A Suggested Pre-Match Procedure for Referees

The "here's what I do pre-match and why" routines — together with a number of other suggestions — from a referee who has been doing this sort of stuff for a long, long time!

Background

Because of the beneficial impact they can have on overall game management and the enjoyment of everyone involved, the pre-match procedures that referees follow when preparing for a game are quite important. From an insurance and legal standpoint, they help to minimise risk and form an important part of the duty of care that all referees are required to exercise.

When carried out diligently and properly, good pre-match technique may also lessen the possibility of a referee being exposed to a claim of negligence in the event that a player is injured during a match. Although serious injuries are rare, Rugby is a collision sport and the possibility of player injury is present at all levels of the game. All of that being so, an effective pre-match routine requires considerably more from a referee than simply checking the players' boots and conducting a coin toss.

Quite understandably, the pre-match process is an area of the game that many newer referees approach with uncertainty. I know from long involvement as a player, referee and referee coach, that it is also an area that a number of experienced referees could improve.

Let me say at the outset that there is no "one size fits all" process that referees should follow prior to a match. Referees are individuals. That being so, each of us will prepare for matches by following a routine we believe best suits our personal needs and the anticipated requirements of the match to which we've been appointed. The important things, in my view, are that referees actually have a process and that they follow it.

However, while it is perfectly acceptable for referees to prepare for a match in their own way, there are a number of elements that every referee should consider including in their pre-match routine. Many of these are common sense. Some are requirements imposed by the Laws of the Game and by Rugby Australia's Smart Rugby protocols and safety directives.

The pre-match routine described below is the one that I follow. It is the product of a lengthy and ongoing process of small step improvement and it continues to evolve as the game itself changes and evolves. It is comprised of a series of simple processes that I've turned into habits and now perform somewhat automatically.

The procedures outlined work for me and over the years I have suggested many of them to other referees. To complete the match day circle, towards the end of this paper some suggestions are made as to what referees might consider doing at the end of a match.

I encourage you to consider the things that I do pre and post-match. Feel free to take on board and to apply those that you agree with and to modify or reject those that you don't. Remember, however, that to ensure you remain covered by Rugby Australia's national insurance scheme, those processes that have their origin in the Laws of the Game and Rugby AU's Smart Rugby and other safety protocols must be carried out precisely as specified by Rugby AU. For those particular items there can be no shortcuts for referees!

Get to the field as early as possible. There's a lot to be done before kick-off.

For those who have only recently set out on their refereeing journey, the pre-match procedure can take some time to complete properly. That being so, it is essential that you arrive at the ground in sufficient time to carry out the necessary steps in full.

Fortunately, like most things in life, the more you learn about it and practice it, the easier and more streamlined your pre-match processes will become. The earlier that you're able to arrive at the ground the better.

To allow sufficient time to prepare, I suggest that referees aim to get their pre-match routine underway at least 45 minutes prior to the scheduled kick off time for their match. You will be surprised at how quickly that 45 minutes or so disappears! Especially when you consider that 10-15 minutes of it is dedicated to your pre-match warm up and stretch (see paragraph 7 below).

If a referee coach has been appointed to work with you on match day, you'll spend another 10 or so minutes meeting your coach and being fitted with communications gear. Ideally, it's best to talk with your referee coach before you set off to do your team briefings and boot inspections.

Firstly, without wanting to sound like your mother, ensuring that you look like a referee is an important first step. As you step out, tuck in your jersey, pull up your socks and wear your referee uniform or tracksuit with pride.

In addition, every referee should wear or carry with them a reliable watch (ideally one with a built in stopwatch or timer facility - and preferably ***not*** the one on your mobile phone), a 20 cent coin, a metal Acme Thunderer whistle (preferably ***not*** of the "fingergrip" variety), a set of red & yellow cards and some water or re-hydration fluid to take on while warming up and again during the half time break. Some referees also carry a scorecard and a pen or pencil while refereeing.

Always set out with the intention of being positive, open minded, quietly confident and friendly in your dealings with team officials, players and the other match officials you will be working with on match day. Even after many years of refereeing, while I'm driving to the ground I still remind myself of the need to exhibit these four qualities irrespective of who or what I might encounter on the day. I personally find this form of positive re-enforcement to be helpful.

Your pre-match process begins as soon as you arrive at the ground.

1. Check the field setup and locate the Ground Marshall

(a) If the match is being played in a NSW Suburban Rugby Union (NSWSRU) or Sydney Junior Rugby Union (SJRU) competition, identify and introduce yourself to the home team's Ground Marshall when you arrive at the ground. If the match is a schools fixture, identify and introduce yourself to the teacher in charge. Confirm that the starting time for your match is as per your refereeing appointment (e.g. *"I'm here for the 11.00 game. Are today's matches running on time?"*).

(b) Player safety is paramount. At some time during your preparation walk around and, if possible, across the ground to satisfy yourself that the field markings are OK; the goal post pads are in place; no sprinkler heads are exposed; the playing enclosure has been roped off; the concrete cricket wicket is covered; and so on.

(c) If you have any concerns about the ground or its setup and the game in question is a SJRU or NSWSRU competition match, draw the matter to the attention of the home team's Ground Marshall asap. If the game is a schools match, raise any concerns with the teacher in charge asap. Play should not start until you are satisfied that player safety and your legal duty of care will not be compromised.

2. Carry out the boot & clothing inspection and team briefings

(a) Provided both teams are at the ground and available, I make a habit of starting my team talks and boot inspections with the **visiting team** and then moving on to the home team. I do this because I prefer this particular part of my pre-match process to finish with the home team captain accompanying me to where the visiting team is warming-up so that we can carry out the coin toss. The actual procedures that I follow — and the order in which I carry them out — are described in the paragraphs below. If one of the teams is late in arriving at the ground (visiting teams sometimes cut things fine), then start with their opponents.

(b) Ensure that you have your red & yellow cards and a 20 cent coin with you when you set off to conduct the pre-match boot and clothing inspections and team briefings. You'll obviously need the coin for the toss (my procedure for this is covered under heading 5 below). The cards sometimes come in handy should it become necessary to make a strong point during a team briefing. That is, in some prickly situations it can be psychologically useful for the players to know and see that the referee is carrying a set of cards in his or her shorts pocket and that one of those cards is red in colour!

3. Approach the visiting team and introduce yourself to their coach and manager

(a) Ask the visiting team coach whether his team will be playing with the **maximum** complement of players on the field (i.e. that he has a full team). For the Under 10 and Under 11 age groups the maximum number of players is 12. For all other matches the maximum number of players is 15.

If the coach says that his team will be playing with a reduced number of players, ask whether the team is short of players in the forwards or the backs and which position(s) the team intends to leave unfilled. The various competition rules define the **minimum** number of players each team is required to field and the competition penalties that apply should a team fail to comply.

IMPORTANT: It is essential that information provided to you by the visiting team or that you observe during your inspection is kept to yourself when you subsequently speak to the home team's officials (see heading 4 below). Say nothing to the home team about visiting team player numbers until you confirm the actual player number situation for the home team.

(b) Ask the visiting team coach whether his players understand and have practiced the Mayday Scrum Safety Procedure. A simple yes or no response is all you require. If they haven't, advise the coach that the match cannot begin until his players have been taught the Mayday protocol. Although it would be rare these days to find a team who are unfamiliar with the Mayday process, make sure that you ask.

(c) Ask the visiting team coach or manager if it would be OK to now carry out the boot inspection and team talk. Have the visiting team coach or manager assemble his players. When all of the visiting team players are available (sometimes the forwards and backs warm up in separate areas and need to be brought together), carry out the boot and clothing inspection and team briefing.

(d) Clothing worn by players must comply with the requirements of Law 4 and World Rugby Regulation 12. The boot inspection can be carried out in a couple of different ways. You can either have the players drop to their knees in a single line while facing in the same direction to expose the underside of their boots for you to check as you walk behind them (a technique best suited to younger players, say, U.14s and below). Or you can wander among the players while they are on the ground stretching and check the underside of their boots. During the boot inspection keep an eye out in particular for older or poorly maintained boots that may have developed a sharp edge along the sole and for boots with missing screw-in studs.

Over the years, as I have wandered around the various fields, I pick up and collect any stray boot studs that I find laying loose on the ground. If during a boot inspection I come across a player who has a stud or two missing, I offer him a replacement from my ever expanding collection of screw-in studs.

(e) Clothing items such as shoulder pads, chest pads and headgear should bear the World Rugby Approval Mark. Shin guards and fingerless mitts must conform with World Rugby Regulation 12. While carrying out your inspection, check to ensure that none of the banned items described in Law 4.5 are being worn by any player.

(f) Most playing equipment on the market these days complies with the Laws and World Rugby Regulations, so don't get overly officious or technical when doing your clothing check. If you come across an item which, in your view, is unsafe or clearly in contravention of the Laws, explain your reason to the player and ask him or her to rectify it or remove it prior to kick-off.

(g) **IMPORTANT:** **Ensure that your team talk is appropriate to the age and skill level of the players and to the time in the season that the match is taking place.** The briefing for a team of 10 year olds will almost certainly contain different content to that provided to a team of 16 year old players and will be different again for a team of adult players. Similarly, the talk to a team of junior representative players will almost certainly be different to that provided to a club team in that same age group prior to a normal club competition match.

If you think it will jog your memory or help with your presentation, jot down the key points of your presentation on a small piece of paper and carry it with you. I do and it helps me!

(h) **IMPORTANT:** **Keep your team talk as brief and concise as possible.** Like referees, players and team coaches also have lots to do in the pre-match period. Don't allow a player to interrupt the flow of your team talk by asking questions. The odds are that during your presentation you'll cover his query anyway. Remain confident and friendly but stay on-message and indicate that you'll take questions later. When you've finished your spiel, ask the players whether they have any questions.

You'll notice that players and coaches tend to ask fewer questions as the season progresses. They've heard it all before from a dozen other referees!

(i) Identify and introduce yourself to the team captain and make sure that you remember his first name. The reason for doing this becomes apparent in heading 5 (b) below. Explain to him your expectation that as team captain he is responsible for maintaining control and discipline among his players. Indicate that you don't mind answering questions during the match but that they must come via the team captain and only during a stoppage in play when the ball is dead. If necessary, explain what "dead" means (re-read the definition in the front of your law book if you need a refresher).

(j) Ask the captain to assemble his team's scrum halves and Tight Five forwards for a **brief** chat. Things you ***might*** consider mentioning to these players ***could*** include:-

Tight Five

- Confirm that the team has at least five trained front rowers (the 3 starting players plus 2 reserves);
- Confirm that the Tight Five know the Mayday Protocol (again a simple yes or no response from the players is all that is required);

- Discuss how the scrum engagement sequence will be applied in practice (explain that as referee you will be controlling the three separate steps of the scrum engagement process);
- Discuss the scrum binding requirements for front row and loose forwards;
- Discuss the position of the non-throwing hooker at the lineout (2m from the 5 metre line and 2m from the line of touch);
- Identify the player who will be standing at the front of the lineout and ask him to take responsibility for setting and maintaining a full one metre gap between his team and their opponents at every lineout.

Scrum Halves

- Rugby scrums are contests for possession and every scrum feed must be credible;
- If acting as the receiver at a lineout, must be 2m back from the lineout participants;
- Quick tap kicks must be taken on or behind the mark (*"For penalties and free kicks at scrums, rucks and mauls the mark is not likely to be where I'm standing, so make sure you run to or behind the mark - and not to me - if taking a quick tap!"*).

(k) Thank the team captain and the players for their time. Wish them luck for the match. Indicate to the visiting team captain that you'll be back in a few minutes with the home team captain to conduct the coin toss.

4. Approach the home team and introduce yourself to their coach and manager

IMPORTANT: As mentioned in the note to heading 3 (a) above, say nothing to the home team about the visiting team's player numbers until you determine and clarify the playing numbers situation for the home team. Certainly don't mention any visiting team tactics-related information you may have noted or observed when you spoke with them.

(a) Ask the home team coach whether his team will be playing with the **maximum** complement of players on the field (i.e. that he has a full team). For the Under 10 and Under 11 age groups the maximum number of players is 12. For all other matches the maximum number of players is 15.

If the home team coach says his team will be playing with a reduced number of players, ask whether the team is short of players in the forwards or the backs and which position(s) the team intends to leave unfilled. The various competition rules define the **minimum** number of players each team is required to field and the competition penalties that apply should a team fail to comply.

(b) Having now determined the situation with player numbers for the home team, at this point you might inform the home team about the player numbers for the visiting team should that be an issue. Suggest to the home team coach or manager that if they haven't already done so, they might discuss with the visiting team the sharing of players in order to match or maximise player numbers, agree on the number of players in each team's scrum, decide whether scrums are to be uncontested, etc.

(c) Ask the home team coach whether his players understand and have practiced the Mayday Scrum Safety Procedure. Here again, a yes or no response is all that is needed. If they haven't, advise the coach that the match cannot begin until his players understand the Mayday protocol. Although it would be rare these days to find a team who are unfamiliar with Mayday, make sure that you ask the question of both teams.

(d) Ask the home team coach or manager if it would be OK to now carry out the boot inspection and team talk. Have the home team coach or manager assemble his players. When all of the home team players are available (sometimes the forwards and backs warm up separately and may need to be brought together), carry out the boot and clothing inspection and team briefing.

(e) When carrying out the boot and clothing inspection and briefing with the home team make sure that you cover the matters described under heading 3 (d), (e), (f), (g), (h), (i) and (j) above **precisely as when you spoke with the visiting team.** It is important that both teams receive the same key messages during your briefing.

(f) Thank the home team captain and players for their time. Wish them luck for the match.

(g) Ask the home team captain to now accompany you to where the visiting team is warming up so that you can carry out the coin toss. Use this walk to break the ice and establish rapport with the home team captain (*"How's the team been going this year?"*, *"How did you go last time you played these guys?"*, etc). This allows you to get a feel for the relationship between the teams and an idea as to how today's match is likely to be played. From a practical refereeing perspective, being forewarned allows you to enter the game forearmed!

5. Organise the coin toss

(a) To maximise the time available for play, try whenever possible to get the coin toss out of the way ***before*** the teams enter the field to start their match. My preference is to organise the toss immediately after carrying out the team talks and boot inspections (which, as mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 4 above, I begin first with the visiting team before moving on to the home team).

(b) Following on from heading 4 (g) above, when you and the home team captain are about 20 metres from where the visiting team is warming up, ask the home team captain to wait at that spot while you approach the visiting team captain and invite him to join you for the coin toss. It will be easy to get the visiting captain's attention because if you followed my process (see heading 3 (k) above), you will have already spoken to him and his team and he's expecting you. Introduce the captains to each other by their first names. With some inexperienced captains and younger players you may need to encourage them to shake hands.

(c) Note that while Law 6.3 requires the referee to "organise the toss", that same law specifies that it is a player who actually tosses the coin (***not*** the referee) with the other player making the call. In the process that I follow, the home team captain tosses the coin and the visiting team captain makes the call. Here's how I go about it.

(d) Hand the 20 cent coin you've been carrying for this purpose to the home team captain and invite him to carry out the toss. To avoid any possibility of skulduggery, ask him to let the coin fall to the ground rather than catching it and placing it on the back of his wrist. Invite the visiting team captain to make a call of heads or tails while the coin is in the air. Check the coin when it lands and inform the captains whether heads or tails is showing. As we know, most referees can't afford to lose 20 cents so remember to return the coin to your pocket after the toss.

(e) The Law allows the winner of the toss the option of choosing one thing only from a list of two possibilities: the captain who wins the toss may choose to kick off or he may choose the direction in which his team will run.

Quite often the winner of the toss will say *"We'll receive!"*. If he does, advise him that if he wants to receive possession then he will need to choose the direction in which his team will run. By default, his opponents will then kick off towards his team.

If the captain winning the toss says *"We'll kick!"*, ask the opposing captain to nominate the direction in which he would like his receiving team to run.

Sometimes the winning captain will say *"We'll kick in that direction!"*. If he does, remind him that he has the option of either kicking off or deciding which way his team will run in the first half, but not both!

(f) Confirm the team kicking off and the first half direction of each team by saying something like *"Blue to kick towards the trees"* (or the houses or the road or whatever obvious landmark is appropriate). This helps to lock this information in your memory so you can ensure that at the start of the match, the teams are defending the correct ends and that the right team kicks off. Some referees note this kick-off information on the scorecard that they carry with them.

(g) Having now organised and carried out the coin toss, before releasing the team captains take the opportunity to raise with them in each other's presence the need for the three of you to work together to ensure that the game is played in the right spirit and that it is an enjoyable experience for everyone. Remind them of their responsibility for maintaining discipline among their players. Again indicate your willingness to answer questions during the match but make it clear that they must come only through the captains and only during a break in play when the ball is dead.

(h) Inform the captains how much longer it is to kick off and ask them to have their teams standing by and ready to run on to the field prior to the scheduled kick off time. Shake hands with each captain and encourage them to again shake hands. Release them to return to their teams and ask them to pass on to their players and team coach the information the three of you have just been discussing.

6. Locate and brief your Assistant Referees and Touch Judges

(a) We know from experience that matches are easier to control and result in a better experience for everyone involved when trained and accredited assistant referees or touch judges are present. Remember that in terms of Law 6, assistant referees and touch judges are different beasts and have different responsibilities. These turn on the reporting of foul play. Ensure that you understand what this means in practice.

(b) Prior to kick off, ask each team coach or manager to identify and introduce you to their team's nominated AR or TJ for this match. As a result of the training they receive, many Assistant Referees now pro-actively seek out and introduce themselves to the match referee prior to kick off. To ensure that everyone is on the same page, I like to talk with the ARs or TJs for both teams at the same time. If that's not possible, then make time to talk with each of them separately. Sadly, you'll find that most schools matches are conducted without assistant referees or touch judges.

(c) The level 1 AR course stresses the importance of match officials acting as a "team of three", so make your fellow team members welcome and at ease. Thank each AR and TJ for agreeing to help and politely enquire as to whether he or she holds current accreditation. If a person tells you that they are accredited, take them at their word. You don't need to sight their MyRugby Card and nobody needs to sight yours.

(d) Remind the ARs that their primary role is to run touch, advise on kicks at goal and to mark the offside line at scrums and lineouts. I inform them that decisions on whether the ball has been thrown in straight at lineouts and whether players are offside will be made by me alone. I ask them to tell me quietly during a break in play if they are seeing things that they think I need to know about as match referee (e.g. players creeping over the offside line, improper blind-side scrum binds, a player who might benefit from receiving a quiet word on the run from the referee, etc).

(e) Ensure that your ARs understand the important role they have in connection with the reporting of foul play. I ask them to flag all foul play incidents they witness even though they think I may have seen it. I openly admit that referees are human and sometimes we miss seeing things! I also remind them that when invited on to the field to make a foul play report they will need to provide the team and jersey number of the offending player together with a brief description of what happened before, during and after the incident. Remember, that although a referee can listen to a foul play report from any AR or TJ, before deciding on the action you might need to take it is suggested that you give a little more thought to a foul play report from an unaccredited person.

(f) I also mention to the ARs that while I'm happy for them to use a nearby solid or broken line to mark the line of touch (i.e. the centre line for the lineout), my preference is that the 22 metre line not be used for that purpose if the ball actually crossed the touch line ***in front*** of the 22 metre line. In these cases I ask that the place they mark for the lineout be a clear half metre in front of the 22 metre line. This enables the 22 metre line to be used as a guide for the defending team to position themselves along at that lineout (just not as the centre line).

It also makes it easier for the players, the referee and the ARs to tell whether possession won at a lineout outside the 22m area is subsequently carried back into their 22m area by the defending team.

(g) Remind the ARs of the need to keep their eye on the ball when it goes into touch. In matches where the players are U.13 and older, remind your ARs of the need to be especially vigilant when a quick throw-in is a possibility. In particular, that the ball that went into touch is used and that the only persons to have touched the ball are the player who carried it into touch and the player intending to take the quick throw.

IMPORTANT: Remember that in matches for the U.10, U.11 and U.12 age groups, quick throw-ins and "short lineouts" are **NOT** permitted (for that matter, neither are dropped goals and penalty goals).

(h) Persons who have attended an Assistant Referee course and gained formal accreditation will be aware of the concept of "leading and trailing" that is now being followed by ARs. They should also be aware of the way in which ARs are expected to mark the 5 metre offside line for both teams at scrums and the 10 metre offside line for the non-throwing team at lineouts. If they don't appear to know what to do in these situations, time permitting, you might consider providing them with a quick refresher.

7. Warm Up and Stretch (with a word of warning about the latter)

(a) *Warming-Up:* Experts agree that a gradual warm-up for 10 minutes or so before an exercise session can reduce the risk of injury and muscle soreness. A warm-up involves doing a few repetitions of some of the movements you're likely to carry out while refereeing — but in a controlled way and at a lower intensity than you're likely to experience during a match. Irrespective of your age or fitness level, it is strongly recommended that every referee takes the opportunity to warm-up prior to a match.

(b) Because refereeing involves mainly the muscles used while running, your 10 minute or so warm-up routine might include exercises such as a series of short jogs starting slowly and increasing to about 50% capacity (include some changes in direction, stepping off both the right foot and the left); side skips to both the left and the right; jogging slowly forwards and slowly backwards; high knee raises to bent arm level while slowly jogging forward; raising heels to buttocks height while slowly jogging forward; side leg crossovers while skipping left and right; standing leg swings to the front and back and to the side; etc.

(c) *Stretching:* Studies have shown that muscle stretching before exercise makes little or no difference to the risk of injury or how sore your muscles will feel the next day. However, if you're happy to incorporate some stretching into your pre-match warm-up routine, then by all means do so.

(d) A word of caution. Remember, though, that stretching a muscle while it is cold can increase the risk of injury from pulls and tears. Experts say that to avoid injury, the best time to stretch a muscle is when it is already warm and pliable as a result of increased temperature and blood flow. That being so, those experts suggest that you refrain from stretching until later in your warm-up session when your muscles are no longer cold.

8. Start and finish the match on time

(a) Matches should start as close to their scheduled kick off time as possible. To ensure that the day's playing and refereeing schedule is maintained, time lost during a match — whether due to its late start or for any other reason — comes out of that match alone.

(b) **IMPORTANT:** **Irrespective of when a match actually starts, it must end as close to its scheduled finishing time as possible.** Ideally, that will be a minimum of three minutes prior to the start of the next scheduled match on that field. If a match has been scheduled to start immediately upon completion of the game you're refereeing, then it is essential that next match starts at its scheduled time.

(c) If the scheduled finishing time for a match is fast approaching and the final result of the game is not in doubt (i.e. one team clearly has the match won), I look to find an infringement and play a short advantage so that I can blow full time and get the players off the field to allow the next match to kick-off on time.

9. Get the teams onto the field and the match underway

(a) Having carried out the coin toss prior to the teams entering the field of play (see heading 5 above), blow your whistle and call the teams to the centre of the field to shake hands prior to the kick off. The pre-match handshake by the players is an important and worthwhile Rugby tradition.

(b) In the majority of lower grade senior fixtures and almost all junior matches, the home team usually runs on to the field first and lines up along the centre of the half way line. As they do, ask the home team captain to position his team so that his players are then facing the direction in which they will be running in the first half.

After the visiting team runs on and the teams line up, encourage the players to shake hands with the opponent standing immediately opposite them and with the players standing either side of that opponent (i.e. they shake hands with three opponents only pre-match — not the whole opposition team!). Once the handshake is out of the way, advise the players *"You're running the way you're now facing. Blue to kick!"*

(c) Check that each team's assistant referee or touch judge is in place. Don't start a SJRU or NSWSRU competition match without them.

(d) Prior to the kick-off, quietly ask the player kicking to nominate the direction in which he intends to kick the ball (*"Which way are you kicking?"*). Explain to him that this is so you don't accidentally get in the way of him or his team mates. At the same time, ask the kicker to take responsibility for ensuring that his team mates remain behind him as he moves to begin his kick.

The real reason for asking, of course, is so that you can position yourself to avoid being struck by the ball. I know from first-hand experience that being hit by the ball at the kick-off is embarrassing and it hurts!

(e) At both the first half and second half kick-offs, ask the kicker to wait while you check with firstly the receiving team captain (*"Red captain, is your team ready?"*) and then the kicking team captain (*"Are you ready, Blue?"*) to confirm that their teams are ready to play. This sort of checking is not required for restart kicks following a score.

(f) At kick-offs and restart kicks, all players of the kicking team are required to be behind the ball when it is kicked. If players are in front of the kicker (or likely to be in front), quietly remind the kicker to check that his players are correctly positioned (*"Make sure they stay behind you!"*).

You'll find that the kicker will immediately stop and wave his team mates back. In addition to ensuring that a player takes responsibility for ensuring that other players remain onside, this management technique saves you from having to raise your voice and wave your arms about at every kick-off and restart kick.

(g) The referee's duties within the playing enclosure are outlined in Law 6.5. One such duty is that the referee keeps the time. If an official timekeeper has been appointed for the game (e.g. matches in the SJRU and NSWSRU competitions), raise your arm and wait for the timekeeper to raise an arm to acknowledge that he or she is also ready. If the timekeeper fails to quickly acknowledge your signal, don't wait for them but get the match underway without further delay.

(h) **IMPORTANT:** **Before blowing your whistle to begin the game (and again at the start of the second half), start your stopwatch or timer and check to confirm that it has begun counting time.** Again, I know from personal experience how frustrating and embarrassing it is to look at your wrist during a match to check how much longer it is to the break or to fulltime, only to find that you forgot to start your watch at the kick-off!

(i) Having confirmed that your watch is working and counting time, now blow your whistle loudly to begin the match. Head down field quickly to ensure that you're level with — or as close as possible to — where the kick-off will land. This will put you in good position to manage the first contest for possession.

Your pre-match routine is complete and the match is underway. Enjoy the experience confident in the knowledge that you have prepared effectively.

10. You've blown fulltime. What happens now?

(a) As you're leaving the field at the end of the match, make sure that you seek out each team captain. Shake his hand, thank him for his cooperation and try to find something positive to say to him about his team's performance. Sometimes that may not be easy! Do the same with each team's coach if the opportunity presents.

(b) After the game, make sure that you shake hands with and thank both Assistant Referees for their help. If necessary or appropriate, remind them that they may need to sign the Result Sheets.

(c) If a player has been sent off (i.e. red carded) as a result of a foul play report from an Assistant Referee, that AR will be required to prepare and lodge a Send-Off Report. In these cases make sure that you confirm with the AR precisely what he or she is going to be saying in their report. This is because, being the person who actually ordered the player from the field on the basis of what the AR said to you, you, too, will need to prepare and lodge a Send-Off Report. It is of the utmost importance that there be nothing contradictory in the Send-Off Reports subsequently lodged by the match referee and the assistant referee. (You'll find instructions on how to complete a Send-Off Report on the **Resource Library Index** page of our website.)

(c) If the game was a SJRU or NSWSRU competition match, make sure that you check and sign both Result Sheets before leaving the venue. I've learned over the years to wait until both team managers and both ARs have signed the forms before adding my signature. If there are any concerns about the final score, let the team officials sort it out and agree on it before you sign the Result Sheets. Generally, there are no result sheets for schools matches and nothing requiring a referee's post-match signature.

(d) Although team officials are usually pretty good at picking up and recording red and yellow card details for their opponents, I've noticed that they sometimes omit to record these details for players from their own team. That being so, make sure that details of any send-offs (red cards) or temporary suspensions (yellow cards) have been accurately recorded on both Result Sheets. That is, against the correct player and for the actual foul play offence for which the player was sent off.

Before leaving the venue, make sure that you make a note of the first name and surname, team name and jersey number of any red-carded players because you'll need to include those details in your Send-Off Report. In the event that the red-carded player was not wearing a numbered jersey (e.g. most lower grade schools matches), make a note of the position he or she was playing at the time of the send-off.

11. Dealing with not so happy endings, harassment and abuse

(a) For a variety of reasons and despite our best efforts, not all matches produce that fairytale ending where everyone lives happily ever after. Regrettably, some games can and do turn to custard! That being so there will be the odd occasion where it is advisable that match officials take a watchful and cautious approach at the end of a match.

(b) Fortunately, unpleasant situations involving match officials are rare in Rugby. However, should you ever experience one or witness one, please do not keep it to yourself. It is important that details of all such incidents — as distasteful or unsavoury as they may be — are quickly drawn to attention. Quick reporting allows support to be provided to the match officials involved (should such action be necessary) and helps to ensure that other officials — in particular, younger or less experienced referees and assistant referees — aren't subjected to similar treatment in subsequent weeks.

(c) **IMPORTANT: Harassment has never been acceptable in Rugby and should never be tolerated. Irrespective of its nature or when or where it occurs, every instance of Rugby-related harassment or abuse must be reported as soon as possible.**

(d) The NSWRU's excellent "Respect Rugby" program provides a simple and effective web-based method for reporting Rugby-related abuse of every kind. Incidents reported online in this way reach the inbox of very senior people almost immediately. This enables the offenders and their clubs or schools to be quickly identified and dealt with.

You can read more about the "Respect Rugby" program and the procedures that support it in documents available via the **Links** and **Resource Library Index** pages of our website.

Bob Watson
Sydney West Rugby Referees' Association

association website: www.swrra.sportzvault.com

Background to this document

Parts of this document started life a few years ago as a much smaller discussion paper for the SWRRA Referee Coach Group. At that time the RCG was considering the feasibility of developing a standardised pre-match team briefing procedure that all Sydney West members might use.

It quickly became clear that each referee coach had his or her own way of carrying out the team briefing. What's more, although there were definite similarities, each of those coaches was unwavering in their view that the briefing process he or she followed was correct.

Following discussion we agreed that each of those individual approaches was indeed correct — but for that individual only! The concept of a standardised pre-match team briefing remained as indefinable and elusive as ever.

At this point I decided to expand my discussion paper into the more detailed "here's what I do pre-match and why" type of document you see here. That is, I set out to record the mechanics of my team briefing process in the context of the many other things I do when preparing for a match. The idea being that those reading my paper could take from it and adopt those parts that they liked or they could modify or reject the parts that they don't quite agree with. The choice is theirs to make!

As mentioned at the start of this paper, the important thing in my view is that every referee actually has a process that he or she follows. The key is to settle on a routine that you find to be efficient and effective and let it develop as you and the game also develop and change over time.

Remember, the observations and suggestions described above are all parts of a routine that I follow pre and post-match. Taken together, they provide a framework and formula that I know works for me and that I'm happy with. I encourage all referees to give thought to including some or all of them in their own pre-match routine.

This paper has already been revised a number of times in response to changes in law, game management emphasis and local operating arrangements. Given the changes I've seen in more than 35 years of refereeing, I have no doubt that I'll be updating it again at some time in the future.

Should you wish to discuss anything above, please feel free to contact me on 9876 1286 or by email via the Sydney West RRA website.

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