CONTROL:

- EARLY WARNING SIGNALS
- EARLY DIFFUSION TECHNIQUES

by Peter Smith

Introduction

A Case Study:

In the 1st grade preliminary final in Brisbane in 1995, a brawl started early in the second half that involved most players, spilled over the touchline, and almost into the crowd. The touchjudge had his flag knocked from his hand, and was almost forced over the fence by fighting players. The referee and touchjudges were senior experienced referees, yet control of the match was lost for a period of some minutes.

What are the early warning signals that the referees involved would have observed, and what strategies and techniques could they have used to diffuse situations?

What is control? Paul Akon (1976 pp44) in "Play the Whistle" describes it as " *the referee's ability through his management of the game to influence the players in such a way that he is able to keep the game from getting unruly and restrain the incidence of foul play and misconduct".*

All referees have experienced this loss of control at one time or another, yet some referees have this occur far less frequently than others. In this paper we will discuss the early warning signals that indicate the potential for loss of control, and what techniques can be used to assist referees diffuse situations and maintain control. Finally, we will look at our case study to see what the early signals were, and what diffusion techniques were used.

EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

"There is no fiercer hell than failure in a great attempt." John Keats.

Television commentators have often been heard to say how a match is "torrid", or there is "feeling" in the game. They are interpreting the signals given by the players in the match. The referee will also receive many signals from the players. He then needs to identify those signals that warn of the potential to lose control.

Many referees will talk about looking for aggressive behaviour when discussing the signs indicating loss of control is imminent. But what is aggression? It can be defined as the intentional response a person makes to inflict pain or harm on another person.(Anshel 1990). Rugby is, by its nature, an aggressive game. Anshel (1990), discusses two types of aggression.

Firstly, Instrumental aggression, which occurs when the athletes intention is to meet a performance goal rather than to cause injury, eg. a hard tackle to stop a player advancing winds that player.

Secondly, Goal or Reactive aggression, which is the intentional injuring or harming of an opponent, eg. stomping on a player on the ground nowhere near the ball. This aggression is not to be confused with performing acts that are forceful, yet acceptable as part of rugby (eg. rucking, mauling, tackling etc). It is reactive aggression that referees try to eliminate from the matches under their control, and that we will deal with in this paper.

Referees should note that rugby provides many possibilities for violent behaviour because, generally speaking, there is a high level of motivation, emotion, and an excess of aggressive signals. These signals include:

- Verbalisation of frustration. This includes swearing, arguing amongst players of same team, arguing with opponents.

-Spiking the ball. Throwing the ball either into the ground or away usually indicates a growing frustration.

-Sledging. The verbal abuse of ones opponents can indicate and or precipitate "heated" situations, particularly if the sledging has a racist slant.

-The "dark" look. Some players give no verbal signals, but give off plenty of non-verbal signals. One of these is the threatening glare.

-Other aggressive body language. Players when confronted or threatened by the opposition in situations off the ball will indicate their mood by body posture. A submissive body posture usually diffuses situations where an aggressive posture may inflame a situation.

-Niggling. This includes pushing ,shoving, grabbing, generally off the ball, and often occurs in lineouts, around the fringes of rucks and mauls, and after a player has passed or kicked a ball.

-Obstruction. Late tackles, holding players in backplay, obstructing players, are all signs that can be interpreted as early signals. They certainly cause ill feeling between players, and lead to some type of retaliation (often outside the laws of the game).

An understanding of why players become aggressive would seem useful in identifying early warning signals and also in how to diffuse this aggression. A study of the research into aggression has led to a number of different theories used to attempt to explain aggression. These are:

-Biological or Instinct theories. These claim that human aggression is inevitable as it is a component of our survival instincts.

-Frustration-Aggression theory. Aggression is a logical and expected consequence of frustration. A player whose repeated attempts to meet a performance goal are repeatedly prevented by an opponent, results in a build up of frustration, and the player becomes more likely to injure an opponent.

-Social Learning theory. The extent to which a player may exhibit aggressive tendencies is dictated by that player's role-modeling and child-rearing experiences. Therefore a player who has had previous experiences where aggressive behaviour is rewarded positively is more likely to be aggressive in future.

As you can see there is no definitive theory to explain aggression, however, the frustration-aggression and social learning theories can be used to explain different situations of aggressive behaviour. By using this knowledge, and by identifying early warning signals, referees can develop diffusion techniques to deal with different players and situations.

EARLY DIFFUSION TECHNIQUES

When does a referee begin refereeing? Players and coaches treat you as a referee the moment you enter a football club's grounds, regardless of what you are wearing or even if you are actually refereeing their match or even that day! Therefore, a referee begins his role as a referee well before a match starts. Experienced referees begin using their diffusion techniques when they first meet the teams as a group; ie. when checking boots and toss of the coin. This gives the referee an excellent opportunity to establish the codes of behaviour he requires for the match.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with every potential situation a referee might encounter. A discussion of the main principles of diffusion techniques will help referees adapt techniques to individual situations.

Communication

As a referee this skill is absolutely vital to your success. It is important to convey to players that you are calm, in control, and confident, while at the same time being positive and fair. There are two types of communication, verbal and non-verbal.

The verbal aspect of communication is very important. The non-verbal aspect of communication can be even more important. It is not only what you say, but how you say it and the way you treat other people in delivering the message.

Non-verbal communication involves:

-body motion (gestures, facial expression)

-physical characteristics (physical appearance, build)

-voice characteristics (inflections, resonance, pitch)

-body positions (distance between bodies, angle to each other)

Non-verbal communication can be direct in that it involves hand signals, or indirect (body language reflecting approval/disapproval), emotions (projecting a mentally tough, confident self-image) or be very subtle.(Yukelson 1993). Referees who have good communication skills find many ways, verbally and non-verbally to get an intended message across. Yukelson (1993) had these suggestions for effective communication (which I have modified for referees):

-No one communication technique will meet all needs. Recognise individuals differences in the way players respond to you.

-Characteristics of effective communication include honesty, clarity, consistency, and sincerity. Sarcasm, ridicule, and degrading or belittling comments are poor communication techniques. When referees lose control, the emotional element of communication may override the content element.

-Use a style of communication that is comfortable for you. Whether you are laid back, animated, relaxed, vocal, or somewhere in between, communicate in a manner that is consistent with your personality.

-Work to improve non-verbal communication skills.

-Be positive. A positive approach is characterised by liberal use of praise, support, and positive reinforcement to strengthen desired behaviours. Skilful use of positive reinforcement can increase motivation of players to play within the laws.

The style of communication a referee adopts may be counterproductive to the situation. Generally, experience is often the best guide for a referee as to how to deal with a given

situation effectively. For the inexperienced referee, Greg Sargant, the Sports Psychology Coach at the Australian Institute of Sport (A.I.S. handout 1994), gives us these general rules for dealing with players, coaches and spectators:

-Have your head on right, expect criticism and plan for it.

-Don't be too tough, steer clear of provocation and antagonism.

-Don't bark - be firm and relaxed, it shows that you are relaxed and in control.

-Show confidence, command respect via your appearance, manner and voice.

-Forget the spectators, they like to antagonise players and referees, ignore them.

-Answer reasonable questions with courtesy.

-Choose words wisely and carefully, don't threaten.

-Stay cool, establish a calm environment.

In communicating effectively referees can influence the players to behave within the laws. Referees need to be as professional as possible in the way they communicate. A problem facing many referees is that they can't objectively evaluate their own communication skills, and, therefore need to seek feedback from other sources; eg. touchjudges, CABs, or other observers off the field. Some referees adopt a "dictatorial" style when a less confrontational manner suits a situation better. CABs have an important role in helping inexperienced referees with communication skills.

Setting the Standard

In a study by Ryan, Williams, and Wilmer (1990), they found that young athletes legitimised aggression when they observed or performed earlier examples of aggression which went either unpunished or were positively rewarded (usually by teammates or supporters). This then makes it important for referees to be strict in applying the laws regarding foul play especially during the early stages of a match. The referee must then consistently apply the laws for the remainder of the match or lose the confidence of the players in the referee to control the match.

So if a late obstruction occurs early in a game and it may only be marginal, then it is better to award a penalty and caution the offending player. All players are immediately aware of the standard of behaviour required and of your interpretation of the laws. Failure to adequately protect players from this sort of blatant foul play can quickly lead to an escalation in aggressive behaviour, as the players lose confidence in your ability to control the game. Professional players prefer to play hard within the laws, and have some protection from foul play.

Preventative Refereeing

Senior referees talk much of preventative refereeing; ie. communicating with players to prevent infringements and make the game more fast flowing and attractive.
This is done by playing advantage, and communicating to the players what is happening. For example, at a ruck you will hear the referee talking to the forwards encouraging them to stay on their feet, making the ball available, and remaining onside.

Often referees will play advantage for infringements, without penalising. It is good technique to advise offenders they have been spotted (usually at the next breakdown). For example, advantage is often played from a lineout, as the ball is won by the non-offending team. Many referees at the next breakdown will say to the players; " played advantage for the barging by blue 5 , lets leave the jumpers alone". This allows both teams to be aware the referee is seeing the offences and he is in control.

Effective use of positive reinforcement can also influence players. Therefore complementing players for positive aspects of their play is also a technique many referees use, eg. "Good engagement last scrum fellas, lets keep doing it." or, "Good gap in that last lineout, don't close it up." or "Stay onside red 4, that's good." or even, "Good try blue, a pleasure to watch." Of course this has to be said at the right time and in the right way.

The length advantage is played is also a technique used by most referees. If a game is expected to be "heated" early on, or there are other signs the players are agitated, then advantage is played rather short. Rucks and mauls are not left to go for any long period of time, particularly if players are on the ground. A close eye is kept on kickers of the ball, and on players who have just passed the ball. As a referee becomes confident that the game is losing its "heat" he may play advantage longer.

Managing Players

A study by Rainey and Schweickert (1991) concluded that three main behaviours by match officials elicited hostility towards them by players. They were:

- judgements on the basis of standards that are contrary to formal rules
- judgements biased by the reputations of athletes
- confidence in judgements even when they are in error.

Hence referees must work hard to be seen as consistent and fair in their rulings, and that they are not influenced by the actions of high profile players.

Referees should always appear confident in their rulings, but when these rulings are disputed by players, referees need to use good man management techniques. They must take their role seriously without taking themselves too seriously. In the military, the common adage is: firm, friendly, fair, but not familiar. Try to learn players names, don't be afraid to have a joke and laugh during a game, and even offer advice. A joke at the appropriate time eases tension and makes the referee more approachable in the eyes of the players. This will add to the enjoyment of the game, and players enjoying themselves make it easier for the referee to maintain control.(Sargant 1994)

Use the captains to communicate with the players of teams. That way your message should get through to all players. Also make sure both captains are involved in a caution or speaking

to a player. They then feel part of the process of maintaining control of the match and appreciate the referee treating them as professional players. Keeping the captains fully informed and making them feel at least partly responsible for maintaining control during a game is an effective technique in diffusing aggressive behaviour.

Warning, Caution, or Sendoff?

Most new referees have difficulty with what to do with an offence under law 26. The penalties awarded are often either too harsh or too light. For guidance I have included the "Crimes Act" (appendix 1). When a player commits foul play and you decide to play advantage, that player must be either warned, cautioned (or even sent off) later (usually at the next stoppage in play). If the players are not made aware that the infringement has been observed and penalised (or advantage played) referees run the risk that players will settle things themselves. Note, however, that for foul play, the advantage should be immediately apparent for it to be played.

When cautioning a player make sure both captains are aware of the circumstances of the offence and what action is being taken by you. A caution or sendoff can have a dramatic effect on a game, so good communication skills are essential to get your intended message across. As this is a period of extreme pressure for a referee, referees should develop a routine to deal with these situations. A suggested routine is:

-Keep teams apart, not taking your eyes off them.

-If you have a touchjudge report, listen carefully, ask for a recommendation (he may have seen something different to you), don't take your eyes off the teams.

-Call the captains over and the offending players.

-Issue the warning, caution, or sendoff to the offending players, eg. Blue 5 the touchjudge has reported you for a late tackle on red player #10. You are cautioned. If you commit a similar offence I have no option but to send you off. Do you understand? Then to the two captains I also ask - Do you understand the caution? When satisfied they understand,

signal for the penalty, and recommence play.

Touchjudges

If a referee is fortunate to have appointed touchjudges by the local association, then he has two extra pairs of eyes to detect early warning signals and diffuse situations. The referee should engender a team approach to the match with his touchjudges. The team should meet well before the game (if possible) and discuss all aspects of team play so that they are clear as to what is expected of them.

The touchjudge should report all incidents of foul play that he observes. He should not assume the referee has seen the incident, because he sees the game from a different perspective. When two teams realise that two touchjudges are observing backplay effectively, and the risks of detection of aggressive play are hence increased, they are less motivated to commit foul play.

The referee should also communicate with the touchjudges at every opportunity to gain feedback on how the match is progressing and if any warning signs have been detected. Touchjudges are also valuable in helping the referee maintain his concentration and focus on the game. Used properly, the touchjudges can be an effective tool in maintaining control.

After the Game

The referee is usually the last on to the field and the last off. It is still important to continue using your communication skills even though the match has finished. You have not finished being a referee.

So as you walk off the field, shake hands with the captains and other players, acknowledge them with some positive feedback. If any players or coaches are agitated it is wiser to avoid them at this stage. Talk to them after you've had a shower and changed, and when they are

less agitated. Given some time to become less emotional, the communication is more effective.

After a match don't slink off, but go to the clubhouse and make yourself available to coaches, players and others. Continue to use good communication skills while talking to people, remembering those points made before in this paper. If a point of law is in contention say you'll look at it later and advise them. Avoid confrontation.

Mixing with players, coaches, and supporters after a game is one of the most enjoyable parts of rugby. Some of the free advice is sometimes useful. It also makes you more approachable as a referee, and thereby helps you develop a rapport with the most important people in the game - the players.

A Case Study

If we now examine the case study in more detail, we should be able to see what the early warning signals were, and what diffusion techniques the referee employed.

The match was a 1st grade preliminary final, the winner to progress to the grand final, the loser to be finished for the season. Consequently, there was an extremely high level of motivation and emotion. The players themselves had a high level of arousal, and from even the early stages of the warm-up, were giving off many aggressive signals.

From the initial kick-off there were a variety of warning signals observed that indicated the match was going to test the referee's ability to maintain control. These included:

- Sledging of opponents.
- Niggling, eg. pushing, shoving, grabbing, off the ball. Occurred most often around the fringes of rucks and mauls, during and after lineouts.
- Obstruction, eg. holding players in back play, late obstructions, particularly after

players had passed the ball.

- Aggressive body language observed of all forwards as both packs tried to assert themselves.

- Minor foul play, eg. striking opponents with open hands, standing on players in rucks and mauls.

The referee used his diffusion techniques from first contact that day with the teams. He used good communication techniques to convey to the players and coaches that he was cool, calm, and in control. At the checking of boots, in company with his touchjudges, he answered all questions with courtesy, and his demeanour commanded respect.

On the field, the referee set the standard of behaviour required from the start, and consistently applied these standards throughout the match. He used preventative refereeing techniques, particularly around rucks and mauls, prior to and during lineouts and scrums.

Around rucks and mauls the referee gave clear, concise instructions to prevent infringements, and keep the game flowing. Eg. " Stay onside blue 4.", " Ball only Blue, leave the player alone.", " Green, stay on your feet.", " Must release Green". When the referee detected minor transgressions, eg. niggling, players were given warnings "on the run". More serious offences, eg, obstruction, were penalised and players cautioned (if required).

At lineouts and prior to scrum engagements, the instructions given by the referee reinforced the type of behaviours acceptable, eg. " Don't crouch till you're ready front row.", " Wait for me to call the engagement", " Ball only, leave the jumpers alone", " Support only, no lifting " . He wasn't too tough, but was firm and relaxed. He tried to keep the players focussed on playing rugby when aggressive posturing by the forwards, either prior to scrum engagement or before a lineout throw, threatened to cause heated situations.

The referee also varied the length he played advantage to assist in diffusing situations. He

played a short advantage early in each half, and also when he detected warning signals. As the referee felt that the players exhibited fewer warning signals, and concentrated more on playing rugby, he played a longer advantage.

The touchjudges and referee worked as a team, complementing and supporting each other. All blatant foul play was detected, which the referee correctly penalised. The referee at all times constantly communicated to the players, by action, word and body language, his interpretation of the laws and the standard of behaviour required.

Although the referee appeared to use good diffusion techniques, a major fight between the players still occurred. This can happen to any referee. It must be noted, however, that the fight occurred only a few minutes into the second half. Both teams had just received highly motivational half time talks from their coaches. The scores were close, and the players and supporters were extremely emotional.

The referee did not lose control of himself, but remained calm. With the assistance of his touchjudge, and by asserting himself with the players, he quickly regained control of the match and stopped the fight. He used his whistle (loud sharp blasts) and his voice to re-establish his authority with the players. He did this without physically touching the players himself.

The referee then established a calm environment. He separated the teams, stopping any arguing or sledging that some players tried to persist in doing. He called the touchjudges over to report. After their report, he then called out the offending players and the captains to communicate his decision.

His decision was to send off the players who had started the fighting, one from each side. He continued to use all diffusion techniques as before, and there were no further incidents in the match. The referee was subsequently appointed to referee the grand final.

Conclusion

Referees need to be able to identify the early warning signals that indicate the potential for control of a match to be lost. Referees must also be able to use a number of techniques to diffuse situations so that they maintain, or regain control of a match. Some of these techniques are used in a preventative way before and after a match. All referees need to develop overall strategies in their use of diffusion techniques in a game, so they are well equipped to deal with every situation. Experience, the help of CABs, other referees and observers, video, etc., can be used by a referee to develop the skills and strategies required to maintain control of a game.

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Appendix 1 **"CRIMES ACT"**

Offence	**Law Reference**	**Penalty**	**Repeat**
Obstruction	26 (1) a-d	1	2, then 3
Deliberate, wilful infringement	26 (2) a	1	2, then 3
Repeated infringements	26 (2) d	1	1, then 2, then 3
Striking: one on one, punching	26 (3) a	2	3
blind, 3rd man in	26 (3) a	3	
after whistle, continuing on	26 (3) a	3	
otherwise striking	26 (3) a	3	
in retalation	26 (3) a	2	3
head butting	26 (3) a	3	
use of elbow	26 (3) a	3	
"Christmas" hold	26 (3) a	3	
eye gouging	26 (3) a	3	
Kicking an opponent	26 (3) b	3	
Trip an opponent	26 (3) b	2	3
Trample head	26 (3) b	3	
- body or legs near ball	26 (3) b	2	3
- body or legs away from ball	26 (3) b	3	
Tackle - early (incl. player off ground)	26 (3) c	2	3
- late	26 (3) c	2	3
- dangerously:			
above shoulder	26 (3) c	3	
shoulder charge	26 (3) c	2	3
stiff arm	26 (3) c	3	
defenceless opponent	26 (3) c	3	
flying tackle	26 (3) c	2	3
Charge or obstruct kicker	26 (3) d	2	3
Hold, punch, charge, obstruct or grasp opponent	26 (3) e	2	3
Front row charging	26 (3) f	2	3
Front row wilful collapsing	26 (3) g	2	3
Wilful scrum collapse	26 (3) h	2	3
Ball out of play	26 (3) d	2	3
Misconduct prejudicial to good sportmanship	26 (3) j	1	2, then 3

Notes:
Penalty legend: 1 = penalty
2 = penalty, and caution
3 = send off
Otherwise striking - includes use of forearm or open hand
Kicking - forward action of the foot, contacting with toe or instep
Trampling - using the soles of both feet in a continuous motion
Stamping - using the sole of one foot in a downward motion whilst weight on other foot