

Refereeing football matches involving deaf players

NDCS uses the word 'deaf' to refer to all levels of hearing loss. It is estimated that there are more than 10 million deaf or hard of hearing people in the UK. More than 45,000 of these are deaf children and young people. Therefore it is likely that you will come across deaf players when officiating matches. We've put together this guide to support you.

Practical Support

General

- Deaf footballers can take a full and active part in mainstream football matches. **No rule adaptations** need to be made from the laws of the game as laid down by the FA and FIFA.
- Before making any changes to the way you referee, ensure you talk these through with the young person and their manager. Some young players may not want you to change anything.

Before the match

- Always ask the deaf young person how they would like you to communicate with them. Deaf young people use different communication methods, so make sure to ask them about their preferred method.
- Ask if there are any ways you can support the young person during the match. Some young people won't want you to change anything, while others may give you tips on how you can help them.
- Talk to the young person directly, even if they have someone, such as a parent, relative or friend, with them who can support communication between you. If all else fails, try writing down what you want to communicate.

During the match

- Have a brightly coloured flag or bib on the pitch which you can use to signify a stoppage in play. Simply raise the flag at the same time as blowing the whistle.
- Ask the assistant referees to raise their flags when the whistle is blown. If the young person is facing away from you they may see an assistant's flag.
- Ask coaches, team managers and even opposition players to raise their hand when the whistle is blown.
- Be patient if the player does not react to the whistle or instructions immediately; they may not have heard or understood if they are busy concentrating on the ball.
- Use visual representations of what actions are required (for example, simulating a throw in). Many players understand the basic signals all referees use.
- Ensure the deaf player is looking directly at you and you have their attention before talking to them. Position yourself where they can see your face clearly.
- Again, if needed, write information down for the deaf player to read.

Hearing technology

FA guidelines

Official FA guidelines state that players are permitted to wear hearing technology during football matches. The decision on whether to wear a hearing aid during a match is up to the player and their parents, not the referee.

It is generally accepted that children can use their aids when playing sport, provided they are comfortable and securely fitted. If a parent is in doubt, please advise them to ask their audiologist (hearing specialist) for further advice.

The above guidance takes into account the referee's responsibility under Law 4 of the Laws of the Game. Should a device of this nature become loose when playing, then the referee should request the player to leave the field of play in order for it to be made secure.

Wearing hearing aids during matches

Hearing aids are sensitive pieces of electronic equipment and risk being broken if they fall out of the ear during vigorous activity. For this reason some deaf people will choose to play without their hearing aids. However, others prefer to wear their hearing aids, particularly if they play in mainstream teams so that they can hear instructions or calls from team mates.

Wearing cochlear implants and bone anchored hearing aids during matches

Having a cochlear implant involves having a receiver package implanted under the skin behind the ear and an external package that is worn similarly to a hearing aid. The main risk with sport is suffering a blow to the head on or around the site of the internal package, which risks damaging the package or the skin around the area. Although the risk is very small, this could mean that it becomes necessary to have repeat surgery to replace the package. Like hearing aids, the external equipment is sensitive and risks being broken if it falls off during a match.

Children who have recently had cochlear implant or bone anchored hearing aid surgery are advised against playing football until the operation site has fully healed (approximately six weeks).

All of the above varies from child to child. Some children may wish to wear their hearing aids, while others may not. Some children wear protective headwear, such as a rugby scrum cap, to protect their hearing aid. It is important to recognise every child is different.

Do's and don'ts for communicating with deaf players

Do

- Speak clearly and naturally.
- Get a player's attention before speaking to them. Wave or tap their shoulder lightly to gain attention.
- Use body language and gestures.
- Write things down if necessary.

Don't

- Speak too slowly or shout – this will distort your lip patterns.
- Stand with your back to the sun or a window – this can turn your face into a shadow and make it harder to lipread.
- Give up. If stuck, try explaining in a different way or write it down.
- Make assumptions. Some deaf players will speak, others will use sign, some will do both. Likewise, some players may be able to hear the whistle whilst others will not. It is important that you establish the individual needs of the player before the start of the match.



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