

## February 2008

**The next meeting of the North Middlesex Referees' Society will be held at Holtwhites Sports and Social Club, Kirkland Drive, Enfield at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 21st February 2008. At present we have no guest speaker. However, Robin and the Training Team are ready to spring into action with a programme, which will undoubtedly educate and entertain, in the absence of a special guest.**

A bigger issue of the magazine this month to accommodate four pages from Gary Cobden taken from The Independent, dated 14 January 2008, entitled "Turf War: How Britain's playing fields became a battleground".

January's guest speaker was former Herts FA Referees' Secretary, Ken Coniam. A report on Ken's presentation is included elsewhere in this month's issue.

Also in this edition is the conclusion of the article on injury avoidance by Patrick Morrissey taken from the December 2007 edition of the AFA ARGUS, adapted from an article published in the 'Sports Injury Journal'. And we don't apologise for including another piece by Patrick in this month's issue.

Life Vice-President Mick Osborn responds to regular contributor, Observer, in an open letter regarding the recruiting and training of referees – in January's Normidian, Observer asked the question "Are We Training Referees Just to Pass Exams?"

Another Life Vice-President, Peter Dace, contributes a nostalgic 'name-dropping' article on being a reserve official at Football League matches in the 'early days' – something for the older ones amongst us! We also congratulate Society member and Premiership Assistant Referee, Phil Sharp, on his achievements to date. Is it only me who looks to see if Phil is on the line at every televised game – I don't think so!

In the last edition of the magazine we featured former Society Auditor Brian Langstone's presentation commemorating his 39 years of service to the Society. Gary Cobden took some photos of the occasion, which we have included in this edition - photographs are notoriously difficult to reproduce in magazines such as ours – I hope they turn out OK.

Robin Jagot reports that Bridge Rovers FC are looking for referees for children's football on Saturdays and we congratulate Society member and Football League Referee, Paul Taylor, on his recent appointment as Herts Regional Development Officer. A brief description of Paul's duties is also included.

The AFA suffered a sad loss in January with the passing of Wally Goss after a short illness. Known to many NMRS members, Wally was the epitome of amateur football in this country. He was a Life Vice-President of the AFA and Secretary for many years. We pay our respects to Wally elsewhere in this magazine.

As usual, Gary Cobden lists this month's Middlesex County and Amateur Football Association County Cup Appointments in this issue. Gary also details the winners of the December 2007 and January 2008 NMRS 100 Club draw, and Secretary Robin Jagot's minutes of the last Society meeting are included as usual.

**Contributions for the March Normidian by 27 February please.**



## DEAR MR. OBSERVER

In last month's NORMIDIAN, you asked if new recruits were being trained to referee or to pass exams. If I understood you correctly you believe that the latter is the case.

Some time ago I wrote a short article for the NORMIDIAN that outlined the changes in basic training being brought in by the F.A. We of the Middlesex (North) Training Team, (Societies have not been allowed to deliver these courses for some time now,) have just completed teaching the third Module of our first five-modular course under this new policy. We started a second course in mid-January.

The main thrust of these changes is that instructors will no longer teach the Laws but advise candidates on the application of the Laws. The County F.A. provides candidates with a copy of the Laws when they register and advises them to study them in readiness for the course. Ideally, the number of candidates admitted to any course will be no less than 10 and no more than 25. At the first session they sit a written multi-choice test to assess the level of their knowledge. At the end of Module 3 (Week 9 of the course,) there is a multi-choice written examination followed by a showing of a DVD of a series of incidents on which candidates must give their judgement. There is no oral examination as in the past. Those who do not gain 75 percent of the total marks available are allowed to retake either or both of these tests.

Module 4 requires the candidates to referee at least six eleven-a-side matches. On your point that new recruits attend local matches with their trainers, one must bear in mind that trainers (instructors,) voluntarily give a lot of their time already, and are often active referees with their own lives and careers deserving consideration. What would be helpful is for each candidate, or at least a small group of candidates, to have a mentor to help them through these early days. For many years at North Middx we have unsuccessfully appealed for our members to offer their services as mentors. Look at the list of Council appointments in our magazine and you will see that even the post of Mentoring Officer is vacant!

We have offered and conducted in-service training but our experience has shown there is very little interest. Newly qualified referees, in particular, have been invited to attend workshops after a reasonable time of their qualifying. Hardly any takers! It seems that only in-service training which is mandatory, for example for referees going for promotion, gets anywhere near well attended. As candidates must return for Module 5 when they have refereed their six matches, to receive F.A. Certificates of Qualification, we should get a better response. We shall have to wait and see.

So, Mr. Observer, although I was very sceptical about the new policy, I am taking part in delivering the new style courses. Even though I think there will be fewer applicants and it will take longer for them to qualify, the aim is for quality rather than quantity and, very importantly, the retention of referees with the character you desire.

Are we going in the right direction?

Yours sincerely

**Mick Osborn**



## Presentation to Brian Langstone – December 2007

As reported in the January Normidian, the December meeting was a Social evening, when presentations were made to Brian Langstone and his wife, Clare. Brian had served the Society as an Auditor for 39 years before standing down at the AGM at the end of last season.



Brian Langstone is pictured (left) receiving his Football Association 50 Year Award from Tony Sharples (Chairman of London FA). Derek Mennell (President of Middlesex County FA) is pictured (below) presenting a bouquet to Brian's wife, Clare. Derek also presented Brian with a gift from the Society.



At the evening, a number of the Society Life Vice Presidents were also in attendance, and they are pictured below together with the Society Officers who were also in attendance for the evening.

Pictured from left to right are:-  
Vince Yeudall (Vice Chairman);  
Terry Wilson (Magazine Editor);  
Peter Dace (LVP); Tom White (Chairman);  
Michael Mackey (Council Member);  
Mick Osborn (LVP);  
Brian Langstone (LVP);  
George Basten (LVP);  
Gary Cobden (Treasurer);  
Robin Jagot (Secretary and LVP);  
and Terry Hayne (LVP).



## The Referees' Association of England

Society Secretary, Robin Jagot, attended the Anglia & South East Region (A&SE) Liaison Meeting at the Bloomsbury Thistle Hotel, London on 1st December 2007.

Silent tribute was made to a number of members who had passed away since the last meeting.

An engraved memento was presented to Sid Harrison in appreciation of his services to the Board.

Other items included a Question and Answer Session, Feedback on last December's Round of Meetings and CRA Discussion Points. Full details are on the RAE website.

## **Being a Reserve Official – the early days**

Sitting before my computer during the Christmas break, my conscience is troubling me. Have I committed a major crime, been the victim of a sub-prime mortgage or worse shouted at a Referee out earning an honest fee? – no fortunately none of these but in many ways equally troubling, I have made few contributions for this season's Normidian.

I can foresee our trusty Editor waiting with green pen in hand for those contributions to arrive yet finding there is nothing to edit apart from the printed covers and the advertisements from the Ackerman Emporium. Perhaps he will be dreaming of a Sheffield United victory or even learning to speak the Queen's English as practised in southern England, where he is now privileged to reside.

But in a flash of inspiration I visited my drawer containing Refereeing memorabilia and found a list of my appointments as a Reserve Official on Football League matches. This covered 26 games between 1983 and 1989 and how I look back on those games with fond memories.

The Football League decided that from season 1982-1983 all Football League games would have a fourth Match Official as part of the team and to be immediately available to take over as a Linesman in the event of any problems with the main threesome. This would also eliminate the previous need to call for a referee out of the crowd in the event of an injury and which once produced a track-suited Jimmy Hill, then a television pundit, to run the line at Highbury Stadium.

How lucky we were in the North Middlesex Society to be teamed with Arsenal Football Club and they provided us with a list of all home games and for our Council to rota current Class One Members deemed capable of fulfilling the role. Two years later we were asked to provide the same service at Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and surely our Society must have been the envy of all others.

I detail my own appointments during the period mentioned above, not as any sort of boast or name dropping but simply as a record of some of the wonderful Referees with whom I shared some great moments.

### **82/83**

<b>Arsenal v Leeds</b>	<b>2 – 1</b>	<b>John Hunting</b>
<b>Arsenal v Manchester United</b>	<b>2 – 4</b>	<b>John Martin</b>
<b>Arsenal v Notts Forest</b>	<b>0 – 0</b>	<b>Howard King</b>

### **83/84**

<b>Arsenal v Notts County</b>	<b>1 – 1</b>	<b>Alan Crickmore</b>
<b>Arsenal v Spurs</b>	<b>3 – 2</b>	<b>Ken Baker</b>

**84/85**

<b>Arsenal v Liverpool</b>	<b>3 – 1 Tom Bune</b>
<b>Spurs v Sunderland</b>	<b>1 – 2 Brian Stevens</b>
<b>Arsenal v Hereford</b>	<b>7 – 2 Dennis Hedges</b>
<b>Arsenal v Southampton</b>	<b>1 – 0 Brian Stevens</b>

**85/86**

<b>Spurs v Everton</b>	<b>0 – 1 Jeff Bray</b>
<b>Arsenal v Manchester City</b>	<b>1 – 0 Jim Ashworth</b>
<b>Spurs v Notts Forest</b>	<b>0 – 3 Roger Milford</b>
<b>Arsenal v WBA</b>	<b>2 – 2 Brian Stevens</b>

**86/87**

<b>Arsenal v Sheffield Wed</b>	<b>2 – 0 Gerald Ashby</b>
<b>Spurs v Barnsley</b>	<b>5 – 3 Martin Bodenham</b>
<b>Spurs v Arsenal</b>	<b>1 – 2 Joe Worrall</b>
<b>Arsenal v Norwich</b>	<b>1 – 2 Roger Milford</b>

**87/88**

<b>Spurs v Southampton</b>	<b>2 – 1 Jim Ashworth</b>
<b>Arsenal v Southampton</b>	<b>0 – 1 Mike Reed</b>
<b>Arsenal v Everton</b>	<b>3 – 1 George Courtney</b>
<b>Chelsea v Southampton</b>	<b>0 – 1 Howard King</b>
<b>Brentford v Gillingham</b>	<b>2 – 2 Peter Foakes</b>

**88/89**

<b>Spurs v Arsenal</b>	<b>2 – 3 Lester Shapter</b>
<b>Watford v Oxford</b>	<b>1 – 1 Ian Hemley</b>
<b>Arsenal v Sheffield Wed</b>	<b>1 – 1 Terry Holbrook</b>
<b>Arsenal v Notts Forest</b>	<b>1 – 3 Alan Gunn</b>

So some marvellous names, some unusual away teams but the games could be anything from Division One of the Football League, to Milk Cup and FA Cup. How I wished I could have added to that list of Referees both Clive Thomas (everyone had a Clive Thomas story except me and how envious I am of Robin Jagot who was Clive's reserve official when he started the second half without the Arsenal goalkeeper on the pitch – oh to be a fly on the wall for what was said afterwards!) and Brian Hill, who later became a mate during our time together on the Capital League.

Who was the best Referee I saw in action from such close quarters? – Undoubtedly George Courtney who at that time was very much the Number One Referee in the country. How calm he was despite a Littlewoods Cup semi-final second leg. I remember about ninety minutes before kick-off he said to the three of us “lets go down the local sweet shop”, and off we went through the crowds, all of whom knew him and exchanged friendly banter. The game itself passed without incident due to his presence and his established reputation, which meant his decisions were accepted without question. In recent years perhaps only the great Italian Referee Pierluigi Collina has had such an effect on players before even leaving his dressing room.

Was I ever called into action? No, not once. On each game the three Officials I was with were the fittest, healthiest and most durable you could imagine so I remain wondering how I would have felt, and how I would have coped crossing that white touchline from the safety of my allotted space. Some Society colleagues were more fortunate and Dave Chapman ran the line for the second half during an FA Cup tie between Arsenal and Leeds when Referee Alan Seville was injured. I know there were a few more but I cannot recall who but if anyone can remind me I would like to hear from you.

**Peter E Dace**

**Life Vice President**



**Law Changes – we have to go back to go forward - taken from “President’s Viewpoint” in the AFA ARGUS by Patrick Morrissey.**

Football’s law-making body, IFAB, meets at Gleneagles in Scotland on 7th March 2008 to consider proposals for Law Changes. No agenda has yet been published. But here are three areas where I believe changes should be considered. In two of them, we have to learn the lessons of history so that the world game can progress.

### **1. The Spirit of the Game and Fair Play.**

Once upon a time, the game of football, which had originated from a group of English Public Schools, was played in a Spirit of chivalry and fair play. There was no need for an explicit statement of this code of chivalry. It was part of the character development of young people at home and at school. Of course there were fouls and misconduct, but once a set of Rules for the game had been developed in the middle of the 19th

Century, the implicit Code of fair play and gentlemanly behaviour, served to underpin the Rules. In much the same way in many countries around the world, moral codes of behaviour, most often from religious codes, have underpinned the legal framework of their societies.

But then came professional football, winning became all-important, and the traditional Spirit of the Game began to erode. The world’s most popular game was now subject to many different countries interpretation of the Laws, different attitudes to cheating, and in losing the original and essentially English concept of fair play, the game has changed.

Cricket recognised this fact some years ago and introduced a new Law 1 covering “The Spirit of the Game”. What had up to then been implicit had to be made explicit. Some might say that the recent public disputes in the Test series between India and Australia show that the ‘Spirit’ Law is not working. But, on the contrary, the outpouring of criticism towards their own players by the Australian public shows that the ordinary people understand the need for the game to be played in a certain way. And they have forced the players and administrators of the game to take notice.

I believe we should do the same in football. The FA’s current “Code of Conduct for Football” tends to appear around page 200 of County Handbooks, and is unlikely to be read by active participants in the game – never mind adhered to. The grass roots of the game – the base on which the professional game depends, should tell FIFA and the FA that we want the implicit made explicit, and a firm statement of intent on the Spirit of the Game based on Respect, Honest and Fair Play introduced as a new Law 1 right at the front of ‘LOAF’.



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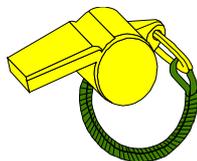
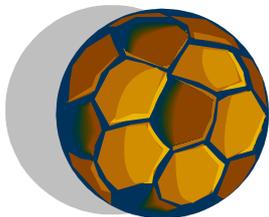
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**Wally Goss MSc ARCS DIC (extracted from the AFA website)**

The AFA lost a stalwart on Sunday 13th January with the peaceful passing of Life Vice President, Wally Goss, after a short illness.

A Life Member of the FA, Wally served as the AFA Representative on the FA Council since 1957. He was also Secretary of the AFA for many years and was closely involved with both Ulysses and the University of London FC. Originally from Norfolk, Wally was a professor, lecturing at the University of London and Head of Radiology at the Royal London Hospital. He also served in the RAF in the Second World War.

Wally qualified as a referee in the days before fees were paid but gave it up rather than accept payment, which he considered would render him a professional, and threw himself into the voluntary sector of grassroots football and continued to do so right up until his death.





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## NORTH MIDDLESEX REFEREES SOCIETY

### Minutes of the Society meeting held on Thursday January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at Holtwhites Sports Centre

**Chairman's Welcome:** The Chairman welcomed our Guest Speaker, Ken Coniam, and members, wishing them all best wishes for the New Year.

**Apologies:** Lockie Bramzell, Terry Wilson, and as per Society Handbook.

**Matters Arising:** None

**Secretary's Report:** The Secretary reported to members that he had attended the RA meeting arranged in London as delegate for the AFA and North Middlesex Societies, and a full report will appear in the next edition of the Society magazine. Members were reminded that a year from now the Society will celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and stated that a Sub-Committee will be formed at the next Council meeting to discuss possible ways of celebrating the occasion.

Council members were reminded that the next meeting would be held at the Secretary's house on Wednesday February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008 starting at 7.45pm.

**Treasurer's Report:** Full Membership – 146 Associate Membership – 4

**Any Other Officer's Report:** None

**Any Other Business:** There being no other business the Chairman moved on to match incidents. An interval break was taken and our Chairman introduced our Guest Speaker, Ken Coniam, from Hertfordshire CFA

Chairman ..... Date.....



### Phil Sharp's Achievement

Society member, Phillip Sharp, (April 5, 1964 -) is an English Premier League Assistant Referee and one of only 10 match officials from the UK to have officiated in a FIFA World Cup Final.

Phil first played football for East Barnet School, but became a referee via the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme in order to fulfil the Service in the Community component of the course. He gained his apprenticeship through the Herts County League before gaining promotion to the Southern Football League middle. From here he was promoted to Panel Referee for two seasons before being promoted to an Assistant Referee on the Football League and, finally, the Premier League. He was selected to run the line at the 1999 FA Challenge Cup Final. Phil currently referees on the national Contributory List of match referees.

Phil was promoted to the FIFA list of match officials on January 1, 1997, being appointed to his first international (in Budapest) in the summer of that year. His progression, internationally, was exceptional being appointed to hold the flag in the opening game of his first senior tournament, the 2000 European Championship, and the semi-final of that tournament. In the 2002 FIFA World Cup, Sharp was appointed to five games in total, including the Croatia v Italy match, and in the 2002 FIFA World Cup Final between Germany and Brazil. As such he was England's second successive match official at a Final match, Mark Warren having been the other Assistant Referee at the 1998 FIFA World Cup Final.

Phil was selected to represent Great Britain at the 2004 Olympic Games football tournament – where he was appointed as Assistant Referee on the Final match – and he represented England at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany.

A presentation to mark his achievement of officiating at 150 games in European Competition was made to Phil at a recent gathering of Premiership Assistant Referees.



**President's Viewpoint – Patrick Morrissey in the December 2007 edition of the AFA AGUS – continued from January's edition of Normidian.**

**9. Don't let minor strains become major injuries**

However careful you are, injuries can occur. The first thing is damage limitation. The procedure should be to immediately stop any exercise that makes the injury more painful, and to get diagnosis immediately, certainly not later than the next day. At the same time, think about what forms of exercise are possible, and re-design your fitness regime to maintain cardiovascular fitness, constant body weight and muscle strength. That way your recovery will be much quicker.

**10. Develop and stick to a regular exercise and match routine**

Every referee will have his or her own preferred fitness regime and pre-match routine. Sometimes it is difficult to maintain because unexpected 'events' throw you off course. The peer pressure of training regularly as a team with other referees can help. On match days, in different locations and with different people every time, your pre- and post-match rituals are a vital part of your mental and physical conditioning. Don't let other people interfere with your preparations. Take control.

**(Adapted for refereeing from an article in the 'Sports Injury Journal'.)**



**Guest Speaker, Ken Coniam at North Middlesex meeting, Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

Ken introduced himself, and we learned that he finished playing football in 1978 having had a bad disciplinary record that included 5 dismissals, one of which was in his last ever game. However he became 'a poacher turned gamekeeper' and refereed on average 84 games for the next 27 seasons. He obtained Class 1 in 1983 and Refereed 4 (Hertfordshire) Finals and had six years in the middle of the Isthmian League. He served 7 years as Referees Secretary of the Hertfordshire Football Association and is now an Assessor.

His talk was on the role of the 4<sup>th</sup> Official at Football League/Premier League level and included many humorous anecdotes. He invited 5 members of the audience to partake in a Manager/Physio/4<sup>th</sup> Official session encouraging them to react as their League counterparts, with amusing results.

In his vote of thanks, Life Vice President Ken Goldman described the talk as giving the Society an Excellent Evening – those present roundly endorsed this.

*Peter Dace sent in the above.*



**Paul Taylor – Herts FA RDO**

Congratulations to Society member and Football League Referee, Paul Taylor, who has joined the Hertfordshire FA as the Referees' Development Officer (RDO).

Funded by the Football Association, RDO's are being recruited into all County FA's as part as part of the National Game Strategy. Paul's role will be to act on behalf of the Herts FA to promote the recruitment, retention, supply, learning and development of referees across the county. In addition to providing support to active referees, Paul's remit also covers instructors, assessors and mentors.



# Turf war: How Britain's playing fields became a battleground

**Screaming, shouting, fistfights, firearms – and that's just the grown-ups. Discover why a record number of children's football games are abandoned due to parental hooliganism.**

It's 1-1 with five minutes to go at the Nursery Road playing fields in Merton, a wealthy district of southwest London. Two teams of nine-year-old boys are battling it out in a closely fought football match. On opposite sides of the pitch, about 20 parents have gathered to cheer on their sons from the touchline. As the referee's watch ticks towards full time, an attacker from the visiting team sprints gamely down the wing towards the penalty area, only for a defender to take him out with a crunching (and illegal) late tackle. The away supporters emit a collective groan as the boy crumples theatrically to the ground. Back on his feet, the felled youngster inspects a grazed knee, and the game resumes with a free kick. But the player's mother is incensed. Seconds later, she launches a volley of expletives at the referee. A mother in the opposition's set of fans reacts and, within seconds, a fight has broken out. Hair is pulled and palms start connecting with faces as the air reverberates with the sound of swearing. As the fisticuffs escalate, the referee (himself an amateur) decides to abandon the match. Groups of confused boys are led away from the action; many are in tears. Meanwhile, fathers from both sides struggle to separate the marauding mothers as the fight spills into the car park.

It's the sort of spectacle you might expect at a high-stakes, grown-up derby between pub teams in a gritty area of Glasgow or Liverpool, not at a match involving nine-year-olds in a leafy, respectable London suburb. But violence in kids' football has become shockingly common. At the highest level of the beautiful game, administrators say it has reached crisis point – and people on the front line of youth football reckon it's getting worse.

Last month, Surrey County FA made headlines when it issued a letter to more than 2,000 local youth teams, for which about 40,000 players turn out every weekend, asking them to clamp down on violent conduct among parents (who are nearly always the culprits rather than the children, who are the victims) after a rash of incidents in the first few weeks of this season, six of which had resulted in abandoned matches. "Just what do these adults think they are going to achieve by abusing referees, opposition parents and club officials?" asked Ray Ward, the Surrey County FA's secretary. "It is beyond my comprehension why some adults devote so much time during the week to providing children with the opportunity to play football, and then lose all self-control and ruin the day for those same children." But his words fell on deaf ears. With the season barely half played, Surrey FA has reports of more than 20 abandoned youth matches on file at its headquarters. The issue, repeated the length and breadth of the country, is tarnishing the national sport. "We've had to kick racism out of football," says one under-10s coach: "Now we've got to kick bullying out of the game."

Ward, who has now launched an inquiry into the Merton incident, speaks of "dreadful, sickening reports" of youngsters being abused. "Just last week, we had a hearing for a match that had been stopped," he says. "I had 52 pages of correspondence from parents, team managers and referees. It's a massive exercise every time something happens, and it is definitely getting worse. I dread to think of the misconduct that goes on every Saturday or Sunday that never gets reported."

The problem is widespread. Last week, Pope Benedict XVI, the German-born pontiff and a Bayern Munich fan, spoke out about the tarnished image of the game. "I'd like the game of football to be a vehicle for the education of the values of honesty, solidarity and fraternity, especially among younger generations," he told his footballing pilgrims.

It's a bitterly cold Saturday morning at Nursery Road, a few weeks after the fight. Three AFC Wimbledon teams are playing their first games in the Epsom & Ewell Youth League after the Christmas break. The atmosphere on the touchline is refreshingly cordial, but if you speak to anyone, you will hear about a string of ugly incidents witnessed in recent months. Jill McElligott, whose son Connor is tearing around the pitch for Wimbledon's under-10 B team against Bookham Colts, witnessed the fight between the mothers. "It was horrible," she says, pausing to cheer on her son, who has pulled his bright yellow sleeves over his knuckles to protect them from the arctic wind. "We couldn't believe what we were seeing." Further along the touchline, David Needs is supporting his son Harry. "You often witness verbal abuse," says Needs, who looks enviably warm in an AFC Wimbledon jacket stamped with his initials, a reward for sponsoring the team; he is the

owner of an upmarket Chiswick restaurant. “It’s all puffy chests and handbags, but when you hear people saying things like, ‘Come on you bastard,’ it sends the wrong message to the children.” Their moods perhaps cooled by the near-freezing temperatures (not to mention the presence of our photographer), the parents at Nursery Road today are displaying admirable restraint. There is not the remotest indication that fisticuffs might ensue, and voices are kept in check. “Referee!” comes the modest cry after one heavy tackle. “Hurry up!” calls another parent after the ball is slow to return to play as his son’s team desperately seek a winning goal. The only, admittedly mild, expletive to be heard in the air over Merton on this day comes from Rob Anderson, the coach of the under-10 B team, who suspects that an overdose of advent calendar chocolates has sapped the pace of his players. “Get to the bloody ball, Ryan, come on!” he shouts.

Elsewhere in the country, the scene is not so pretty. Touchline tyrants are not confined to inner-city clubs. In rural Somerset, there are reports of parents tripping up seven-year olds running down the wings, leading to fights. In Wiltshire recently, a father drove his Range Rover on to the pitch in protest against a referee’s call, refusing to back it off unless the decision was reversed. The game was abandoned. There are also independent, if unsubstantiated, reports from Liverpool of a parent pulling a gun at a youth game.

Jim White, a writer and the chairman of the Oxford youth football club Summertown Stars, says the problem is worst at games involving children aged six to 10, who play shorter, seven-a-side matches on small pitches. “I’ve been coaching my son’s team for eight years and, now he’s 16, you only get the occasional complaint about a line call,” says White, who chronicled countless weekends spent on the touchline in his book *You’ll Win Nothing with Kids*. White believes the reason is as simple as it is telling. “Many of the abusive parents disappear because their kids drop out of football. When my son started 11- a-side football, aged 10, there were 12 teams in our area. Now there are two, and I would say one of the principal reasons is that they are put off by the overwrought atmosphere on the touchline.” The worst case White has witnessed came during a summer tournament in which a new rule said that outfield players would concede a spot-kick if they entered their own penalty area. Soon enough, a puzzled seven-year-old defender put a foot wrong. “When the ref pointed at the spot, parents screamed abuse at this kid,” White says. “But nobody explained what he had done wrong, so, two minutes later, he did it again. This time, a parent came onto the pitch wagging his finger and calling the kid a ‘useless twat’. The boy stood for a moment, looking bewildered, and then ran off into a nearby copse and sat in a tree, refusing to come down.” White adds: “You can bet if someone’s shouting horrible things on the pitch, they’ll be having a go on the way home and over breakfast before the next match. The kid will associate that with football and pack it in. At least three kids at Summertown have given up because they’ve found it too intense on the touchline.”

As witnessed in Merton, mothers can be just as bad as fathers. “They can get very protective,” White says. “A linesman was knocked unconscious by a mother recently. I’ve seen incidents that look like an audition for *Macbeth*.” There is growing concern in the game that touchline abuse could be doing more to kids than turning them off football. “Sometimes it is nothing short of child abuse,” White says.

Kairen Cullen, an educational psychologist who has consulted in community football schemes, says the game should be a force for good. “Football teaches physical, cognitive, behavioural and social skills,” she says. “It provides an opportunity for children to prepare for life. “But if you’ve got adults with whom you are closely connected showing negative emotions on the touchline, that’s going to have a knock-on effect on the children, who need to feel confident and emotionally settled to develop well.”

Football was a different game when Sir Trevor Brooking, the former West Ham and England No 10, kicked a ball around the streets of Barking, Essex, where he grew up in the 1950s. “I used to come home from school, leave my bag and meet up with my mates round the corner for a couple of hours,” says the former BBC pundit. “We’d play five-a-side, six-a-side, or however many of us were there until it got dark and I wandered home. There were no parents watching us there, or at school, where we also played a lot of our football.”

In recent decades, thousands of primary schools have banned football on health and safety grounds, or to satisfy the prevailing notion that competition is damaging. Last May, a proposed “super school” in Peterborough hit the headlines when its head announced that the school’s £46m budget would include a wetland eco-pool, but no playground.

At the same time, apron strings have been tightened as fewer parents allow their children to play unsupervised in parks and street culs-de-sac, which, in Brooking's day, would buzz with the noise of gangs of children with scabby knees and scuffed shoes having a kick-around. But the end of the "jumpers for goalposts" era has not coincided with a drop in the popularity of football. Instead, it has forced soccer-mad kids into youth leagues organised by – and, some say, for the benefit of – parents.

"Football has taken over from a lot of other things," Jim White says. "I would imagine that there are far more kids playing football now than go to Scouts. Because more parents are getting involved, you are bound to find more dyspeptic loonies on the touchline." Across England, there are now about 67,000 Football Association-affiliated youth teams, for which almost 900,000 youngsters play every weekend.

Trevor Brooking, who was appointed the FA's head of development in 2003, agrees that parents who think they are offering encouragement can have a negative influence. "We all made mistakes in the games we had round the corner, but nobody was there to shout and tell us off, so we learnt by watching older boys or by practising against a wall. You improved without the scrutiny kids are under now." But White says that it is hard to stay calm when it's your child out there. "I've spent eight years fighting with bubbling fury every weekend," he says. "It's like your kid is a projection of yourself, but there's nothing you can do, so the only way to intervene is to shout. "I remember an incident when our goalkeeper had made about a dozen mistakes. I knew it was the worst thing possible to shout at a kid whose nerve had gone, so it built and built inside me. Then, when my own son made a mistake, I went mad at him and immediately regretted it."

For one group of soccer mums and dads, it's not enough to regret an inappropriate outburst – for them, losing one's cool is not an option. They are the parents whose children have been snapped up by one of the professional club academies. René Meulenstein, a former Dutch professional footballer and now the skills development coach at Manchester United, says the only sounds on the pitch at academy games are of kids playing football. "We have parents' evenings to explain that shouting and screaming on the line doesn't help. If they do it, they run the risk of having to take their kid away," he says. "That hasn't happened."

The irony of academy games, where results actually matter, being played in what Jim White calls "monastic silence" is not lost on those involved in youth football. But many people in the game blame the academy alumni – the Premier League footballers idolised by those kids on the playing fields of Merton – for fostering the aggressive atmosphere that ruins the game for so many children. "More and more, youth football resembles the Premier League. I call it the Premiership for tots," says Paul Cooper, a youth coach in Cirencester, who became so frustrated with what he calls the "adultification" of grass-roots football that he launched a campaign, called Give Us Back Our Game, in a bid to change it. "There's an advert for Ford, which goes out before Premier League games on Sky. It shows pro footballers, and then cuts to a mum at a mini soccer game going mental, punching the air when her son scores. And kids are wearing kits with sponsors' names on and playing in leagues published on websites. Youth football is almost packaged as an alternative to watching the Premier League, and touchline aggression is just one symptom of the problem."

Another is the way young players emulate their idols. "You see them copying their favourite players' celebration routines when they score a goal," says Ray Ward at Surrey FA. "I remember when Robbie Fowler 'snorted' the touchline after he scored some years ago; four youngsters did exactly the same thing in a local league the next morning."

Children watching the Match of the Day repeat with dad on a Sunday morning don't need to be trained lip-readers to make out what players or managers think of referees they disagree with, and many believe that filters down to the youth game. In 2003, Sedgley Scorpions, an under nine team in Birmingham, were rapped by the FA for sporting the slogan "stuffem, tankem, ammeram [sic]" on kit badges.

And it's often the referees who bear the brunt of the abuse. Last year, 7,000 referees threw away their whistles, leading to a national shortage of officials. As a result, youth games are often presided over by unqualified parents, or children as young as 15 whose age rarely protects them from reproach. "They're just as amateurish as the rest of us, but nobody gives them any leeway any more," says Jim White. "That's something young players and their parents pick up from the TV."

Desperate clubs have tried everything to curb the touchline tyrants, from roping off pitches to codes of conduct, but such tactics may not be enough. Paul Cooper is among a growing group of coaches and parents who think that the only solution is a radical overhaul of youth football. This, he says, would also improve the standard of the national game; something that the suits at FA headquarters are desperate to achieve as a summer without international football approaches.

Cooper is now devoted full-time to Give Us Back Our Game, which he launched in October 2006. He tours the country, preaching a new school of football which he hopes will transform the game. His approach amounts, in essence, to supervised street football. Children play on smaller pitches, often without goalkeepers, refs or substitutes. Teams are four or five-a-side and games last 10 minutes. In a morning, kids might play six or seven games in a round robin competition. There are no leagues for dads to pore over online or in the local paper. Nor are there forwards, midfielders or defenders (“At this age, it should be about positioning, not positions,” Cooper says), and if the ball creeps a foot out of touch, the kids, refereeing themselves, just play on. “It’s all about giving kids maximum time on the ball,” says Cooper, who believes this method should apply to children up to the age of 12. “It brings creativity back to the game and helps them to develop skills rather than just hoofing the ball up the field because they’re terrified of making a mistake.” Give Us Back Our Game fun days have taken place at schools and clubs all over the country, involving as many as 19,000 children. Cooper expects to double that figure this year.

Keith Gould, a coach at Sandhurst Town Boys & Girls FC in Berkshire, tried the system in a tournament last summer. “It was great, because the only pressure on the kids to win was the pressure they put on themselves,” he says. “I spoke to a few parents and they said they weren’t really needed any more. When you change the system, they don’t know what to do so they keep quiet. A lot of our parents sat around having picnics.”

One man looking closely at Cooper’s campaign, as well as other new approaches to youth football, is Trevor Brooking. With his colleagues at the FA, which governs organised football for children as young as six, Brooking is considering ways to improve the game and “take the intensity and pressure” out of youth football. “At the top of those discussions is parental and player behaviour,” he says. “Our top priority is setting a philosophy that says football has got to be fun.” Measures being considered at the FA include scrapping leagues for the youngest players; introducing smaller teams; improving coaching courses; using local newspapers to identify the best-passing or most-sporting team (“It’s not all about coming top of a league,” Brooking says); and making organised football more accessible. The FA cites surveys showing that more than a million young players who want to play for a team can’t, either because they don’t know where to find a club or because there are no facilities.

At Nursery Road, however, some parents are resistant to sweeping reforms. Paul Howlett is watching Wimbledon’s under-10 C team, who, as full time approaches, are pegging opponents Horley Town deep in their own half in a thrilling 1-1 draw. Asked if he approves of Cooper’s campaign, Howlett says: “It’s not what the kids want. They want to play for a proper team with a league, and pretend they’re a mini Arsenal or Chelsea.” Howlett’s son, Jordan, 9, speaking through chattering teeth after being substituted in a game that Wimbledon goes on to win with a last-minute deflected goal, agrees with his dad. “I prefer this because it’s like the real thing,” he says. “I used to play that kind of football and it was boring.”

But Brooking is adamant that if we are going to turn the national game around after England’s failure to qualify for Euro 2008, and bring the fun back to the football field, things will have to change. “You’ll get little groups that will resent it, but we have to get them to join in the transition to make them see the benefits,” he says. “We shouldn’t shy away from biting bullets to make sure that we all buy into what we’re trying to achieve. We’ve got to bring fun back to youth football.”

The Independent – 14 January 2008

**More on ‘Give Us Back Our Game’ in the next Issue**



## Middlesex County FA – County Cup Appointments – Season 2007/2008

### Youth Division Appointments

Under 18 Cup – Round 3

Whitewebbs Eagles F.C. U17	v	Princes Park Youth F.C. U17	Peter Jago (R)
Whetstone Wanderers Yth F.C. U18b	v	Whetstone Wanderers Yth F.C. U18	Michael Mackey (Jnr) (R)

Under 18 Cup – Quarter Final

Gladstone Rangers Youth F.C. U17	v	Whitewebbs Eagles F.C. U17	John Noblemunn (R)
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Under 15 Cup – Quarter Final

Park View Rangers F.C. U15	v	Actual Soccer F.C. U15	Barry Kyriacou (R)
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Under 14 Cup – Round 4

Whetstone Wanderers Yth F.C. U14b	v	Omonia Youth F.C. U14b	Stephen Reuter (R)
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Under 13 Cup – Round 4

Watling Club F.C. U13	v	Pitshanger F.C. U13	Barry Berndes (R)
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Under 12 Cup – Round 4

White Wings F.C. U12	v	Spartans Youth F.C. U12	Nicolaos Andrea (R)
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### Parent Body Appointments

Senior Challenge Cup – Quarter Final

Edgware Town F.C. First	v	Northwood F.C. First	Peter Smith (AR)
Enfield Town F.C. First	v	Hampton & Richmond Boro F.C. First	Michael Mackey (Jnr) (AR)

Senior Charity Cup – Quarter Final

Wembley F.C. First	v	Uxbridge F.C. First	Peter Smith (R)
Wealdstone F.C. First or Hillingdon Borough F.C. First	v	Harefield United F.C.	Michael Mackey (Jnr) (AR)

Intermediate Cup – Quarter Final

British Airways (Saturday) F.C. First	v	Northfield Shamrocks F.C. First	Paul Watts (AR)
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Sunday Premier Cup – Quarter Final

St Andrews F.C. First	v	Broadfields United F.C. First (Sunday)	Stephen Reuter (AR)
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Sunday Junior Cup – Semi Final

F.S.L. F.C. First	v	Hanworth Villa Sunday F.C. 3 <sup>RD</sup>	Stephen Reuter (R)
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Sunday Junior Trophy – Round 4

Broadway United F.C. First	v	Athletico Town F.C. First	John Noblemunn (R)
Oakwood United F.C. First	v	Bridgehill F.C. First	Paul Fuller (R)

## Amateur Football Association – County Cup Appointments – Season 2007/2008

### Parent Body Appointments

Senior Novets Cup – Quarter Final

Albanian F.C. Fifth	v	Bealonians F.C. Fifth	Les Kyprianou (R)
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### Bridge Rovers FC

Society Secretary, Robin Jagot, has received a plea for referees from Bridge Rovers FC who are looking for officials on Saturdays for Under 13's and Under 12's.

Bridge Rovers play at Park View Rd N17, near Tottenham Hale. Fee is £35.00.

Anyone interested should contact Catherine Duah by email at [CatherineDuah@aol.com](mailto:CatherineDuah@aol.com) who will send details of match dates by return.



## North Middlesex Referees Society - 100 Club - Season 2007/2008

The December 2007 and January 2008 draws for the 100 Club – for which there were 38 shares subscribed - were made at the January Society Meeting. Details of the winners are shown below.

	First		Second		Third		
Dec 11	Charles Lifford	£15.20	36	Malcolm Sonenfeld	£7.60	2	Gary Cobden £3.80
Jan 28	John Faithfull	£15.20	16	Max Lea	£7.60	13	Adam Yuchatel £3.80

Cheques for the winners are included with the Magazine; if you receive your magazine by e-mail, the cheques will be sent under separate cover. If you would like to join the 100 Club, please complete the form below, and return it to me.

### NORTH MIDDLESEX REFEREES SOCIETY 100 CLUB

I wish to purchase.....share(s) in the NMRS 100 Club at £1.00 per share per month.

Please find enclosed my cheque/postal order for £...00 to cover the subscription for 7 months.

Renewal information will be included with next seasons Membership Form

Name..... Signature.....

Society Use - Numbers Allocated.....

**Gary Cobden**  
**Honorary Treasurer**



### News

(From the North Middlesex Referees' Society website)

#### Welcome to the North Middlesex Referees Society web shop.

Here's a great way to get some fantastic online bargains, find cheaper gas and electricity services and even book a holiday. Remember, anything you buy through our webshop will help towards our fundraising targets.

So go on, top up your CD/DVD collection, or, if you're making business purchases, why not make them from our webshop? For example, you can buy computer equipment, great value broadband or stationery from Eurooffice. There's also plenty of offers on DIY products, clothing and lots more from big high street names.

Use the search facility to compare a product name (e.g. kettle) with all of our retailers to help you find the best price.



**See our full-page feature on the web shop elsewhere in the magazine. Ed.**