

# Drew's balancing act

Richard Eaton interviews Lee Drew about his new role as the PSA's director of referees and examines the issues he needs to tackle

A few years ago a leading British player with a provocative sense of humour invited the referee to dinner in the middle of a match after a decision about which he wanted to prolong the argument.

His satire attracted some laughs, but it also brought a conduct warning and the invitation, predictably, was never taken up. Now, at last, things are about to get more serious.

The personnel are different, as referees of that era have retired, so an invitation to their successors is coming not from a touring pro but a well-known player/coach/administrator, that man of many parts – Lee Drew.

The issues, however, will be the same. Drew has been made PSA director of referees and been asked to make improvements to squash's most controversial area, namely player-referee relations and attitudes to refereeing.

He is conferring with all interested parties – players, referees, the WSF, and perhaps the WSA as well – and in the process should receive some dinner invitations. Knowing Drew, the dialogues will not result in conduct warnings, even when they are not easy.

That will be important. Players and referees sometimes say similar things, while closer inspection shows they view them differently. Clarity, education and agreement on principles is the kind of sequence Drew will seek, but it will require insight, tact, diplomacy, imagination and good organisation.

"I've seen how many people are passionate about squash and want it to move forward," he said. "So many have come forward with suggestions. I can take them to the (PSA) staff for discussions.

"I also want to build a relationship with the WSF and help them as well. I hope I can add something.

"Having been a player, it may help my communication with players. Maybe my coaching role will have the same effect with coaches. I hope I can add perspective to what they do."

The political tripwire may have been avoided then. Control of refereeing is a province of the WSF, but the reaction of Rod Symington, the WSF referees' committee director, has been pleasingly



Lee Drew, the PSA's new director of referees

positive.

"Lee and I agree about the actual issues that occur in matches and need to be addressed, and we have begun to collaborate on measures to educate referees about those issues," he said. "I fully expect that there will be more positive developments in the near future."

So why is this initiative happening now? As far back as 2002 the IOC representatives at the Commonwealth Games warned about the undesirable image created for squash by arguments between players and referees.

A three-referee system followed. Since then the possibilities and rewards of television have become even greater, so delays in the action – whether contentious or not – are even more harmful to the sport. Indeed, BT recently indicated a need for rallies to have greater continuity if squash is to be attractive to their viewers.

Understanding the urgency of these issues has been enhanced by the PSA now having two experienced ex-professional players, Alex Gough and Lee

Beachill, in charge. There is a personal feeling as well as professional recognition that initiatives are overdue.

Drew already appears to be onside with the WSF. He may next need to create a fusion between referees' current interpretations and those of pro players.

Gough phrases it more strongly. "The main cause of the problem is that WSF referees feel the game should be refereed in a certain way, without input from players," he claimed.

"That's Lee's first task. He will get players' views and referees' views, showing them problem areas. Hopefully somewhere there is a balance where it starts to work."

To achieve this, Drew will create a video library with more than a hundred on-court situations – areas of complexity, such as players coming out and in from the top-left corner – and work to get agreements on interpretations.

Contentious situations in the women's game are sometimes different from the men's and much less frequent. Despite this, the WSA's leader designate, Tommy Berden, has

already expressed an interest in what Drew is doing.

The most important outcome of all this is that players should attempt to play the ball wherever possible, more often than some of them do now anyway. The aim is to develop their sense of responsibility in keeping play flowing.

Some matches can have as many as 80 refereeing decisions, a few even more. Squash as a spectacle has become more important than detailed justice about its traffic problems.

"Rather than just saying referees aren't very good, we want to be able to say the way you are playing isn't very good either!" Gough explained. "We want to influence players quite heavily in terms of attitude and in the way we play the game."

Highly-charged exchanges between players and referees in matches overflowing with adrenaline can be compelling viewing, provided the exchanges are brief. If that becomes the norm, squash's occupational hazard might become part of its special theatre instead.