



The Future of Rugby Refereeing: PART TWO

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Principles of Refereeing: Strategic

In 1985, I was nineteen when I refereed my first match. It was a men's division five game in Durban, South Africa. There were ZERO spectators and the penalty count was ZERO. I have yet to replicate that dubious "success". Today, I am still learning about the intricacies of this amazing game called rugby.

In **PART ONE**, we shared that a combined **TACTICAL** and **STRATEGIC** refereeing approach can reach the goal to provide teams a level playing field.

This second section can be a bit more challenging. We naturally want to be in control, and to be right. Being in control is **NOT** the same as controlling the game. Your performance is built on relationships with the game and players. I am sure you believe rugby is the greatest game, so it is worth noting that you get to be part of something you love. It's an honor to be out there and that attitude can help you focus on the challenge and not the pressure or the concern of making mistakes. It maximizes your ability to succeed, reduces the need to be in control and allows you to integrate **STRATEGIC** elements.

So let's look at its three areas:

1. Empathy & MATERIALITY

2. Refereeing in CONTEXT

3. Attaining BALANCE

1. Awareness of another person's condition from their perspective is **Empathy**. It promotes pro-social behavior. Captains and players are your audiences. You shape your audience by understanding their viewpoint and relating to them with:

1. Your voice in tone, pitch and pace;
2. The structure of your sentences; and
3. Your body language, gestures and eye contact.

You're building trust and respect all the time. Every word, sentence and its delivery are important for an effective message to get the needed result. Players don't like an arrogant or sarcastic referee. It's condescending and makes you seem insecure.

It comes down to influencing the game and player behavior without it being about you.

MATERIALITY is making decisions applicable to the game. You have to decide what is important or what is too small to be of consequence. If a Law is infringed and it has an effect it needs to be addressed, if not, manage it, but don't ignore it. Talk to the players to avoid further transgressions.

On a good day, the top folks in refereeing can only agree on about 70% of a referee's performance. So when you're expected to only make clear and obvious calls, it's not that simple. We want to make it easier and here's how. Go back and check out Establishing BEHAVIOR from PART ONE.

When you set clearer standards, it creates a bigger separation between what is material and what is not.

2. Game understanding promotes **Contextual REFEREEING**. It is anticipating what will happen next and breaking a pattern of reaction. Knowing which team has the upper hand or momentum, and what the opposition may do to counteract. This could apply to:

1. A single moment, a breakaway perhaps;
2. A phase or phases;
3. Set pieces; or
4. The game over a period, short or long. One team could be dominating possession and attack, then the momentum shifts the other way.

Knowing what a player or a team's probable or possible response may be is dependent on many factors, or a combination of factors:

1. Who is dominant in a situation, i.e. an isolated player;
2. Field position;
3. The score and/or the time remaining;
4. Strengths and weaknesses of an individual player or a team at set pieces;
5. Reduced number of players due to temporary suspension or a player sent off.

Knowing the pressure teams are under or the pressure they can enforce helps you to be better prepared to make relevant decisions.

3. Refereeing evenly, enables you to **Attain BALANCE**. Treating both sides the same way. In most every game, there are opportunities to set standards for both teams. This could overcome the appearance of bias, and allows you to effectively raise the standards for the players and the game.

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It generates an environment where you are controlling the game and players can get on with it, as the boundaries are more defined.

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Understanding it's not about you, setting clearer standards, making relevant decisions and creating more defined boundaries won't get you to a ZERO penalty kick game; instead, the outcome of the match will be determined by the players.

That will be your success!

NEXT: PART THREE – *New Laws or Better Application?*

REQUEST: I would like to invite you to share your opinions on the topic above for PART THREE. Please send me your thoughts via LinkedIn message or by email. Thank you!



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