

Football: Referee Respect

Contributed by Ashley Knott
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Respect the ref. Those are the words booming out of the Premier League...

Having just handed out a further two game ban to Liverpool midfielder Javier Mascherano it appears the game's governing body is getting tough.

The tabloids have been stirring up this sort of reaction ever since the Argentine saw red against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Does this seem to be a one way street? The ref's way or the highway? It is of course completely correct that players and managers respect referees, nobody within the game is questioning that and if they are then they are wrong.

It is becoming increasingly clear that referees do not appear accountable in any way at all. They do not explain their decisions, they do not speak to the press and perhaps most importantly they do not explain their decisions to the clubs – which of course they affect most.

This is what the managers get so irate about, and rightly so.

If a manager loses a run of games quite often he will get booed, sworn at and questions start to be asked and if the losing streak continues he is indeed sacked – ultimately he will have to explain himself as he has a duty to the supporters and his board of directors that he is representing.

So is it correct that referees explain themselves to nobody in the public domain – despite football being very much in the public domain?

They may receive a telephone call from referee chief Keith Hackett but the public do not know if this happens and/or the consequences of this.

Alex Ferguson and Carlos Queiroz have both been asked to explain their comments following United's exit from the FA Cup to Portsmouth.

The comments were extreme with Ferguson aiming his rant at Keith Hackett, saying, "I don't think he makes a contribution to the refereeing performances in the country and I think that has to be addressed. I think that he's not doing his job properly".

He would have perhaps been better saying we have no idea what Keith Hackett is doing and he probably would not have been contacted by the FA as this would indeed be true. Do Mr.Hackett's referees face consequences for bad decisions? The evidence so far would say no they do not and if they do just what are consequences?

The incident most in question following Fergusons comments was during the first 10 minutes at Old Trafford when Cristiano Ronaldo was bundled over in the box and it was clear for all to see it was a blatant penalty, in an FA Cup Quarter Final this is without doubt a serious and ultimately costly decision.

Why should the referee in question Martin Atkinson not explain his decision after the game? If Fergie had of played without a goalie would he have to explain this? Absolutely.

Player behaviour has also been brought into question of late. The Sun decided it would be clever to publish a series of players swearing at officials. Adults swear. It is a fact of life. Yes, some players go too far, but the referee has the power to deal with this by means of handing out a yellow card for dissent which in the main, most people fully agree with.

It is completely ignorant to just lament every player who swears on the football pitch. If this is the way the game is going to go players will soon be robots, they won't swear, they won't speak to the referee and they won't care and why should they if they cannot have an opinion? Ultimately they put bums on seats, they make the game what it is, they should be the ones with the loudest voice.

So just why do referees choose to not speak to the press and public?

How on earth can they expect a supporter who has forked out £50 to watch their team in a Premiership game see it ruined by a dodgy decision and not be annoyed? They have absolutely every right to be annoyed.

Perhaps it is because they fear being hounded in public or losing their jobs, but let's put this into perspective, football is a multi billion pound industry and completely results based, referees affect games every week but answer to nobody.

It is incorrect, unjust and is exactly why there is such a divide between manager and referee. If players perform badly they are sold, if managers perform badly they are sacked, if you or I perform badly we are also sacked.

Referees do nothing to help themselves, they have alienated themselves more and more often refusing to talk to players on the pitch. The FA needs to take a positive stand and encourage referees to explain themselves in a form the fans, managers and players would appreciate, ultimately it is the only way the refs will get the respect they long for.

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