

Hary Milas from Refsworld Interviews Mr. Mario van de Ende 01/03/2009

Refsworld:

Mario, in your opinion, what makes a professional referee?

Mario:

I want to act as a real professional and sometimes that's not always an easy job because you always have to try and find the balance between working, social life and refereeing life.

This season I was so surprised. We received an email from one of the referees that had called off a game because one of his daughters was having a birthday.

Compare this with the players; you know some players are away New Years Eve for instance. It is a part of the job.

This mentality I don't understand because when you want to be a top referee and you want to be at the top of your career, you're looking forward to every match and sometimes it's a kind of offer you have to bring.

Another example is a referee or an assistant referee, they came to the match without gear because there was a strike at the airport and they didn't receive their luggage. That's not an excuse. The most important things are your tools. When I ask a carpenter to come to my house to fix something and he doesn't bring his own tools, it's not like I can provide them for him.

I think working with the game and feeling the game, they have to spend more time becoming a better referee.

Refsworld:

Is this attitude something that you have found in Australia?

Mario:

No it's not only in Australia. It's in many countries. As long as you don't have professional referees, you have to make the best of it. On the other hand they also receive a good amount of money for the matches. In my opinion when you sign a contract with the federation you always must be available.

Refsworld:

I agree, that should be your focus.

Mario:

Yes, the Football Federation of Australia (FFA) offers you the opportunity to organise the game and be on the stage. Being more professional is not only thinking that you are a good referee but also acting like one.

Refsworld:

What do you mean about acting professionally?

Mario:

On the field it means that we have to give the input and we have to have knowledge of the game.

What's in the player's mind, what's happening in the dressing room, what's happening with the share holders?, evaluate the whole environment?

Referees must be aware that we are a part of the football world.

I always say that the football world is one big machine and the refereeing is an important part.

The machine can't work missing a part. That's the type of mentality and I'm not saying that it's not easy as we've had some very good examples this year of excellent refereeing, but of course everyone makes mistakes and they don't do it deliberately.

At least after the match they can say that they made a mistake.

They can say I didn't see it or I did it wrong but your approach must be professional.

The game needs good referees.

When you want to develop the game you must also develop your referees. It's a machine.

Refsworld:

You speak about the relationship of referees and coaches being part of the whole machine, the whole football game. You have suggested that referees should speak with coaches before the game. Has that happened in the FFA A-League?

Mario:

There is a pre match meeting but in my opinion there will always be a kind of rivalry.

I think we should break down this wall to make it a win- win situation.

Sometimes a coach can be very angry that a player is sent off, but there should always be a certain level of respect and also there is a way to communicate because it's very easy to say that the referee makes a mistake.

Even sometimes I see when a referee makes a mistake but we need to see why he has made the mistake.

Is it a wrong decision or was it a lack of concentration?

It is easy to point out a foul. My sister can also do this even though she has never refereed.

Speaking to the coaches' pre match is a way you can bring people together to make this a win-win situation.

Then all concerned will be closer.

Refsworld:

Would you encourage a referee to speak to the media after the match, not so much to explain his decision, but to shed some light on the way he was thinking at the time.

Mario:

I think that an explanation from the referees can solve a lot of problems in the newspaper or on television the day after.

He can convey his message. Not every referee is used to media attention and I think it would be beneficial for referees to do a media course over six weeks so that they can hold themselves and know how to present in front of a television camera or media crew.

Refsworld:

Do you have any advice to a young and up and coming referee who wishes to make a professional career out of refereeing.

Mario:

The first thing is that we always have to enjoy what we do. You also must be self critical on your own performances, your behaviour and your way of life.

I held a course two weeks ago and for the 29 participants I drew a picture of two mountains.

I put a flag on top of one of the mountains. I asked the young and talented referees, how are you going to reach the top?

. They all said step by step or go around and around to the top.

In my opinion, if you want to be a top referee you must go straight to the top.

The sooner the better. This is the mentality of a top sports person. Why waste your time.

You must also be strict and honest with yourself.

What are your strengths? Everybody can say I'm good, I'm good, I'm good. The top referees I have met around the world never talk about the negatives or the things to improve.

When I was a referee I always looked and tried to find the points where I can improve because these to me are the most important things. I know I'm good in the laws in the game.

When I had the exams on the laws of the game I always got 10 out of 10, because in my opinion this is standard. I always had good results because I spent a lot of time practicing. There are two elements of refereeing that are very important – reading and practicing. The other things are decision making, dealing with critics, dealing with negative decisions, your reliability.

This is determined by your own personal qualities. How is your communication with players?

. Some referees don't like to talk to the players. I think refereeing is about communication.

When you whistle everyone is watching you. You have to be very clear about your decision. You have to be clear to the player that that's your decision and it's final.

This action is not only just for the players but also for the coaches, the teammates, the spectators, everyone in the stadium.

This is not the easiest job in the world and you have to realise this when you start refereeing.

Refereeing can give you a lot of enjoyment, a lot of fun but also a lot of negatives. All these things make you grow, grow, and grow with personality.

Also you grow because every match is a challenge and believe me when you are sitting in the dressing room afterwards with good feeling after the match it makes your whole week. The only problem is when your last whistle has blown, your next match is already there, but if you only recognise your good matches you will never move forward, so you have to work on it and be honest and critical about yourself. Ask yourself - What can I improve?

Many referees want to be surrounded by many others, but it's a lonely job. You sometimes have assistants. Most of the time you're alone.

Your preparations are alone and if you don't like it then you have to ask yourself am I the right man in the right place.

Refsworld:

You speak about being self critical. Have you ever come off a game thinking – That was a terrible performance?

Mario:

Yes of course. I was very critical of myself. I always went into the details, because the details make the difference between a average referee and an excellent referee.

Anyone can read the book and anyone can train three, four, five or six times a week so they can all pass their physical test but now we come to the details.

How was your communications with players?

Can you deal with an improper decision?

Are you reliable?

How's your credibility?

Not only to yourself but also to the players. These kind of things are very important, but these individual things you can develop.

Of course one man that is an extrovert has less problems communicating to players than an introverted person but the introverted person may not be a bad referee.

They have to develop these things.

If the FFA can help with that, then we are on the right track.

Refsworld:

Mario what was your most memorable moment in your career as a referee?

Mario:

World Cup Qualifying Game 1998 - Group 2

Stadio Olimpico, Rome, Italy - Saturday 11 October 1997

After the match, between England and Italy in Rome. 0-0 result. Both teams hit the post in the last 4 minutes.

Everybody was mentally and physically dead. It was a high speed formula one race.

England at that time had qualified for the '98 world cup in France and Italy was coming into the playoffs.

After the game, both of the coaches, Glen Hoddle and Maldini Snr, the father of Paolo Maldini were both in the referee's room.

Also in there was De Livio, who I had just sent off, Vieri, Gascoigne, Seaman, Ince. They were all in my referee's room and in Italy the referee's rooms are very big.

There was a fridge in the room and I said to my assistant to offer them all a drink. We all sat down for ten minutes and they were not in a hurry to go to the press conference because they were all exhausted.

This was for me a highlight of my career.

The feeling to be together, my assistants, the players, the coaches.

During these 10 minutes, I had the feeling; this is what I trained for.

I had already refereed for 20 years but this moment was worth the whole 20 years. It had all come together at that moment. Not even during the game but after the game.

The respect, the relationship with the players.
It was perfect.
All the sweet and sour things - because it's not always a positive pathway to the top.
This was the time when I felt 100% accepted.
We were one group at that time.
This was my highlight.
I've officiated two world cups, two European cups, two European Super Cups. It's now history. It's good.
Now I can think back that I was a referee that has visited over 140 countries in the whole world. Every match is not only a challenge, but you get so much out of it.

Refsworld:

Mario, Where to from here?

Mario:

We are discussing to stay for another period at the FFA.
We will wait and see.
We are also bringing in other people into the FFA. Refereeing is growing so you must also grow as an organisation.
Because we have so many referees in Australia, it's very important that in Perth, in Tasmania, in Darwin, that they have the same education possibilities and that even in these places we can have 5 or 6 good referees that we can use in the future.
You never know.

Refsworld:

So the opportunities should be the same for everybody!

Mario:

Of course! It's a free country. That's why everybody wants to live here.
Everyone gets the same opportunities as everyone else.

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