

IN THE HOT SEAT

Squash Player asks Lee Drew some probing questions on refereeing in the modern game

Squash Player magazine has an attitude problem. We would like to see points won in play, not awarded by the referee. We think if you reward players for stopping, they will stop. We think that if the referees are awarding points, the players will work out how to win them.

We would like to see players 'make every effort' to play the ball (accepting minimal interference) and 'make every effort' to get out of the way.

We would like to see referees make fair decisions and we would like to understand them. Ideally, we would like referees to give clear directives so the players, spectators and TV commentators know what is going on.

To help us with this, we spoke to Lee Drew, head of World Squash Officiating, the joint body formed by both PSA and WSF to manage refereeing.

The body has several aims. One is to professionalise the sector, bring some money into it and create career pathways. Another is to develop consistency in training across the board. WSO has introduced training tools (online and in-person courses, match seminars and appraisals) to work with all stakeholders including national governing bodies.



Lee Drew

"We will soon have two player-specific courses that will have to be renewed every three years. This will be made mandatory for WSF events and will be part of the PSA membership requirement in the near future," explains Drew.

So the players will have to know the rules! Perhaps we are getting somewhere.

"The courses are available for anyone and will improve the squash experience for a player. They go through the common causes of interference," says Drew.

That will be excellent. And now to the questions.

SP: Readers comment that they do not understand refereeing decisions. What are the referees trying to do?

LD: The referees are aiming to encourage players to play the ball and clear the ball. They are looking to get the game and rallies to flow without players looking for decisions.

Doesn't it seem that when a player plays a loose ball, the incoming player may block their recovery and attempt to get a stroke?

The referees are being encouraged to make sure that the player has the time to be able to hit a shot and clear. If the incoming player moves early and holds them in, then they have created the interference and a stroke will not be awarded unless the shot is that loose that a stroke is the only possible decision.

What percentage of points are awarded by the referee?

Less than in previous years because there are now far fewer decisions per match than there used to be. The average at the recent World Championships were 15.5 decisions per match in the men's and 12.5 decisions per match in the women's.

Is it a policy to proportionally decrease the number of lets and proportionally increase the number of no lets and strokes?

The policy is to ensure the fair outcome of each rally according to the rules. A yes let should be a yes let, a no let a no let, and a stroke a stroke, according to the rules and situation. Yes lets have reduced in number

because previously you could hit a shot and stand on it and it would be either a yes let or a no let.

The problem is that some people see players as playing for points (no lets and strokes) and being rewarded for that. Doesn't it seem referees are rewarding stoppages?

It is important that referees identify when a player is looking for cheap points and manufacturing situations. The policy is to encourage players to make every effort to provide access and to make every effort to play the ball. We want players genuinely looking to play the ball and win points with their squash.

There is rarely any explanation of refereeing decisions to the players or the audience. For example, we are left wondering was the no let because it was a winning shot or did the player not make enough effort to play the ball?

Explanations are encouraged to be given when a player asks for the explanation, when a referee is giving a directive to solve a recurring issue, or when the video referee overrules the match referee. It aggravates players when explanations are given and they don't want one. Explanations will not be continuously given if a player is asking after every decision, as this can disrupt play.

When shots rebound off the side and back wall to near the half court line, the outgoing player is obliged to avoid interference and (make every effort to) provide the whole front wall for an opponent to hit to, but they rarely do so (see the Nouran Gohar v Hania El Hammamy incident at last year's British Open)...

The directive would be to inform the player who has hit the wide crosscourt that they need to clear the shot and that the appropriate decision should be made based on the variables according to the rules.