REFEREERING
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SITUATION

“A GOOD GAME OF FOOTBALL HAS A GOOD REFEREE” - COMMENT FROM THE FLOOR, CANBERRA WOFP FORUM, 11 NOVEMBER 2014

The essential role played by referees and assistants was succinctly put by this contributor in Canberra. By extension, we can say “no referee means no Football match can be played”.

In 2014, there were 9,169 referees registered in Australia; 47% of these were 18 and under. Community Football referees play a pivotal role in Football over and above that of a laws enforcer; they are game facilitators and educators who are at the heart of the participant experience.

CHALLENGE

For Football to grow it needs more referees and more referees who are ready to stay in the game and improve their refereeing skills. Unfortunately, Football loses around 36% of our grassroots referees per year. One of the primary reasons for this high drop-out rate is the lack of respect referees receive from spectators, players and coaches.
TARGETS

The standard of refereeing will only improve if we can retain referees and educate them. Football needs to work towards achieving a retention rate of 90%, up from the current rate of 64%. This will both increase the total number of referees and, through a clear development pathway and coordinated approach to education, improve refereeing standards.

CULTURE

Referees must be shown RESPECT as qualified service providers who provide a high quality experience for participants. Nurturing this culture is the responsibility of the entire Football community.

ADMINISTRATORS

We must create a culture where every single referee in Australia feels comfortable to take charge of a match and socialise with the participants afterwards. The adversarial nature of many referee-coach and referee-player exchanges must stop.

It is the governing bodies’ responsibility to run RESPECT campaigns to educate players, coaches and clubs in the Laws of the Game and the pivotal role that referees play. It is also the role of A-League officials to set an example by showing a clear and consistent support for A-League referees.

REFEREES

Referees need to understand the role they play as game facilitators and not just law enforcers. Furthermore, they need to create an open dialogue with players and club representatives, explaining decisions and acknowledging that like players, they also make mistakes.

CLUBS

Football needs to change our culture and this starts and ends with the culture of our Football clubs. In the future it will not just be players who are punished for ill-discipline; coaches will have to take responsibility for their own actions and the actions of their players particularly where junior referees are involved. Consistent ill-discipline by players and coaches will result in people being mandated to undertake courses in the Laws of the Game and to officiate in junior matches. If a club consistently shows ill-discipline, sanctions will be placed on the club, for example, exclusion from competitions like the FFA Cup.
To improve retention, recruitment and the culture surrounding referees we need to ensure our referees are highly trained and educated. This will require renewed education programs, better amenities at matches and good training infrastructure for referees.
ADMINISTRATION

In some areas the administration of referees has traditionally not been fully integrated with Football’s administration. However, the role of referees is too important for this to continue. In the future, we will work towards aligning the administration of referees with the strategic direction of the rest of the game.

RECRUITMENT

Football needs to have a referee recruitment policy that attracts more people with “Football common sense”. This means targeting ex-players to become referees at the grassroots level. To attract ex-players we need to promote the benefits of being a referee; the respect of the Football community, a healthy environment in which to perform this challenging role and appropriate remuneration. In addition, we must provide a clear pathway to the very top of the game and the ultimate opportunity of a professional career in a Top Tier competition and international Football. Furthermore, we must ensure that there are suitably flexible arrangements for all referees that respond to the demands of everyday life.