



more so than some players, unfortunately. As the sport became professional some years ago, I believe the pressure was on for all referees to become more consistent than ever. Refereeing was going to be the most talked-about subject after any top match. "All we ask for is consistency," cries a critic.

The only possible way to make 50 referees 100% consistent is to have them all cloned into exactly one. Impossible! One interpretation of a breakdown isn't exactly like another. A reaction time isn't always like another. In fact, a referee's procedures are sometimes different, all due to us being human. A top player once said to me "you should ref what you see, not what you hear – and never guess." This has become my platform to refereeing the game of rugby.

As we know, there are now professional pathways and careers for both managers and coaches, and therefore a successful record throughout the grade is an advantage. In modern sport, it has more and more become 'the whistle-blowers' fault! Not the knock-on inside the 22 metre line, nor the deliberate offside causing a penalty in front, not the other infringements that make the game unsportsmanlike. The game is lost and won in 80 minutes. A game is not lost in one minute. That's rugby! It disappoints me to see still so much pointed at the whistle-blower, rather than the four hours spent each week training on correct methods and set moves. Come kick-off time a lot is forgotten. Some of the best training staff I've come across show no emotion, say little, ask the right questions. "We had eighty minutes." That to me is professionalism.

Media statements from coaches week to week is definitely beneficial to the public, but in the controversial games there are always two sides to the game. Referee comments could help clear areas of the game which were misunderstood and enlighten the public.

Counties Rugby in my opinion is some of the most demanding at times to referee, due to a diverse mixture of culture in the Counties area. Our ruck and tackle area produces rugby where counter-rucking plays a huge part of the game, where some other unions have a more clinical, non-contest approach around these areas, making it easier to referee I feel. Counties rugby from my opinion is unique in this area but during our N.P.C. competition sometimes I see we are hard done by, with some calls, but it is definitely improving with referees allowing confrontation in this area now. Referees in the Counties area this year are taking a firmer stance in some areas to try and help our ref and other players lift their game and get accustomed to how they will be refereed during the N.P.C. competition, which will hopefully be beneficial. I believe the captains are the most important players, and Counties have some good ones. I have a lot of respect for a player who has the team's respect and is able to lead under pressure. The ones who identify the sanctioned player - and deal with it! These guys are beneficial to a good game.

The sport still gets me excited. To be part of a game which flows consistently with some good tries scored; or an even, close nail-biter where you can feel the pressure. It all leaves me wanting more of the same the next Saturday.

If this is you, call 0800 REFEREE. ■

A Rugby Referee's - eye view

By Simon Brown

2.30pm: "Out in 30 seconds!" - the final word given to the team managers as they relay this to an anxious, psyched-up team inside their rooms.

2.33pm: Final check - whistle, cards, time – and out you go! Through a cheering tunnel of players who have just come off from the previous game. Out in the middle of the field teams huddle. You get a moment to scan. Two to three hundred loyal supporters arrive 25 minutes before and claim their patch of ground. Home side stand proud.

2.35pm: Emotion has peaked between players. It's WAR! You feel it! Pumped and ready to go, whistle in mouth. Everyone waits. An eerie moment. GAME ON.

Refereeing is one of those parts of the game that make it all worthwhile, an adrenalin rush that hooks you into a sport and makes the training and law exams all worthwhile. After playing rugby most of my younger days it became clear to me that the game of rugby was going to be a part of my life in my prime years as well - but as a referee. Ambitions were high, goals were set. But as I was going to find out, there was a dark side of rugby which had gone unnoticed to me.

I remember when I was a young boy, getting up at 3am to watch a test. Back then, the referee was hardly mentioned, never recognised. But as the game has progressed through the decades, he has become a huge part of the game due to new law changes and new reasons for ruling. This in some cases has put the referee into the limelight,