so should the level of games in which they is appointed. It is important that a referee's development is not to fast so that a level of pressure is placed on a referee beyond their capabilities, especially at the formative stages of development, so that the referee's confidence is not damaged and future development hampered prior to the referee successfully proceeding through the "knowing that they do not know" stage of learning.

The assessment of a new referee is different compared to an experienced referee. The traditional methods of assessment for a new referee will be impractical given the skill level of the players and 'shape of the game' that a new referee is appointed too. It is therefore necessary to apply a more subjective assessment process to new referee's appointments in order to ensure an appropriate mix between referee advancement and maintenance of a new referee's self confidence is achieved.

The main criteria that should be used to assess a new referee should be the referee's application of coaching advice that they were provided by their referee coach from week to week, game management and safety. As a referee continues to develop further the assessment of referees should become more objective and performance outcomes that relate to accuracy and compliance should become the key areas of focus over subjective measurements.

Summary Points and Recommendations

In summary the key points and recommendations made to assist the new referee are:

- 1. Assist the referee in developing a checklist for his first team chat and practice going through this checklist with him.
- 2. Make use of referee shadowing and reverse shadowing until a new referee's confidence has been established.
- 3. The positive nature of the referee referee coach relationship should be emphasised at the level one referee course.
- 4. The ability of the referee in applying the laws during the first couple of games is secondary to the need of the referee to feel supported and encouraged by the referee coach to build up their confidence.
- 5. The development of checklists and strengthening of law knowledge and application is essential as the new referee begins to make a transition from "not knowing what they don't know" to "knowing that they don't know".
- 6. The Referee Development Officer needs to have the skill to directing the needs of a new referee to appropriate resources within the association that can best develop the referee.
- 7. The referee association plays a critical role in ensuring that enough attention and resources are provided to the referee through its membership.
- 8. Equal peer discussions can provide a learning opportunity for discussions at a common issue level.
- 9. Senior referee discussions can provide a learning opportunity for new referees to learn from the experiences of others.
- 10. Development of new referees by referee coaches should be through a directing style with a high emphasis on passing on of knowledge from the referee coach to the referee.
- 11. As the new referee begins to make a transition from "not knowing what they don't know" to "knowing that they don't know" the referee coaching style should move towards a more traditional referee coaching role of directing and supporting the referee.
- 12. The emphasis for developing new referees should be on referee coaching rather than mentoring.
- Senior referees with a certain level of experience can provide additional coaching resources and a role model for new referees.
- 14. New referee specific training has been overlooked. Emphasis should be placed on the practical development and practice of "Skill, Drill, Game" for new referees.
- 15. Professional referees can be used to assist a new referee understand their own style and their styles strengths and weaknesses.
- 16. Referee appointments should be at a level that will allow the new referee to gain confidence and experience and allow them to apply the coaching principles that they are taught.
- 17. Assessment of a new referee will be more subjective and should apply additional emphasis on the ability of the referee to apply the coaching advice they have been given, game management techniques and safety.