

THE ART OF REFEREEING

Words of Advice from John Street

There is a very well known expression in the world of Billiards and Snooker and that is "A good referee is never seen" and that should be one of the most important aims of any aspiring referee. There is more to becoming a good referee than knowing the Rules backwards. You'll not be popular if, when you are refereeing, you keep getting in the player's way or in his 'line of sight'. Positioning and the ability to 'read' the game are among the many extra skills you will need to master. In the following pages I will try to explain some of the fundamental details to the art of successful refereeing and pass on some of the little tips I have picked up during the last 40 years of refereeing. Before I start let me make one thing clear and that is that this is the way I carry out the duties of a referee, you do not have to follow my advice to the letter, but it seems to have worked for me.

I am going to assume that you have at least passed your Class 3 referees examination so you should have a reasonable understanding of the Rules. However, do not think you know it all because you are more than likely to get a rude awakening at some time or other. The Rules of Billiards and Snooker are very complicated and even now, after all the years that the games have been played, a situation can crop up which is not strictly covered in the Rules. In the past, interpretations of Rules could differ greatly between referees and you only had to get a group of them together discussing a rare incident that happened and listen to all the arguments that went on to understand my point.

My first piece of advice is keep reading the Rules and do not be afraid to ask for help from other referees, especially if they hold a higher class certificate than you. Better still, ask an examiner. Any of these people would be only too pleased to pass on the knowledge that they have gained over the years. Examiners, in particular, are not examiners for nothing and they are usually people who have had years of experience regarding the Rules. Never be afraid to ask for advice.

Let's start from the very beginning. When you are asked to referee a match of any kind, first inquire as to the type of clothing you are expected to wear whilst officiating. Remember, first appearances are important. If it is required that you wear a blazer and grey slacks, always wear a tie with some sort of tie clip. It looks very bad to see a referee spotting a ball with his tie dangling over the table and touching a ball or balls. Never referee in an open neck shirt! I always think that black shoes look best with grey socks. White socks are definitely out! If you should be required to wear an evening suit then its bow tie, black socks and shoes (evening dress shoes if you have them). I personally do not like to see a handkerchief sticking out of the top pocket of the coat, but that is purely a personal choice.

Confirm what time the match is due to start so that you can arrive at the venue in plenty of time to make sure that everything is in order. Inquire who the players are, how many frames or how long the match is over and if there is to be an interval. Also, will the table be ready for play when you arrive, i.e. brushed and ironed?

The Tools of the Trade

Before you set out for the venue check and double check to make sure that you have everything with you that you may be going to need. The 'Tools of the Trade' for a referee are:

1. Two pairs of White Gloves (the extra pair in case of accidents) and these must be cotton. The use of gloves made of polyester or any other synthetic fibre should be avoided as they do not give a good grip of a ball. A useful tip is never use a new pair of gloves until they have been washed first.
2. At least one Ball Marker and there are many on the market, which one you prefer to use is a matter of individual choice. Most ball markers are designed to be the width of a ball with a means of being able to also measure half that width. The purpose of the ideal ball marker is three-fold, assisting you to check for a possible 'free ball', to see if a ball will spot when there are other balls in close proximity and to mark the position of a ball preparatory to cleaning it. The last of these ensures that the ball goes back in exactly the same place as it was before you removed it.
3. A coin which has a head on one side and a tail on the other and remember which pocket it is in. You will look ill prepared if you have to go searching through your pockets for it or, worse still, if you have to ask the players or a spectator for one.
4. An up to date Rule Book. Of course, you will not be referring to it during play but a player may ask you a question before play starts, during the interval or after the end of the match and ask you to show him the Rule in the book.
5. A pen and notebook in case you have to make a note of the position of the balls if the match should have to be stopped for any reason. These items would become very important if you should be refereeing a session of a Billiard match which was going to be continued later.
6. Tailor's Chalk or a special pencil (which marks in white) in case the spot markings become faded during the match. An HB pencil in case the table is marked in black. A cube of billiard chalk will also be useful for preparing the long cues.
7. Two small towels or cloths which must be of a non-fluffy (i.e. lint-free) material for cleaning the balls. At the venue one will be dampened while the other remains dry.
8. A Tape Measure for a pre-match check that the spots, Baulkline and radius of the "D" are correct. It will also be necessary if there should be an interruption in the game and the positions of balls have to be noted. If you have your own triangle and any extensions, take these as well.
9. White cards (and a thick felt-tip pen) for the players' names and Blu-Tack to fix the name cards to the scoreboard.

Remember, appearance is very important to the players involved. It may be 'just another match' to you but to the players it may be their big moment, their first final or whatever.

Pre Match Preparation

Every referee should do his own basic checks on the table so that the players get the best match conditions available. Get to the venue in plenty of time and check everything out. The first task is to check that the table has been brushed and ironed and if it is not, get something done about it! While this is being done, check the equipment provided at the table. It always gives the players and spectators a better impression if the table is ready for play when they enter the room. Make sure you know where all the equipment is. There is nothing worse than a player asking, for instance, for a spider rest and you have to go looking for one. I always set up the table equipment in the same way. Looking from the baulk end of the table the half butts go on the left hand side hooks and the longer full butts on the right and in both cases the rest heads and cue-tips are at the top end of the table. Check that this equipment has tips on the cues, chalk them and see that the rest heads are firmly fixed on. There should be a cross rest at each end of the table on the hooks provided and, once again, check that the heads of these rests are firmly fixed on.

Once the table is finished check the following and if anything is faulty or incorrect put it right if at all possible:

1. Table measurements, correct marking of the spots, Baulk-line and the "D".
2. All the spots by rolling a ball onto them making sure that it stays on each spot without rolling into any indentations in the cloth.
3. Pocket nets and rails, for damage and security of fixing.
4. Hooks that hold the rests, for security of fixing to the table.
5. The table lights, for sufficient brightness.
6. That there is no furniture or seating for spectators too close to the table and thus likely to interfere with play.
7. That arrangements have been made for seats so that the players can sit down, and that they will have a table, drinking water, a glass, ashtrays and cloths for cue-cleaning provided.
8. Check the scoreboard/s are working and put up the name cards of the players.

Wash the match balls with plain warm (not soapy) water. Dry them with a non-fluffy cloth and put them in their box. This should be the last time that you handle the balls without your gloves on.

As the time for the match draws near, take the box of balls to the table. Don't put the box on the cloth-if you must put it down, do so on the cushion rails near a corner pocket. When setting up the balls, don't drop the reds into the triangle-group them together by the top cushion and place the triangle over them. Unless you have the custom type triangle with rollers (as used on TV) lift the triangle slightly from the bed of the table and roll the reds into position. Place the triangle where it can be easily found at the start of the next frame (or reset) but never put it on the light shade as it could be dislodged during play and damage the cloth and/or disturb the balls. Roll the colours onto their spots starting with Black. Pink comes next but don't spot this from the top of the table by stretching over the Reds. It is impossible to see from this position if Pink is correctly on its spot and there's a good chance of disturbing the Reds if you ignore this advice. Always spot the Pink from the side of the table. The way I carry on from there is to spot Blue next, then Brown, Green and Yellow. Once I have finished spotting all the balls I check from the side of the table that the baulk colours are in a straight line, and then I do a final check from the baulk end that all the balls on the centre line of the table are also in line, including the three Reds on a line through the middle of the triangle. Then place the cue-ball against the bottom cushion so that the striker can pick it up easily. Once the first frame has finished, it is best if you keep the cue-ball with you while setting up the balls for subsequent frames as this will prevent an overzealous player from breaking off before you are ready.

Now for the rest of the equipment, spider and extended spider rests etc. Once again, check all the heads are firmly on and place the rests under the table at the baulk end with the heads facing you. This saves you from getting on your hands and knees to see which is which when a player asks for a particular one. Again, there is an accepted order in which they are laid out:- reading from left to right it is Extending Rest (if there is one), Spider, Swan Neck, Extended Spider. Extensions should also be placed under the table at this end, and they are customarily placed at the left, before the extending rest. The laying out of the equipment in the manner laid down here may seem a bit fussy but there is a very good reason for advocating that everyone should use the same setting-up procedure. If the referee is suddenly taken ill and has to be replaced at short notice, the person who takes over will know where all the equipment is without having to look for it. Here's how it should look:

That's the table ready for play. Now check the scoreboard and put up the names of the players. Finally, make sure there is a chair for each player to sit on and a table for them to put their drinks, etc. on.

During the Match

The audience is a necessary and important part of billiards and snooker. The referee should endeavour to keep spectators aware at all times of the state of the game and, if necessary, call for order and good behaviour in the interests of both players and (other) spectators. Now for the match itself, and it is important to remember that 'the referee shall be the sole judge of fair and unfair play and be responsible for the proper conduct of the game under these Rules'. A referee is not only in charge of a match but must be seen to be in charge. A 'couldn't care less approach' will undermine the referee's authority in the eyes of the players and spectators.

Introduce yourself to all the players involved and inform them of any information that may be relevant about the table. For example the cloth may have been recently stretched and the previous Baulkline can still be seen. If this should be the case, in order to avoid any confusion point out to the players which is the official Baulkline. Shake hands with both players and wish them luck. If they fail to shake hands with each other, quietly ask them to do so (they may be so keyed up they just forgot). Ask one of them to call either 'Heads' or 'Tails' as you toss a coin in full view of both of them but not over the table. Tossing a coin above the table is a dangerous practice. If you fail to catch it cleanly, it could cut the cloth. Ask the winner of the toss if he is going to break or let his opponent go first. Then you can turn to the audience and make an announcement along the lines of 'Quiet, please, ladies and gentlemen' or 'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen' to get their attention. Then introduce both players by name, one by one, followed by the description of the match, something like 'This is a second round match in the English Snooker Championship and is the best of nine frames. There will be an interval of 15 minutes after the fourth frame. John Smith has won the toss and will break'. When you first see the players in action ascertain if either or both is left-handed. This will help you in your positioning during the game and help you identify danger spots when that player is at the table. When you move around the table always walk at a reasonable pace, never hurried.

When calling out the score do not shout. If there are only a few people watching there is no need to use more than just a normal speaking voice. If it is a large crowd then make sure most, if not all, of the audience can hear you. There is no specific time to call out the scores, just when you think it is necessary but there is one point to remember here and that is that some of the spectators may not be able to see the scoreboard. If this is the case then you should call out the scores on a more regular basis. When you do decide to call out the scores choose your opportunity very carefully. There is no point in calling them out when the audience is applauding, no-one will hear you. Never call out the scores when a player is on his stroke! To keep audience and players aware of the state of the scores, call them between the end of one player's turn and the beginning of another Call the incoming striker's name

and score first, then the other side's. Never get into the habit of calling one player or side 'Spot' and the other 'Plain' no matter how informal the game may be.

During a break, you call the score when a player pots a Red and all the balls have come to rest. However, when the player pots a colour after a Red, re-spot the colour first and then call the score. This will let the player know you have done this and that everything is in order for him to carry on with his break. If the striker asks what the scores are during a break, inform him of the scores at the beginning of his break and then tell him how many he has scored in the break. It must be left to him to do the addition (although the players on the pro circuit have scoreboards which show the state of the scores, including the current break).

When a player verbally declares a ball he intends to play after potting a Red or a free ball as a Red, or after being given a free ball, or a touching ball when on a colour, or just to distinguish between colours close together, it is good refereeing practice to repeat the nomination. This not only confirms to the player that the referee is aware of his intention, it also keeps the spectators informed as well.

Try to keep the pockets clear at all times and do not let them fill up with Reds. This applies mostly to the two top pockets, particularly when a player is on a Red-Black, Red-Black break. As soon as convenient remove the Reds to another pocket. If possible, take out the first Red the player pots and put it in one of the baulk pockets which are less likely to fill up. This is quite easy to do without making a big show of it. All you need to do is re-spot the Black with one hand and, at the same time, collect the Red with the other. With practice this can be done smoothly and automatically with no one realising it has been done. By doing this you greatly reduce the chance of getting into a position during a frame where the player, in the middle of a break, has to stop and ask you to clear the pocket. Sometimes of course, it is impossible to clear the pocket in the manner suggested but that is the exception rather than the rule.

When you have a Red or Reds in your hand, try to dispose of them as soon as possible by placing them in the runners of the pockets (if the table is fitted with them). One of the worst things you can see is a referee walking around the table dropping balls into pockets. Disposing of balls quickly also reduces the chance of dropping one on the floor or being caught with your hands full of Reds by a player asking for the half butt or another piece of equipment. It looks very bad when you are caught standing there with two or three Reds in your hands which you have to dispose of before you can hand the player the equipment he requires.

However, if you do get caught out in this, or any other situation, DO NOT PANIC. Just act calmly and cover the situation in the best way you can and this will help you keep the confidence of the players.

When balls have to be spotted, give each ball a quick clean first. Extreme care must be taken at all times when spotting a ball and the best way to do this is to place it close to its spot and gently roll it on. Never bang a ball down as this will soon wear a hole in the cloth. Remember, it must go on the spot and not be touching any other ball when it is in position. If you are in the slightest doubt whether it will spot correctly or not, check the position with your ball marker. There is nothing worse than seeing a referee spot a ball, call the score and stand back, thereby indicating to

the player that everything is correct, and then the player asks the referee to check if it is correctly spotted, whereupon the referee then checks the spot, finds the ball will not spot correctly and has to put it somewhere else. This is very bad refereeing. MAKE SURE FIRST. It only takes a couple of seconds to do. Finally, a last comment on spotting balls is, do not put your other hand on the table while doing so. The reason for this is that referees and players seem to spend a great deal of time picking bits of dirt or fluff off the table during a match. Why increase the chance of you being the guilty party by placing your free hand, which may have picked up some foreign matter, on the table.

In a touching ball situation, it is the generally accepted practice now (if there is more than one ball that could be the touching ball) for the referee to point to the touching ball or balls as he calls

'Touching ball' so there can be no doubt in the striker's mind as to which ball or balls he must play away from.

A good referee should always be able to 'read' the game and try to anticipate what stroke the player is going to play next. By being able to do this the referee can take up his position for the next stroke without too much trouble and this is where knowing if a player is left- or right-handed comes in useful. There is no specific place for a referee to stand, it depends on the type of stroke the player is about to play. Always try to stand behind the player for every stroke and never in his sight unless absolutely necessary. By standing behind the striker you are able to see if he is applying 'side' to the cue-ball when trying to hit a ball 'on' from a snookered position. This information may help you gauge the difficulty of the stroke in the event that he fails to contact the ball 'on' and it will help you decide whether or not a Miss should be called.

If you do have to stand in the player's line of vision, and it sometimes happens, stand very still with your hands behind your back. A golden rule is 'follow the cue-ball' and although it may mean a lot of walking about it is better than having a player ask you to move out of his 'line of sight'. Never stand at any time with your hands folded in front of you as white gloves can be very distracting! Try not to stand too long or too often in one particular place, and do not hold any conversations with members of the audience or laugh. It goes without saying I hope, that there will be no smoking or drinking by the referee during the match, apart from a sip of water if needed. Don't smile! You would be amazed at the number of times I have seen it happen.

Always be ready to hand a player a rest if he asks for it and be ready to take it from him when he has finished with it. I make an exception to this practice when the player has potted a colour after a Red. To keep the game flowing in this instance, I would let him replace the equipment himself as I would be on my way to retrieve the ball from the pocket to spot it. This would only apply of course to the normal cross rest. If he had used one of the specialist rests (spider, etc.) or the half or full butts then I would take these from him first before spotting the colour. When replacing any equipment in the hooks, try to replace them quietly. When a player hands the rest back to you, replace it in its hooks immediately - or as soon as possible without distracting the striker. Do not stand or walk around the table holding it like a staff of office! When handing any equipment to the striker, or when taking it back, never do so over the table. Always carry out this service away from the table because accidents can, and do, happen.

It is the player's responsibility to both place and remove rests from the table, but there is no need to be stupid about this rule. The referee is there to help the game flow, not to be pedantic about things. If it is obvious that the player is going to need the cross rest for a stroke, there is nothing wrong with the referee getting it and putting it on the table. This is not 'assisting the player' it is just using common sense! It is then up to the player to put it in the position he wants it in order to play the stroke. When he has played his stroke invariably the player will pick the rest up and pass it back to the referee. However, sometimes the player will just walk away and expect the referee to remove it from the table for him. This only happens when there are no balls in the vicinity of the rest and the player would not make a foul. Once again there is no reason why the referee should not remove it. If the rest should be set near or in the middle of balls such that when it is removed there is a chance that a foul may be committed, this is an entirely

different situation. In these circumstances if the player should leave it there, expecting or asking the referee to remove it, the referee is fully within his rights to ask the player to remove it.

There are occasions when the referee needs eyes in about five different places at the same time. A player may be stretching on tip-toe on one leg with the other leg on the table. His waistcoat is nearly touching one ball and his sleeve and cuff are hanging perilously close to other balls. His bridge hand is very near another ball and to make matters worse he is playing a very thin stroke. What I do in this type of situation is decide in my own mind which of these is the most likely to cause him to make a foul, and this is the one I concentrate on as he plays his stroke. It is impossible for a referee to look everywhere at once. The nice thing about billiards and snooker players is that, if they know that they have committed a foul and the referee has not noticed it, the striker will own up.

Never clean any ball while holding it over the table because, if it slips from your hand (and it can happen), you could be in a lot of trouble if it falls on the table and hits balls, scattering them. It is far better to mark the position of the offending ball with your ball marker, pick the ball up and take a step back away from the table and then clean it. If you drop it then it will only fall on the floor out of harm's way. And you did remember to check the position of the ball before marking its position, didn't you? One final point is worth remembering-never run your back on the table while the game is in progress. That way, you should never miss anything that might matter. If you have to move away from the table, do so in a manner that allows you to keep the table in view.

After the Match

At the end of the match, shake hands again with the players. \

Con-gratulate the winner/s and commiserate with the loser/s.

Then don't forget to collect the balls before someone collects a souvenir!