

## **Ten point plan for inspecting the field of play during the winter months**

It's that time of the year when the weather takes its toll on football fixtures up and down the country and when we as referees need to be aware of what to do if we are called in to inspect the field of play.

With this in mind, it is important for us as Referees to make the ultimate decision as to whether a game of football should be played or not. It is a decision that we will have to face at some stage during the course of our career so here is a ten point plan for you to use as a guide for when you are required to inspect a field of play;

### **1. Do your homework**

Have a look the day before your game at the forecast and anticipated conditions that will lead up to our kick off. There are regular updates in the media and there are plenty of websites on the internet that will give you accurate up to the minute information.

### **2. Be Proactive - Pick up the phone and make contact**

It will normally be the responsibility of the home club to confirm the fixture with the Referee, but don't be afraid to make initial contact if the weather is already looking uncertain and ask them what their plans are in terms of ground inspections. What is the current condition of the field of play? Do they use a local Referee to complete their inspections to avoid unnecessary travel for you, your colleagues and the away team? Remember, as the Referee you are the leader and sometimes it will be you that has to take the initiative. If you are required to complete the inspection, ask the home club what time somebody will be at the ground to meet you.

### **3. Get to the ground early**

Be prepared to inspect the field in appropriate clothing. By being prepared it will allow you to complete your inspection more realistically, so pack your boots, a tracksuit, and a match day

coat. Make sure where possible you get to the ground before the players and Managers get there – the fewer the people present the easier your situation becomes.

#### **4. Think Ball!**

Before you walk out onto the field of play, remember to take one out with you. Consider how you as a Referee can sell to the people watching that a ball will not roll, it won't bounce and it simply sticks in the puddles and the mud if you did not have a ball!? The ball is an invaluable tool for you to have and quite often by using the ball effectively it will publicise the judgement of whether or not the game can be played even before you do!

#### **5. Every Blade of Grass**

Don't just consider the main activity areas (Centre circle and penalty areas) the fact is, that the game will potentially be played on every single blade of grass and it's therefore important that we survey the entire playing surface before deciding.

Don't forget to ensure that it is not just the areas that the 22 players will also operate – remember to ensure that the perimeter lines are also fit for our assistant referees to operate on throughout the 90 minutes, their safety is paramount,

#### **6. Not just the field of play**

Some of the games that you will referee will take place within Stadia where there is terracing, a covered standing area or maybe some form of seating. As a referee in conjunction with the club, you will have to check that these areas are fit and safe for spectators to watch the game.

In addition especially as you go further up the refereeing pyramid you will also have to consider travel for those involved, what are the access roads like, what are the conditions

like that they will face when they try to return home? All of these areas are equally important.

### **7. What about the Temperature?**

In freezing cold conditions remember that the temperature will so often begin to drop after midday. It's important to understand this specifically when you are completing inspections before midday – what might seem playable now may be a very different story at 3pm. Remember the weather forecast, its conditions, and anticipated temperatures.

### **8. Do it on your own....or with your team**

As the Referee, you will need an open and clear mind when you are undertaking a pitch inspection. When you arrive people will undoubtedly give you their input and opinion and on occasions, this can be really helpful so don't dismiss that – after all, there is nobody that knows their pitch like the groundsman so don't be afraid to absorb their early thoughts. After this politely ask that you be given some time alone or with your team so that you can survey the field of play for yourself. You will be amazed how professional you will look at people when they are trying to form an opinion of you.

### **9. Think Safety not Farce!!!**

The most important area you need to consider above all when making your final decision is; Am I satisfied that this field of play and surrounding areas pose no risk or place any player in danger? If you have any doubt then the game must be postponed.

Secondly, if I decide to play this game then whilst it may pose no risk to me or the players will it develop into a farce? Even if people are not paying to watch the game if the conditions are such that the players cannot show their skills because of the state of the field then it looks silly and you as Referee could lack credibility if you continue.

**10. The decision is made – communicate it with confidence and strength.**

In our role as referees, we make hundreds of decisions during the course of a game. Some of them are popular and readily accepted some of them aren't.

Field of play inspections are no different and there will always be somebody somewhere that disagrees with your decision. However, make sure that you communicate with confidence, explain your thought processes, highlight the risk areas if you are postponing a game and reiterate the importance of player safety and avoiding farcical conditions.

Finally, whilst the responsibility often falls with the home club be prepared to communicate your decision to the league, the away team and your colleagues if they are not with you at the time – this way there is no risk of anybody not receiving information from the home club.

If you require any further support or assistance on how you should carry out your inspections at any of your games please do not hesitate to contact your local County Football Association Referee Development Officer – they will be only too happy to assist.

Enjoy the rest of your season

Roger Vaughan

Referee Development Officer