



Whistle Talk

News from the British Columbia Rugby Referees' Society

Volume 1 ed 4

The 15's season has ended. Time to rest and heal... until the 7's tournaments start!!

I have had positive responses to these articles and hope to continue next year. Do you have topics that need to be discussed in the realm of refereeing in BC? Send them along (dpue1@shaw.ca) and I'll use them next season.

So it is time to wrap up some loose ends of topics for Whistle Talk.

Scrum Engagement

The process for getting forwards packed down in a scrum is clearly laid out in the Laws of the Game and was discussed in detail in an earlier Whistle Talk. Some points bear mentioning again.

For the safety of the players, anyone refereeing a game must follow these procedures. The players' body positions, the distance between the front rows and the binding between the players need to be correct. The Law calls for the referee to give 4 commands to trigger player's actions leading to the formation of the scrum...."crouch, touch, pause, engage". **The referee must use these (and only these) commands exactly.** The pace of the commands should not be too slow or too fast.. the players need to have time to respond to each.

Liability Insurance

It recently came to the attention of the BC Rugby Referees' Society that many people were refereeing school games without the protection of liability insurance. This left these officials vulnerable in a possible lawsuit.

With respect to boy's leagues, it had been thought that BC School Sports held a policy which covered rugby officials. It turned out that the policy only covered 3 events: BC High School Boys 7-a-side tournament, Zone qualifiers and the BC championships. Regular season games were not included in this coverage.

Happily the BCSS and its insurer have recently agreed to include the current, regular season games in this year's policy. It is hoped that this coverage will be included in future policies.

Rugby Canada registration; part of the registration fee pays for a group insurance policy held by Rugby Canada. The liability portion of that policy covers all certified referees for any sanctioned game in Canada. This would cover a referee for a BCRU adult game and school games.

As the girl's leagues are not part of BCSS and are under the BCRU, to have liability insurance, anyone refereeing their games MUST be registered with Rugby Canada.

NOTE: the BCRU and the schools require that referees of their sanctioned games have a current certification. This means that the official has taken an approved refereeing course within the last 4 years. For most referees this means an IRB Level 1 Officiating course.

Bottom line for anyone officiating a school rugby game in BC? Get certified and get registered with Rugby Canada. The time in the course and the \$95 fee are little to pay for protection if the unspeakable happens.

Decisions the Referees do not make.

A referee makes hundreds of decisions in every game: off-side?, knock-on? in play? dangerous play?

But there are some decisions that they do NOT make:

- Should scrums be uncontested?

Coaches are responsible for ensuring that a player is trained to be in the front row. If a player is not trained then the referee has no choice... scrums must be uncontested.

- What happens if a team doesn't have enough front row players?

If a sanction is going to be assessed on a club for not having enough front row players is decision by the Competition Committee of the BCRU. The same applies if a team doesn't have 15 players.

- Is a player eligible to play?

The clubs are responsible to see that their players are registered, eligible to play and recorded properly on the games sheet (ie import, carded, etc). There is not (yet ?) an ID card system in place like they have in soccer. The referee only checks the games sheet to see that the score is correct before signing it.

- What extra sanctions does a player get after a yellow or red card?

The referee decides if the player's actions require that they must spend 10 minutes in the sin-bin or leave the pitch. Whatever happens beyond that is decided by the Discipline Committee of the BCRU. The referee gives a written report of the facts of the incident but does not have any say in the DC's decisions.

- What happens if part of the field is frozen or under water?

If any part of the field is too dangerous to play on, the referee cannot let the game begin. The Competition Committee decides if a game is forfeit or a "game not played".

Allocating Referees

There were questions asked again this year about the choices made for the referees doing the BC Finals:

“Why was refereeing instead of?”

Lots of factors go through the minds of the people who select the referees for the finals (and really all games). Is the referee: experienced enough? Fit enough? Available? Earned the honour?

The basic principle is to have the right referees for the game. They should do the final in the league they have officiated during the season. As many referees as possible should be involved in the playoff. Referees should not do multiple games in the same league... ie. semis and then final.

“Why was Refereeing a game involving the club he used to play for?”

Almost every referee has played for a club early in their career. Do they still have an emotional link to their old club? Perhaps. Do they have to rise beyond that when they referee? Of course! Some referees decline to referee their old club because they find it too hard to be objective. Do the people who appoint referees take their past links into consideration? In terms of the referee’s ability to deal with the added distraction and pressure... yes.

Yellow Cards

In a recent article in BC Rugby News, John Langley brought up three topics involving refereeing that should form the basis of much dialogue.

First the clarification. He mentioned a player who “... *has drawn the wrath of the referee society though and appears to be a marked man.*”

The referee society does not contain wrath nor does it keep lists of those who are naughty or nice. The corner stone of refereeing is objectivity and fair application of the Laws of the Game. Referees are human (insert chuckle here) and subject to human frailties BUT they are trained to deal with the events as they happen. They are trained not to think about what happened in a game 2 weeks ago but only what is happening in front of them right now. If a player seems to be getting a lot of penalties, cards, etc. then the player needs to look to their actions because that is all the referee is looking at.

Second, “*We are told internationally that the Canadian game isn’t tough enough.*” This comment of John’s is definitely worthy of a 2 pint discussion. (I am sure that names such as Al Charron and Eddie Evans will come up !).

But he implies that BC referees are making the situation worse by penalizing “tough” players too much. Toughness within the Laws is one thing, outside the Laws is another thing. Foul play must never be condoned by referees, players, coaches or fans. Fair play and sportsmanship are what separate rugby from other sports... especially soccer !

Rugby is a physical game and the potential for players to get hurt is always present. Referees constantly deal with questions around physicality of the game: When does physical play become

dangerous? Do referees have a duty of care to protect the players from injury? Could a referee be legally liable for letting play that is too physical continue? Does the level of the game have a bearing on how much physicality is allowed? Should a U-19 game be allowed to be as physical as Premier Men's game?

In a more general sense, should the physicality of games in the Super 14 or RFU Premiership be the same as that in BC Rugby? Years ago, one of my referee mentors gave me sage advice on this topic: "we're an amateur game. Come Monday morning everyone has to go to work!"

Third; yellow cards. In the old days, referees would formally caution a player by "taking his name". Any further mis-behavior would lead to the player being sent off. Now the referee shows the player a yellow card and they get 10 minutes in the sin bin... a sort of purgatory; between the heaven of playing and the hell of being sent off. Yellow cards have proven to be a very useful tool for controlling the game... it gives a player time to think about their actions and the opportunity to return with new focus and attitude.

John's beef appears to be with the yellow cards given for Law 10.2 (unfair play) and 10.3 (repeated infringement)... "The frivolous cards...". He has 2 complaints: that they exist at all and how the Discipline Committee deals with them. The Discipline Committee can speak for itself. (I imagine that they could be swayed by the desires of the clubs)

Most of us would agree that there is a difference between a yellow card for foul play (ie a high tackle) and for being the latest member of your team to go off-side. To some, getting 10 minutes in the sin-bin for each offense doesn't seem to match the crime.

But without the Laws 10.2 and 10.3, there is no escalation of accountability for a team or player who continually cheats. We have all seen players intentionally prevent a quick "tap and go" by their opponent because they would rather have the penalty kick moved up 10m and get organized than their opponent running against a confused defense. The same goes for being off-side at rucks... without Law 10.3 the benefits of stuffing your opponent time after time, could outweigh the penalties.

Breaking Law 10.2 when your opponent could score a try ie. "cheating in the red zone" is the most common reason for issuing a yellow card for cynical or professional foul.

The BC guidelines for invoking Law 10.3 are three infringements by a single player and four by a team. A yellow card might also come into play when the total count of penalties for a team gets too high. Referees are coached to warn the captain when their team is on the verge of too many penalties.

Discipline by individual players or by teams as a whole is important to the game of Rugby. If "frivolous" yellow cards encourage discipline on the pitch, then its all good.