

MENTORING YOUNG REFEREES

This guide is a condensed and adapted version of a much longer document on Mentoring Referees. (This is available to individuals if they wish it by e mailing me at the address below).

I am grateful to the following for their input into the final document:-

Nigel Spencer (Hampshire Referees Society) Nick Bunting (RFU), the National Coaching Foundation (now Sports Coach UK), Dave Broadwell (RFU), Trevor Sharpe (Notts, Lincs & Derby Referees Society) and Peter Hughes (Manchester & District Referees Society)

May I remind you of the following Child Protection guidelines:-

- **Do not travel to or from a match with the referee alone in your car**
- **Do not meet the referee alone in his/her changing room.**
- **All discussions, and review of any videos, should take place in an open area in the company of other adults.**
- **All Mentors must be CRB checked**

If you have any comments on this guide please contact me.

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MENTORING YOUNG REFEREES

What Does a Mentor Do?

The Mentor: - is a role model, builds confidence, is a resource, develops knowledge or skills and challenges and questions

Remember - Referees learn in many different ways

Finding and Using Information

Young referees: - are informed about new skills and presented with new information via relevant RFU courses and materials; often pick up information from watching and listening to other referees or from reading books and newspapers; can analyse their own performance and that of others; will find that trial and error is one of the most common ways for a referee to discover new methods. Through experimentation you and the young person will decide on what works and what does not.

Remember - Mentoring is more than just passing on knowledge

Mentoring Activities

Could be: - attending a squad session together; video analysis of a match; video analysis of certain phases of a match; personal development planning programmes or sessions; some involvement/discussion with parents; touchline assistance and involvement; possible use of audio system or digital camera; discussion of performance - individual and/or group.

Mentoring Sessions

Could be: - pre-match meeting; observational/activity; post-match analysis and evaluation; action points. NB at some point there must be a written document so that progress can be evaluated and monitored.

Initial Meeting

To: - clarify expectations; agree priorities; establish goals. This must include parent/ guardian who will inevitably be providing or authorising transport and have to live with the post match upsets and disappointments. They must understand the occasional loneliness of being the referee and the need to be there, as well as helping to watch and see progress. Much of the mentor's contact will involve parents to agree programmes

Mentor Core Skills

Are: - observation; giving feedback; active listening; questioning

The Importance of Goals

- Goal-setting focuses on closing the gaps in performance.
- Goals must be SMART i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time- related

Key Stages in Reflection and Mentor Role (Better with the older end of the spectrum)

Key Stage		Mentor Role
1	Refereeing activity – description of experience/problem on/off pitch	Objective observer/listener
2	Evaluation – what was good/bad	Objective listener/probing
3	Analysis – focused on one aspect of the experience/problem. Why was it good or bad?	Challenging
4	Conclusion – as to options in addressing the issue	Clarifying/source of knowledge and/or objective feedback
5	Development planning – devise an Action Plan and carry it out	Adviser/building confidence

Qualities of a Mentor

Experience - experience as a referee so that what is done is done well and any advice has credibility with the referee and parents (who may be rugby enthusiasts and think they know it all!); knowledge of the National Foundation Certificate course (you know what they know); also Adviser or team coach experience would be valuable.

Personal include: - empathy, patience, objectivity, time, knowledge, experience, general ability to develop a referee's potential

Stages of the Mentoring Relationship

1. The Early Stage - relationships must be developed with the referee and parents; both participants getting to know each other; you must make your role as facilitator very clear in the initial stage, and encourage the referee to take responsibility for his or her own learning from the start. The Mentor probably has to arrange introductions to clubs/ coaches to get early matches, and be there to ensure good relationships in the long term.

2. A Developing Relationship – initially the young referee will be very dependent upon your knowledge and experience; you may often feel the need to explain, give information and sometimes advice; you may find yourself filling the role of counsellor and resource provider; in time there may be decreasing involvement, as the young referee becomes more familiar with the situation and more confident in making decisions – therefore less inclined to ask for advice. With

ongoing parental contact and with confidence from club contacts, the clubs themselves can actually invite the referee to do matches.

3. A Balanced Relationship - as the referee develops in knowledge and confidence the relationship may develop into a two-way process; the referee learns how to manage the self-reflection process and becomes adept at learning from experience; contacts become more flexible; your role changes to one who assists in, rather than directs, the learning process.

Evaluating Mentoring

- It is important that you gain some qualitative feedback from:-
The referee, the referee's parents, the club coaches and even "the touchline" on your role as mentor and the mentoring process in general.
Be open, honest and sensitive in your approach.
- At the end of the season, when you report to your Society, evaluate the success of the scheme with some quantitative evidence. E.g. if you started with (say) 8 referees, how many carried on till the end of the season, how many will be going into a second season and so on. In the slightly longer term you can work out what % has gone on to referee adult matches.

Other points to consider

- The parents – can they help, will they commit, do they support, is rugby taking the family down a path the siblings may resent, and will the family enjoy the ride?
- Every young referee should be supported by someone trustworthy at any match or tournament. The Mentor should ensure this and have back up contacts at clubs, referee society, etc to provide cover.
- A network of friendly cooperative coaches/ team managers is essential to success so that mistakes and bad days are treated no differently from a player's situation.
- Young referees should be encouraged to continue playing in a team environment to enjoy peer group socials etc and carry on learning the game from a playing perspective. Refereeing can be a lonely life especially on a bad day, and mentors/ parents are poor substitutes for team mates. A balance of playing and refereeing is valuable.
- During a match you must not be afraid to tackle anyone who is making aggressive comments from the touchline to the referee. Use your skill and experience to defuse such a situation. You may also be able to help with the management of other game related and touchline issues

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