



Why Ref, Why?

My involvement in refereeing began 37 seasons ago and I still care as passionately about the game now as I did then. If there is one question I am repeatedly asked, time and time again, it's "why do you do this Ref, why?" It's a great question, so I will attempt to explain the apparent lunacy that drives my decision to continue to referee, even though I am now nearer 60 than I am 50.

If you are a referee, you will understand where I am coming from in that you know when you have caught the 'bug', and there can be no escaping it. By the 'bug' I mean the sense of achievement and enjoyment which being a match official can bring. Yes, of course, every once in a while, the wheels fall off and I don't have the best 90 minutes, but as referees become more experienced, the frequency of those games become less and less. Let me focus of those 2 key words, achievement and enjoyment.

There is no better feeling in coming off a 'muck and nettles' game of football (sorry – Yorkshire slang, but you get idea of the feel of the intensity of the game) and you have achieved match control. You have had to make decisions under pressure, think on your feet and man-manage 22+ head-strong individuals who use every trick in the book to try and persuade you that black is white, and vice-versa. If that is not a skill-set which will help you in other walks of life, especially business, then I do not know what is.

So, do I enjoy my refereeing? That's a daft question, of course I do, you may as well have asked me "do bears poo in the woods?", "is Luxembourg small?" or "do 1-legged ducks swim round in circles?". The minute I stop enjoying the game, I will stop refereeing, it's as simple as that, but I can't see that happening for ages. The other aspect of the enjoyment side of the game is the friendships you make by being involved. Refereeing colleagues have become long-standing and very trusted friends, worldwide, and there is a 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' of close camaraderie which stems from helping each and working together in a high-profile, pressured decision-making environment. For example, I am writing this article on a flight to Northern Ireland where I will be officiating in a 6-day tournament, friendships will be renewed and, rest assured, we will enjoy the 'craic'.

So, if you love our beautiful game, your playing days are over and you still wish to be actively involved, why not give refereeing a go? Your local County FA will guide you through the process of becoming qualified, and, who knows, if you get the 'bug', I promise you, you won't regret taking up the whistle, as many before have done.

That's "Why"