



## Club Referee Guidance

This guidance is aimed at providing the club referee with more confidence and knowledge so that they are better placed to carry out the role of referee and thereby help create a safe environment for players of all abilities.

It should not be looked upon as a training programme but more as a guide to help you take the first steps on becoming a walking football referee. There is no qualification at the end of the guidance, but it may provide you with the impetus to seek out a route towards walking football referee accreditation.

I have produced this guidance as a result of my own experience as I have developed as a walking football referee. I am an FA qualified and registered level 6 County referee with Lincolnshire FA. Although I only turned to refereeing after a long-playing career, I refereed regular football at county level (and local Saturday and Sunday leagues) and acted as assistant referee in the United Counties Premier league and FA Cup extra preliminary rounds. In walking football, I have refereed in LinxWF , ERCFA and the NPL walking football leagues, Festivals and Tournaments around the country, hundreds of internal sessions and at the FA Peoples Cup Finals Day at FA St Georges Park both in 2018 and 2019.

We must start out by reminding ourselves about the ethos of walking football and the need for internal recreational sessions to be the bedrock of the game.

We play for improved fitness, improved mental well-being, friendship, in a game many of us thought we had left long behind. There are obviously differing levels of commitment as players become fitter and techniques are improved but this guidance just wants to concentrate on internal recreational sessions and helping put you in a better place so that we can all enjoy this wonderful game.



## Referee Skills

- Communication
- Control
- Confidence
- Consistency

These are the four areas the guidance will look at. If we can achieve some competency in these areas, then we will take big strides in improving the walking football experience for all involved.

### Communication



The most important tool we have to aid our communication is our whistle, so the message is firstly don't be afraid to use it. When the players hear a whistle blown, they invariably stop playing because they recognise the referee wishes to stop play. When we try to use just our voice then it can get lost amongst the voices of others and is therefore not a clear instruction to the players.

So how do we whistle, again the length and harshness of tone can be a great indicator of the instruction. For instance,

- the ball goes above the height restriction being used so a short soft whistle followed by the shout of "Overhead Height Green ball" is enough.
- A reckless challenge committed by a player should be indicated by a lot louder/stronger blast on the whistle. This indicates to players that a serious infringement has taken place, but more importantly that you as referee had spotted the serious infringement and are now acting upon it.

By thinking about the use of your whistle you can improve your game control as the players begin to understand the instructions you are providing. Vary your tone and length of blast to fit the circumstances.

Signals aid and abet your decision-making process. You can use clear hand signals to indicate the direction of a free kick. Hold your arm out at shoulder height pointing in the direction of play the kick has been awarded. Once you have clearly indicated which way the free kick has been awarded you can now point to where you want the kick to be taken from.

Other signals can be used to indicate the type of infringement you are awarding the free kick for (although there are currently no prescribed nationally recognised signals)

- Overhead height infringement; Raise a hand above your head and motion it backwards and forwards giving a clear indication for this offence.
- Running infringement; Indicate a running motion with your arms simulating what a sprinter would do or I have also seen used the basketball/netball indication for travelling offence which is when you roll your hands over each other in front of your body.
- Advantage/Play on; Arms outstretched and waving forwards. This signal should be supported by a good loud verbal command of either “Play On”, “Advantage” or “Keep Playing”

As your confidence grows and if it suits your personality you can utilise verbal instructions to assist in game control especially so in internal sessions. You can advise players about their speed, you can advise players not to challenge from behind, you can advise players not to challenge at barriers etc. All of this will over time improve players knowledge of law and more importantly improve player behaviour making the game safer for all. These verbal instructions should not be used to take the place of the whistle and hand signals.

### **Control**

- Your level of control may alter throughout each match you officiate in and the level of control required will in many ways be dictated by the players themselves.
- Players playing sportingly and within the laws will require less control than one where players are stretching the laws to their limits through a competitive nature.
- In such a case you may need to apply law to the letter in order to slow the game down until such time the players have got the message and match control has been restored.
- Violent conduct, Excessive foul play or excessive displays of dissent must always be acted upon in a positive manner in order to maintain match control.

Your level of match control will be dependent upon player behaviour. Your internal sessions will in the main be light-hearted and friendly with a lower level of competitiveness, although concentration is key to highlight any potential flashpoints. In this type of game then your control will be attained by general gentle application of law and by ‘game’ conversations with players. Perhaps a gentle warning about off the ball running or a reminder about careless challenges. These warnings can be aimed at individuals or at the players.

If internal sessions become more competitive then your control may need to differ and fluctuate during the game itself. You will always need to set the level early in the game, this may be the award of a free kick for an offence with a clear supporting signal or message indicating why the free kick has been awarded.

Whistle blown, *“Free kick for careless challenge, more care please”* Whistle blown *“Free kick for running off the ball, watch the pace please players”*

These sorts of comments convey the expected levels of player behaviour and most players will respond with appropriate levels of play. The comments should always be made in a manner that suits your own personality, never try to be something that you are not.

On occasions the match temperature will raise to such a level that in order to regain control you will need to enforce the laws of the game rigidly with no allowances. This will allow you to slow the match down, not just by awarding free kick but also by controlling the pace of restarts, kicks taken from the right place, ensuring players are the full 3 m back etc. This should be done for a short period of time until the players level of behaviour returns to an acceptable level. Hopefully this will not occur very often during internal recreational sessions.

As spoken about previously your whistle tone will also communicate a message.

### **Confidence**

- Knowledge
- Appearance
- Manner

How confident are you that you know the laws you are playing too?

The players will know them, or at least try to make out they do!

So, if your group play to FA Walking Football Laws then get a copy of them from the FA Website and have a read. The amount that you need to study will depend in some way on your background but please don't fall into the trap that many do and think that because they have been involved in playing and watching football all their lives they know the laws of the game, you may surprise yourself. This guidance will not go into detail on all law but will offer guidance later with regards to running and infringements. It is for you as an individual to develop the necessary knowledge of law to officiate proficiently at your internal sessions.

Our appearance although important in competition etc is less so at internal sessions but little things can still help. Be prepared to wear a bib that clearly indicates that you are the referee, have a suitable time keeping device watch or stopwatch are better than carrying a mobile telephone around. I personally have found a cheap stopwatch from ARGOS (other reputable retail outlets are available) to be great. Worn with a wrist lanyard it enables me to see the time quickly and clearly. And of course, a whistle that works well.

Our manner though is important at any level. We should apply ourselves fully to the role if we expect ourselves to do it well. If we appear disinterested, then it will transfer that feeling to the players and they will undoubtedly respond by not respecting the decisions you make.

A good rule of thumb is to *'referee as you would like to be refereed'*

You will find as well that if you fully apply yourself to the role of referee then your performance will improve, you will be tuned into the game and therefore being more effective in your decision making. The players will see that you are committed to the game and therefore more likely to abide by your decision making because you will be communicating with them, you will be more confident in your manner and your control will improve.

## Consistency



- This will be achieved in a match by a fair approach to all situations, treat each situation the same and apply the laws consistently
- Treat each transgression of law fairly to all players

We would love to achieve consistency across every session being run throughout the UK but let's be realistic for now and just look to achieve consistency across our own sessions. If we can achieve that week in week out through several different referees, then that national standardisation will be just a little step nearer.

But more importantly your players will know week on week what is acceptable behaviours of play in your local recreational sessions. So, when new players arrive standards are already well set.

## Walking



- Too fast?
- If it looks like running, then it is?
- Law 17
- Walking is defined as 'always having at least one foot in contact with the ground'.

The 'need for speed', is it wrong that walking football involves pace?

There will be a difference in player ability, a quickness of mind will allow a player to anticipate a pass and move quickly into position, this may only be over perhaps one stride, but the quickness of mind presents itself in some cases as an illusion of running. FA Law 17 is quite clear in that it states that

walking is defined as always having at least one foot in contact with the ground. We could look at all sorts of dictionary definitions and explore theories about leg straightening etc but as stated in FA Law 17 at least one foot in contact with the floor is what we are looking for. This is in conjunction with travelling around the field of play either in possession or not. It does not involve a situation whereby a player raises both feet from the floor to chest control the ball, or perhaps jump over a ball from a stationary position carrying out a 'dummy'. It is about player transition around the field of play.

It can be very difficult to identify if both feet have left the ground as a player moves but experience will let you identify the difference between a player who is fast walking and one who is jogging.

Running off the ball should only be punished when that player or team gains an advantage. However, the player committing the offence should be warned about their speed and if they continue should be made subject of a sin bin. (obviously in recreational sessions the use of sin bins is not mandatory but is a really good way of illustrating to all players acceptable levels of speed).

FA Law 17 requires a player who commits three running offences to be issued with a blue card and serve a two minutes timed suspension in the sin-bin.

Running is the most difficult infringement to identify consistently. FA Law and other versions of law provide definitions, but they are extremely difficult to apply consistently especially as players devise different 'walking' gaits to increase their speed around the playing area, but as mentioned earlier as you referee more matches you will be better able to identify the fast walkers and penalise the runners. Set the tone early in the game. Encourage them to play slowly by penalising offenders and continue to do so. If you let the game 'run' away from you from the outset you will never regain control.

**Your ability in this area as a club referee is vitally important to the national development of the game of walking football because if we control local recreational sessions more effectively then it will be easier for tournament referees and players as well.**

### Fouls

- Careless
- Reckless
- Excessive force

This along with running must be the biggest difference between walking football and regular football, but one that many players and referees fail to understand. We have all probably been involved in matches when an FA Qualified referee has officiated and allowed all sorts of physical challenges to go unpunished because they don't fully understand the ethos understand of walking football. As Club referees you can again influence the national development of the game by being proactive in this area and punish the 'cloggers' so that they are educated about acceptable levels of physicality. The ruthless defender or aggressive midfield tackler have no place to play in walking football.

The levels of offending are laid out below, you as club referees must use the careless category to stop the niggly fouls as in the examples highlighted below.

**“Careless”** means that the player has shown a lack of attention or consideration when making a challenge or that he acted without precaution.

- No further disciplinary sanction is needed if a foul is judged to be careless

**“Reckless”** means that the player has acted with complete disregard to the danger to, or consequences for, his opponent.

- A player who plays in a reckless manner must be cautioned (sin binned)

**“Using excessive force”** means that the player has far exceeded the necessary use of force and is in danger of injuring his opponent.

- A player who uses excessive force must be sent off

These are the definitions taken from the FIFA laws of the game and some would suggest they do not go far enough with regards to walking football. I would tend to disagree with that and to me if applied correctly then they are strong enough definitions.

#### **Careless;**



For example, a player challenges an opponent in an effort to gain possession and in doing so uses a degree of upper body strength. In football that would be no problem and no offence but apply the same situation to walking football and it could quite easily be stated that such a challenge is showing a lack of attention and acting without precaution and therefore a careless challenge that can be penalised with a free kick.

Another example is a striker backing into a defender in order to maintain possession using his ‘behind’ to make contact with the defender, again not a problem in football but in walking football when you consider the age groups and medical conditions of some of those involved then the award of a free kick could be awarded for a careless challenge. This situation obviously works both ways with a defender hassling too closely a forward in possession from behind.

These types of challenges are the niggly ones which need to be eradicated from walking football to increase the enjoyment for all participants.

## Reckless and Excessive Force;

Are clear in their definitions from FIFA but as club referees you should clamp down hard on any transgressions even in recreational sessions



## Misconduct

- Dissent
- Stepped approach
- Sanctions



This is an area that you would imagine needs little attention when the game is being played by people of our age, however this re introduction into a game many of us left behind lots of years ago has sometimes just replicated behaviours of years gone by.

You as referees must set out the standards that are acceptable and be brave enough to deal with misconduct effectively, efficiently and consistently.

Extremes of behaviour are easily identified, and the sanctions are clear FA Law 11 sets out what the sanctions are for fouls and misconduct. Use the sanctions consistently,

- S1 is guilty of serious foul play
- S2 is guilty of violent conduct
- S3 spits at an opponent or any other person



- S4 denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (this does not apply to a goalkeeper within their own penalty area)
- S5 denies an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offence punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick
- S6 uses offensive, insulting or abusive language
- S7 receives a second blue/yellow card in the same match

### These are all **red card** offences

In the game of walking football

- is it acceptable for a player to be constantly appealing?
- Is it acceptable for a player to be constantly questioning the decision making of the match referee?
- Is there room for players to consistently transgress the laws of the game?

### Temporary Timed Suspensions (**Blue Card Sin Bin**)

A player is shown the blue card and temporarily excluded from play if he/she commits any of the following offences:

- C1 is guilty of unsporting behaviour
- C2 shows dissent by word or action
- C3 persistently infringes the Laws of the Game
- C4 delays the restart of play
- C5 fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner kick, kick-in, free kick or goal clearance.
- C6 enters or re-enters the playing area without the referee's permission or infringes the substitution procedure
- C7 deliberately leaves the playing area without the referee's permission outside of a substitution

You as the referee will decide upon when to issue these sanctions/temporary timed suspensions. Again, match temperature will influence when the use of the sanction is required. As a referee you should consider the stepped approach towards an individual.

A good and recognised method of dealing with such incidents is the 'stepped approach



Clearly you do not always have to follow this approach and on occasions it may be necessary to escalate straight to a sin bin sanction