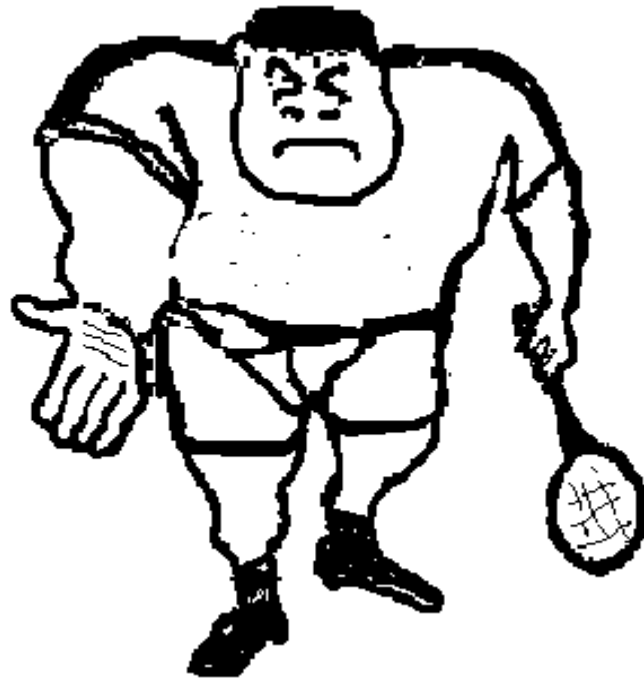


The Squash Official

The January Issue of 2003



Sometimes it might be best not to insist on 4.1: "...the spin of a racket decides the right to serve first" !

Sometimes I think I understand everything, then I regain consciousness. Maybe this issue will help? We've got news, a report from the recent YMG, a WSF advisory, the usual Q & A Forum (apologies for the small font), and a thought provoking polemic. Read on – this way..... →

SERIOUS DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of Squash Canada.



SPORTS OFFICIALS OF CANADA

For a couple of years now, a core group of officials from various sports has been working to create a national organization that would serve the interests of officials in all sports in Canada. During a recent Coaching & Officiating Conference in Montreal the Secretary of State (Amateur Sport), Paul DeVilliers, formally announced:

“Officials play an essential role in the development of athletes in sport and are a valuable part of the sport community. Starting in fiscal 2003-2004, funding will be provided toward the creation of an organization that will represent officials in Canada.”

This should open a lot of doors for officiating in Canada and create a viable organization which can act as the “voice” of technical officials to ensure continued recognition as an integral part of Canadian sport.

SCHOOLTIME FOR 2003

This year's Nationals will be held in Edmonton, and once again an Officiating School will be held on Tuesday, April 29th – the day preceding the start of play. Although officiating at the Nationals will be done on an invitational basis this year (see next page), the school will be open to all interested participants. Details of the schedule and content will be available at a later date.

NEWS NEWS NEWS



‘ONLINE’ EXPANSION

You are no doubt aware that you can get an enormous amount of information from the Officiating Program's website at <http://www.squash.ca/e/officiating/index.htm>

Now, there are plans to take this media to the next level to promote the program and improve officiating in Canada. The idea is to allow access to the program's slide show and instructor's manual for ‘at home’ use – a teaching approach that permits individuals to advance at their own pace. We will also be placing the written exam on the website so that candidates may take it online, submit their answers to Squash Canada and receive their marks. The respective P/T Association will be informed of these results for follow up with the practical part of the exam process. P/T's will also be receiving a CD with the slide show and instructor manual comments as text overlays for use at traditional clinics. This will provide all P/T's and Clinic Instructors with the option of delivering the clinic using a PC and LCD projector or the traditional way of 35 mm. slides and projector. There are still some administrative issues to be worked out (password access, website development with the contractor, flow of electronic documents, etc., but we hope that these things should happen in the spring of 2003

Phase 2 of this project will incorporate video clips right into the slide program. There are still some issues to be worked out with this, not the least of which is the limited access to high-speed Internet across the country. Without high-speed Internet access, video clips somewhat resemble the Shopping Channel, and that's a charitable description. Stay tuned for further developments.

OFFICIALS DON'T GET NO RESPECT?

It's generally safe to say that officials feel that we are 'underconsidered' when it comes to our participation in the various events around the country. This state of affairs runs the gamut from recognition, to payment, to benefits, and so on. A committee will be struck, headed by Rod Symington, to sensitize the community and to fill the void that has existed far too long. Contact Rod if you have input. We'll keep you posted.

REFEREE SELECTION FOR THE NATIONALS

Well folks, to quote Bob Dylan, the times are-a-changin' and Referees attending the Nationals this year in Edmonton will, for the first time ever, be likely chosen using a new set of guidelines. A working committee composed of both A & B Referees has reported to the Committee's executive on a new proposal that stems from the program's mandate to collectively utilize the best available officiating for players participating in the National Championships. As well, there is a need to create a rewarding and satisfying experience for officials who volunteer their time, expertise and effort for this purpose since nobody wants to take a week off work to referee at the Nationals, only to be assigned a series of less than challenging matches. As a first year trial, there will be a selection of predominantly A Referees, and a few developmental B Referees. A series of guidelines for assignment and assessment have been established. If all meets with approval, invitations will be sent out shortly for interested people to apply by the end of February.

REFEREE ASSIGNMENTS FOR 2003

Confirmed as Tournament Referees for these National Championships:

Women's Team Championships (Edmonton) – Joe Ellis
Men's Team Championships (Niagara-on-the-Lake) – Moe Shehata
Canadian Jr. Championships (Charlottetown) – Bob Aitken
Canadian Nationals (Edmonton) – John Cushing

Appointed as Assessment Scheduler for 2003 Nationals – Graham Waters

Invited as WSF Assessor at the National Championships – Jack Flynn

National Examiners appointed to the following major events:

Women's Team Championships (Edmonton) – Adeline Clements
Men's Team Championships (Niagara-on-the-Lake) - Penny Glover
BC Open (Vancouver) – Gerry Poulton
Alberta Open (Calgary) – Colin Field (tentative)
Saskatchewan Open (Regina) – Wes Barlow
Canada Games (Campbellton) – Graham Waters
Ontario Open (Toronto) – Larry Jones (tentative)
Quebec Open (Montreal) – Barry Faguy
Atlantic Open (Halifax) – Graham Waters
Canadian Jr. Championships (Charlottetown) – Graham Waters
Canadian Nationals (Edmonton) – Committee (GP, BF, AC, RS, GW) plus Western NE's

AN OFFICIAL'S REPORT

The YMG 2002

By Gerry Poulton



Have you ever heard the referee, perhaps feeling a little pressure, open the match by saying: Player A serving, Player B receiving, love-all, match ball? Well, it happened here, and it was correct! Perplexed??? Read on.....

So, it is Thursday afternoon, Finals Day, and time to reflect on a superb tournament before the evening's entertainment of yet another Power v Nicol match. Sell out crowds every night, and fans fanatic enough to stay until 12:45 am for the completion of the quarter-final round.

Rather than use the old PSA court (well past its use-by date) which first made its appearance at the Silver Unicorn Challenge in Vancouver in 1990 and which we last saw at the 2002 Canadian Nationals, promoter John Nimick brought in the WISPA court - a new ASB portable glass-walled court. Much cleaner, much clearer, and probably from the players' perspective, much more true in bounce and play. The only real drawback is that this court sits firmly on the floor, rather than being a foot or so raised like the PSA court was, leading to a few problems with sight-lines.

Perhaps the biggest lesson we can take away from this tournament is that the state of men's squash in Canada is very good. Six representatives in the qualifying event, with the draw unfortunately pitting two pairs of them together. Shahir Razik overcame Ian Power in the first round and was then battling on equal terms with Rodney Durbach (South Africa) when he went over on his ankle in the back corner and was unable to continue; Durbach then went on to upset #8 Martin Heath and reach the main

round, only to go down to Peter Nicol in a tough four-setter in the Quarters. Viktor Berg and Sabir Butt also went head to head, after which Viktor and Simon Parke (England, #26 in the world) traded shots and athleticism for 5 games, with Parke finally coming out ahead. Simon had earlier met Matthew Guiffre who, although losing 3-0, certainly made his opponent concentrate. The best performance in the qualifiers was by Shawn Delierre who took out Dan Jenson (Australia, #27 in the world) in the first round in five excellent games, only then to run into the top seed Stefan Castelyn (Belgium, #24).

The Canadians' good play was also evident in the first round of the main draw, where Jonathon took out David Evans of Wales in straight sets on the Sunday night and where Graham battled on equal ground for 71 minutes with Peter Nicol on Monday night before succumbing 15-12, 11-15, 15-13, 15-8.

So what of the officiating? Mike Riley (US) and I were brought in as International Referees, and were ably assisted by Moe Shehata and Dave Howard. Needless to say, we all had our moments, and the players often took the opportunity to chat to us or the crowd. Among the exchanges were:

– **Joe Kneipp v Jon Power:** he is just fishing, and there are no fish in here. Look, it's very easy to say "I was wrong"....

– **Joe Kneipp v John White:** (comes out the door to the front of the first

Joe Kneipp v Jon Power: he is just fishing, and there are no fish in here.

boxes and asks each one there about a referee's decision) I've just taken a poll, and they say The referee responded: this is not a committee decision

– **Jon Power v Joe Kneipp:** (having played a ball near the front then two shots later asked for a let) I asked for the let while playing that shot; you've gotta give me a let. Referee: I did not hear you ask for a let, and if I had, no let.

– **John White v Stefan Castleyn:** (after the referee changed a call) ... perhaps we can discuss those earlier calls now.

So now it's the final; as a preliminary, John Nimick put together what he called a "shootout"– 8 men start, first round is best of 5 points, second round is best of 3 points, and the last round is one point - winner take all - hence "0-0, match ball". And, the kicker is that there were no lets/strokes, except in the instance of extreme danger. So, as a player (refs aren't needed!), how would you approach this? You win the serve, then what?

Graham Ryding had the answer - serve, then run straight at the opponent as he thinks about returning the ball! He sees you coming, hesitates, and the ball is now unreturnable - match and money to Ryding!!

Power v Nicol, for the 32nd time. Stands are full, atmosphere electric. Jonathon starts in pretty good form, coming from 4-7 down in the first to win with a convincing 15-8 scoreline. He picks up the pace in the second, making no errors, driving through to win 15-3. It's looking like a quick night, but at 1-0 in the third, everything changes and the referee is called on to make a critical decision -

Graham Ryding had the answer - serve, then run straight at the opponent as he thinks about returning the ball!

I have since seen the video of the match, and it is quite clear that there was no contact ... which resulted in the first stoppage

Jonathan has tripped and re-injured his right ankle, writhing in pain on the court floor. Is this a contributed injury (one hour, and perhaps more, to recover), or self-inflicted (3 minutes, then play on or default that game)? The referee leans over to me (I am the marker, fortunately) and says "I am calling this contributed", and so informs the audience. JP goes off for treatment, the crowd disperses, and we are left wondering if recovery is feasible. Nearly three quarters of an hour later, we have our answer - to the accompaniment of loud cheers, Power makes his reappearance and the match recommences. But the referee was not yet finished with his difficult decisions; after Peter won the third 17-16 (allowing me the lovely call "16-all, game ball, match ball"), he goes over on his ankle in the fourth! This time there was no doubt - self-inflicted, 3 minutes. Peter did resume, but Jonathon was back in full control and ran the game out 15-7 to capture the YMG crown once again.

I have since seen the video of the match, and it is quite clear that there was no contact between Peter and Jonathon which resulted in the first stoppage (he went over when his foot slipped on the service box line). So here's the question: it is the final; the stands are full; the home town boy is leading by a very convincing score when he goes down injured. **WHAT CALL DO YOU MAKE?**



WORLD SQUASH FEDERATION

To: All WSF Referees and Assessors
c.c. Management Committee
Gawain Briars, PSA
Andrew Shelley, WISPA
Tournament Referee, World Junior Men's Championships
Tournament Referee, Men's World Open
Ted Wallbutton

From Graham Waters, Director, Rules and Referees Committee

Date: December 4, 2002

Re: Player Behaviour and Communications with Players

As you all know, there has been an issue with player behaviour and the amount of interaction between players and referees. This has sparked much discussion within the squash community and in the press. Olympic Officials who visited the squash competition at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester were appalled at the amount of player backchat that was allowed by the referees.

Our new Management Committee has addressed this issue and has issued the attached advice to WSF Referees on how to deal with such behaviour from this point forward. They would like this to take effect immediately, which means that it must be implemented at the World Junior Championships in Chennai and the World Open in Antwerp. They have also recommended that all National Associations to adopt it as a standard practice within their countries.

I would like to add a word of caution to the advice provided from ManCom. There are times when players on court make some very witty comments on court and these are enjoyed by the spectators and add to the spectacle of the encounter. We must be careful not to sterilise the game by crushing these exchanges and applying heavy handed penalties. However, we should be able to detect the tone of the voice and the degree of malice inherent in the players' behaviour. Whenever the tone is hostile and/or threatening, then we must apply Rule 17 immediately and not let the situation develop into something worse.

Rule 17.1 actually states that the referee SHALL penalise the player whenever an infraction has occurred. A polite question as to why a certain decision was given is fine, but any vocal tantrum, argument, throwing or smashing a racket against the court must be penalised immediately.

Good luck with your refereeing.



NEW ADVISORY
December 2002



WORLD SQUASH FEDERATION

There has been an increasing tendency by a minority of players to constantly query decisions. These players exhibit the following behaviour that is not acceptable:

- Showing constant dissent at decisions,
- Undermining the authority of the referee
- Intentionally distracting their opponent
- Giving themselves unjustified recovery time
- Deliberately disrupting matches for their own advantage

The convention in Squash is that players may always query a referee's decision to ensure that they understand the reasons for it, so as to avoid repeating the same situation, and this procedure is specified in Guideline G19 to the Rules.

The Management Committee of the World Squash Federation ruled on 29 November 2002 that, with immediate effect, the following procedures shall be implemented by all WSF International Referees and recommended to WSF Member Federations as standard procedure for National Referees.

1. Under Rule 15.5, players are not permitted to request a change in marker or referee. Players who do so should be quickly informed that they have no such right. If they persist, the referee should apply an appropriate Rule 17 penalty for "delay of game"
2. As directed in Guideline G19, a referee may explain a decision to a player, but no further discussion on that decision is permissible.
3. If a player constantly and unjustifiably asks for explanation of decisions the referee shall issue a warning or apply a Rule 17.3 penalty.
4. If a player attempts to engage the referee in a discussion, following explanation of the reason for the decision, the referee shall issue a warning and advise the player of the fact that no discussion will be permitted. Thereafter the referee will apply Rule 17.3 penalties as appropriate.
5. Under Rule 15.4 players are not permitted to leave the court during a game without the permission of the Referee. Where an enclosed court makes an explanation of the decision impossible a player may open the court door to improve communication, but abuse of this freedom will result in Rule 17.3 penalties after due warning.

This additional guideline has been communicated to both PSA and WISPA and will be implemented by all WSF Referees from 5 December 2002.



ROD SYMINGTON



The FO

Note: The following questions and answers often deal with matters not specifically touched on in the rules and the opinions of the advisors sometimes differ. This only points out the inherent difficulties...

BODY CONTACT DURING SWING

The swing is a very sensitive movement. We frequently award strokes for interference to it, either because it is 'prevented' by a major contact, or because of a poor clearing effort by the opponent in the case of a more minor contact. Should we treat contact with other parts of the body with the same severity if it occurs during the swing, given that such contact can be just as disastrous to the outcome?

GRAHAM: Yes. The rules make no reference to what parts of the body are contacted, but attempt to measure the effect that contact has – if it “prevents” a reasonable swing, then stroke to striker. If it has some effect on the swing but does not “prevent” it, then it is a let. This is assuming that all of these “contacts” are accidental – if deliberate, then the Referee must impose a Rule 17 penalty, the severity of the penalty dependent on the seriousness of the deliberate contact.

ROD: It is difficult to imagine a situation where two bodies are in contact and there is not interference with the swing. What kind of squash players are these - Martians? This is a "show me the video" question! In theory, any situation in which the incoming striker encounters interference gives him (or her) the right to stop play and ask for a let. There are three possible outcomes: 1. If the opponent is not making every effort to clear, it is a stroke. 2. If the opponent was making every effort to clear, but the swing is prevented, it is likewise a stroke. 3. If the opponent was making every effort to clear, but the swing was not prevented, it is a let.

ENCOUNTERING 'POSSIBLE' INTERFERENCE

Common practice generally dictates that interference must actually occur – that the incoming striker must actually 'contact' the opponent in making 'every effort' – without physical abuse, of course. It's generally considered that the striker cannot just stand back and simply claim that the opponent's in the way. Is this correct, and if so, why is the word 'possible' in Rule 12.5? Would its meaning be different in the light of the new provisions for 'minimal interference'?

GRAHAM – The reason that the word “possible” is used in 12.5 is because when the striker appeals for a let, it has not yet been determined whether or not interference, minimal or otherwise, has occurred – that is for the referee to decide. At the time of appealing, any interference is only “possible”, at least until the referee decides whether it has occurred or not.

ROD - The question is in two parts: 1. There does not have to be physical contact for interference to take place. A player who stops before actually contacting the opponent has a right to claim interference if the next step (or half-step) would have resulted in bodily contact. If the referee is following the flow of the game, it will be apparent that the player would have made contact if he or she had continued along the chosen path to the ball. 2. The word "possible" in Rule 12.5 is ambiguous (what's new?): it refers to the fact that the player might believe that interference has occurred. However, this is only confirmed when the Referee says that it has taken place. Hence, the interference has "possibly" taken place ("Let, please") - and has not definitely taken place until the Referee says "Yes, let." (Remember the baseball umpire: "They're nothing till I call them.")



RUM



GRAHAM WATERS

in officiating Squash. You can minimize the number of episodes that trouble you by developing a thorough knowledge of the rules through reading and studying.....and by asking taxing questions.

COACHING

The rules forbid coaching other than between games. In the event of delay for injury or some such occasion where players come off court, would you assume that if you saw them speak to their coach that they were being coached and thus apply a Rule 17 assessment? Would you warn them in anticipation of such conversations as they left the court?

GRAHAM – Perhaps this is a loophole that needs to be addressed. The purpose of the “No coaching” rule was to try to avoid any delay in play caused by a player looking for advice from a coach who is outside the court. If there is an interval in play, allowing the players to leave the court, I think a referee would be ill-advised to try to determine what conversations are taking place. Coaching under these circumstances does not delay the game – there is an interval – it doesn’t matter what the reason is – injury, court unplayable, etc.

ROD - The Referee should never assume that a conversation is necessarily coaching. That would be grossly unfair. (The coach may simply be telling the player that he has reserved a table for dinner.) You can only take action against behaviour that you actually witness. Thus, in punishing coaching during a match, you must be absolutely sure that you heard what was being said. To act on speculation is both unfair and asking for big trouble. Also, to warn a player who is about to leave the court because of injury against receiving coaching would be equally bad: it assumes before the event that the player is going to break the Rules. A player who is so warned would feel offended - and rightly so.

WRONG FOOTING STANDARDS

In wrong footing scenarios, the rules only require that for a let to be granted, the recovery by the striker should be “sufficient”. Do you think that it’s a good idea for a Referee to establish a tougher than normal standard for that effort, essentially imposing a form of punishment for having made that mistake?

Graham – No. You don’t finish the sentence - the recovery is sufficient for what? Guideline 11 states that the recovery must be sufficient “to demonstrate the player would have made a good return”. That is a judgement that the referee must make, but there is no reason to “establish a tougher than normal standard” – either the referee considers that the player could have returned the ball or not.

ROD - No; the Rule is quite clear as it is. However, a player who has wrong-footed himself (or herself) has to show by sufficient effort that he or she would have reached the ball. Simply taking one step in the new direction and hoping will not do. The Referee cannot award a let unless he or she judges that the player would have reached the ball. The Referee may not speculate and say: "Oh, he's pretty fast. On the basis of what I have seen in the match so far, he would have reached that ball if he had chosen to make sufficient effort." NOT!

Squash Refereeing in the Twenty-First Century: A Polemic and A Proposal

By Rod Symington



"Let's play a game. Imagine what would happen if a sport chose to frame its rules in such a way that the official charged with making a large number of subjective decisions was placed in the most disadvantageous position imaginable."

"You mean like a football game, if the referee had to sit up in the twenty-fifth row of the stands and shout out his decisions from there."

"Yes, something like that. Can you think of another analogy?"

"Yes - a fencing match, where the umpires were compelled to sit in a hot-air balloon tethered 100 feet above the action, and call out the "hits" from on high."

**My favourite:
squash - they already place the referee in an impossible situation."**

"Hey, you're getting good at this! How about one more for good measure?"

"A diving competition, where the judges would have to lie on the bottom of the pool wearing scuba gear and watch through goggles as the divers jump into the water."

"Very good. But I'll tell you my favourite: squash - but there would be no need to change the rules, because they already place the referee in an impossible situation."

"Of course! How silly of me! You're right: it's the one sport that chooses to hamper the referee as much as possible so that the decisions will always be contentious."

The above dialogue is, of course, fictitious and a slight exaggeration – but only a slight one. Because the fact of the matter is that the officials in a squash match are regularly placed in positions equivalent to the imaginary ones described above. As we all know, it is quite common for the officials in important squash matches (such as the Final of the British Open or the even more important Canadian National Championships) to be placed twenty rows back, looking through a (not always completely transparent) glass wall, attempting to judge what is happening on court. The inevitable result is that the officials are too far away and at the wrong angle to be able to judge what is happening on court, and yet both players and spectators expect the officials to make correct decisions every time. It is a state of affairs that is both scandalous and mystifying. It is scandalous because it is permitted to continue year after year; and it is mystifying because it is within the

The inevitable result is that the officials are too far away and at the wrong angle to be able to judge what is happening on court...

power of the ruling bodies of squash to attempt to change the situation.

Complaints about refereeing in squash are not merely commonplace, they are of epidemic proportions. And the epidemic continues to flourish without abating year after year. Not a week goes by without there being some "scandal" somewhere in the world about the refereeing in a match (or even an entire tournament). I know of no other sport where the complaints about the competence of refereeing/officiating/judging are so universal and so persistent. And there is surely no other sport on earth where the players so often begin a match praying that the referee will be competent and the decisions consistent.

And yet, for some strange and inexplicable reason, when the question of changing the system of refereeing in squash is brought up, it elicits more rigidity and close-mindedness than almost any other topic. The sport is conservative to the point of blindness. The evidence that the single Referee (plus Marker) system is severely flawed is overwhelming, yet there is no common will to do something about it. The Marker/Referee system has been in place for so long, it has become sacrosanct: even to suggest the system is inadequate is equivalent to blasphemy. (So I blaspheme.) Other sports have taken the initiative in changing their rules to make the game more attractive, to eradicate abuses, and to improve the officiating. Why has squash been so slow to change? Let us look at the options.

1. Marker/Referee System

Let us be absolutely clear about one incontrovertible fact: the Marker/Referee system contains a fatal flaw, in that it is conceptually wrong and can never be fixed. Any refereeing system that relies on one referee in a static position to judge the actions of players who are moving will always be inferior and inadequate. Imagine a football game (all variations) or a hockey game (both ice and field) in which the referee was told to stay in one place and make his decisions from there. Ridiculous and unthinkable? Yes, but that is, in effect, what happens in squash: players move around, yet the referee must remain still and attempt to make decisions from a position of clear disadvantage. Admittedly, squash takes place within a much more confined space than an event such as football or basketball or hockey, but the same principle applies: the referee (umpire/judge) must be able to place himself in a position to see the play from the best possible vantage-point. And as we all know: there is no one perfect vantage-point.

Obviously, it would be impractical in squash for the referee to move around during a rally. But even when he is seated in the location recommended by the Rules, the Referee is in the wrong place to make all the most critical decisions. The vast majority of those critical decisions take place over to one side of the court - either near the left wall or the right wall - and consequently, a referee located even in the recommended position (in the middle of the back wall and sitting above it) is in a disadvantageous position to make a decision. In fact, if you analyze carefully what actu-

Complaints about refereeing in squash are not merely commonplace, they are of epidemic proportions.

the Marker/Referee system contains a fatal flaw, in that it is conceptually wrong and can never be fixed.

ally happens in the referee's mind, you come to an astonishing conclusion: the referee guesses - and he does so many times during a match. The refusal to face up to this fact (namely, that the referee guesses) is the major stumbling-block to progress in squash officiating.

In fact, if you analyze carefully what actually happens in the referee's mind, you come to an astonishing conclusion: the referee guesses

For example, the player hits a shot down the left-hand wall. However, the shot is loose and comes out from the side wall by a foot or two. The opponent moves across, believes that the player is in the way of a direct shot to the front wall and calls let. The referee has to make a decision from a position where he cannot properly see what has happened. One thing must be perfectly clear: the referee is most definitely not in the ideal position to make the decision. In the most difficult decisions that the Referee has to make - where one player is getting out of the way and the other is moving across to hit the ball ("crossing the flight"), the Referee is in the wrong place almost every time.

He therefore makes a judgement based on past experience and probabilities: in his mind he translates what he sees from the wrong angle into an image that conforms to what he would have seen from the correct angle. Once you have come to realize that this is what the referee does, it must be clear that the situation is ripe for error - and as we all well know, many errors do occur. It is the reason why so many novice referees have difficulty judging the close calls: they can't translate in their minds what they see from the middle of the back-wall to what they would have seen if they had been directly in line with the play.

In all other sports that I can think of where subjective decisions are made, there is a team of referees, umpires or judges. In many sports the officials move around so that they have the best view. In some sports the subjective decision that an infraction has occurred or a play was good or bad is taken by the official who is in the best position - or by officials consulting together (and sometimes with the aid of video playbacks). In other sports, to reduce the element of subjectivity as much as possible, the decision is rendered by the whole team of officials (and in some cases - where a competitor is given a score - the possible element of bias or incompetence is lessened by throwing out the bottom and top scores). Only squash stubbornly insists on leaving subjective decisions in the hands of one badly situated individual; and only squash adamantly refuses to introduce a refereeing system that will reduce the number of controversial decisions and improve the quality of the decision-making process.

Only squash stubbornly insists on leaving subjective decisions in the hands of one badly situated individual

What would any rational system of squash refereeing do? It would place a referee in a position where such decisions could be made from the best possible vantage-point. Thus, for episodes that take place near the left-hand wall, there would be a referee on that side of the court behind the back wall. For episodes that take place on the right-hand wall, there would be a referee on that side in the best position to make the

decision. The system is so simple, so rational, so obvious, that not to put it in place requires an act of criminal negligence.

Not only the bad positioning of the referee in the conventional Marker/Referee system leads to questionable decisions; there are other factors as well:

Far too often the match becomes a hand to hand confrontation between two egos. There is, in any case, far too much ego in squash refereeing.

i) The stress on a squash referee is enormous - and most referees cannot handle it. (There aren't more than a handful of referees in the world who could referee, for example, a British Open Final without collapsing under the strain.) Placed in a major final, most squash referees experience a level of stress that had a negative effect on their judgement and effectiveness. In effect, they fake it, appearing to be in control of their emotions when they are really shitting in their pants.

ii) Far too often the match becomes a hand to hand confrontation between two egos. There is, in any case, far too much ego in squash refereeing. Many referees love the challenge of refereeing a squash match alone, and I have heard some referees express great joy at having refereed a difficult match - not because the decisions were correct and the result fair, but because it gave the referee intense personal pleasure to be in that situation. It's the wrong attitude.

iii) One bad decision from a referee under stress can poison the atmosphere of a match, undermine the players confidence in the referee's competence, and led to an ugly game.

iv) The player who needles the referee is hoping to unfairly influence the referee in his favour. More often than not the referee's confidence is undermined, and bad decisions for both players are the result.

In conclusion: the Marker/Referee System is a failure - and no amount of training or tinkering with it will alter that fact.

2. The Two Referee System.

In this system there is a Referee (who also keeps score) and an Appeals Referee, whose decision on appeal is final. Just like the Marker/Referee system, the Two Referee system cannot work. You are simply placing two referees in the wrong place. In addition, the advantage of having two referees agree about a decision is greatly outweighed by the terrible image created when they disagree.

3. The Three Referee System.

The Three Referee system was never given a fair chance. It was tried for a while and abandoned as unsatisfactory. In fact, it was never given a legitimate trial, because it was a) not applied properly, and b) not used for long enough. The players attempted to abuse the system by appealing every decision. The press did not like

The Three Referee system was never given a fair chance

the system because there were never any confrontations between the players and the referee and they had no controversies to write about. The advantages of the Three Referee System are as follows:

I have never seen referees so relaxed as when using this system.

i) All three referees have more confidence because they are working as a team, not alone. There is less pressure on each individual and far less likelihood of a referee "cracking" under the strain. (In fact, I have never seen referees so relaxed as when using this system.)

ii) There are no egregiously bad calls. If the central referee makes a clearly bad decision (which can happen when the Referee is under pressure), the other two referees can be relied upon to overrule him and eradicate the "bad" call that can easily poison the atmosphere

of a match.

iii) Players behave much better, and confrontations are virtually eliminated. How do you argue with a committee?

iv) The quality of decision-making is much improved. Over the course of a tournament, the number of correct decisions using the Three Judge System has been proven to be significantly higher than using the Referee/Marker system.

Unfortunately, it was falsely assumed that any referee who had been trained to use the Referee/Marker system could automatically use the Three Referee System too. Nothing could be further from the truth. To use the Three Referee System effectively, referees need adequate training in its use. The failure to train referees was one of the major factors in the failure of the system.

The disadvantages are:

i) Players can try to make a mockery of the system by appealing every initial call. This can easily be stopped by the referee saying (at the first sign that players were abusing the system) that any future frivolous appeals would be penalised. (It works.)

the deciding vote is often cast by the referee with the worst view of the situation.

ii) The major disadvantage of the system is the fact that in a "split" decision, the deciding vote is often cast by the referee with the worst view of the situation. For example, a player asks for a let on the left-hand wall. The central referee says: "Yes, let." The player appeals. The Referee on the left wall (who is in the best position) says: "Stroke." The referee on the right-hand wall - furthest away from the play and with the worst view - now has to cast the deciding vote. (In practice, this referee was instructed to say "stroke" only if he was absolutely certain that it was a stroke.) This is a serious objection to the system, but there is a solution to this defect (see below).

iii) It requires more officials to run a tournament. This is a minor objection (which

There are no appeals possible under this system.

has never, to my knowledge, been a genuine impediment in practice). Many other sports use multiple-official systems, and they are able to supply the number of officials needed. With the expansion of squash officiating programmes around the world, the number of qualified officials is increasing every year.

The Three Referee System has much to recommend it, and with a few simple modifications would prove itself far superior to any other refereeing system for squash.

The New Proposal: The Modified Three Referee System.

This system would use three referees, one in the centre and one on each side (as under the "conventional" Three Referee System). When a player calls let, the referee with the best vantage-point makes the decision, which is final. There are no appeals possible under this system. If we imagine the court being divided into two halves down the centre-line, then each of the referees (left and right wall) would be responsible for all episodes on his or her side of the court.

The objection will inevitably be raised: "Yes, but what about all the other functions of the Referee. Who performs those - or who decides which referee will perform them?" This is a minor objection which could be easily solved by writing a few sub-rules: getting bogged down in the details will detract from the much-needed debate about the principle being proposed here. By far the major challenge in squash refereeing is making correct and consistent decisions on appeals for let. Everything else is subordinate compared to that important function. The technical question of what the responsibilities each referee has is not a problem in any other sport with a multiple referee system. For the moment, however, the intent of this paper is simply to plant a seed - to set people thinking about the ideas expressed above and to provoke discussion.

There is no ideal position for a squash referee: every position has its disadvantages. And similarly, every system of refereeing is going to be imperfect, because it depends on human beings and their imperfect judgments. But the important point surely is to search for the best system that produces the highest percentage of correct decisions and the greatest player satisfaction. We know that the present Referee/Marker system is severely flawed, and owe it to the sport of squash to try to improve the game.

We know that the present Referee/Marker system is severely flawed, and owe it to the sport of squash to try to improve the game.

Does squash wish to enter the twenty-first century? Does squash wish to present to the world a better image, with less controversy, better behaviour on court and more correct decisions? Don't hold your breath.



OFFICIALLY SPEAKING!!



There's a dire shortage of humorous quotes in recent events, so perhaps it's a signal that we should reminisce with the following classic quotes about officiating:

Jansher Khan (from way back): I know referees have pressure because I refereed in the Spanish open. When I referee I have to wear two shirts because I sweat. When I play, I wear one.

Zarak Khan : When you play with the referee you play with two opponents. I don't talk.

Good judgment comes from experience, and experience – well, that comes from bad judgment.

He who thinks he knows it all is especially annoying to those of us who do.

Well known Baseball ref: I occasionally get birthday cards from fans. It's usually the same message – they hope it's my last.

Frustrated ref: You're expected to be perfect when you first begin the match – then improve.

Wise words: A mistake in judgment isn't fatal – but too much anxiety about it is.

Player to ref after being foot-faulted: Aren't you going to warn me first about that?

Ref to player: Are there any other rules you'd like me to warn you about?

From the last page of the first TSO back in April 1994, by yours truly: "Well folks, that's it for now. I've just gotten myself an upgrade to a 486, with DOS 6.2, & Windows 3.1 – whatever all that means! Keep posted for a flashy 'édition nouvelle'!"

Half way through the season, folks, which means the next one is in April, just before the Nationals. We welcome your input, of course. The coordinates are: National Office - fax (613) 731-6291 or your friendly editor's fax – (514) 697-4333 or his e-mail – bfaguy@videotron.ca

Barry Faguy