

**TALK BY ROBERT EVANS AT SSBRA MONTHLY MEETING,
OCTOBER 29, 2002**

I'm from Wales originally. I spent much of my life in Dallas. You know, the FBI is taking note of all foreigners, and I want to reassure everyone I've been a citizen in the United States longer than I've been a foreigner.

The theme of what I'm going to talk about tonight is: What is best for the players and the game?

And what I want to emphasize is that I started off as a player; when I was a kid in Wales I played in junior leagues, senior leagues, went to university, played in university, and so on. I came to the US, played in graduate school, played in Canada, I went to Dallas, and I thought that's the end of my football career, but within a week I was playing on a team, then I heard about the pro league that was starting, and so on. The fact is, I started as a player and that has colored everything about my refereeing. I've refereed some of the best players in the world, and my theme as a referee is always what is best for the players and for the game.

And so many referees, I think, get into refereeing and enjoy the authority of being a referee, and they forget that the reason they are there is for the players. I'll tell you a story to justify that: in northern England, in the winter, heavy fog settles all over everywhere. And on many public parks in big cities they have playing fields that have twenty soccer pitches, and they're back to back, side to side and all that. And there was one game going on in the thick fog--and the basic rule over there is that if you can stand on the goal line and see the halfway line, that's OK to play. It means the goalkeeper cannot see the entire end of the field; it doesn't matter as long as you can see half of it, which is generally more than the referee can see anyway.

So, anyway, there was this corner kick--and those games also were played without linesmen--I'll remind you that the United States is the only country in the world that has assistant referees at games involving players less than 14 years old. You will not see assistant referees anywhere in the world. So anyway, there's this game, you got this referee, and he's got a corner kick and it's from the far side, so he goes to the far post, and he looks across the goal and he sees another referee at the other post. And so he shouts at the guy taking the kick, "Heh, wait a minute, hold it, hold it," and he walks over to the other referee and says, "Excuse me, what are you doing here? I'm refereeing, and he's about to take this corner kick." He says, "No, no, no, I'm refereeing this game, where are you from?" So they have a little discussion, and they learn that both of them had been refereeing the same game for the previous ten minutes. And that's not the important point. What had happened was that the goals on two adjacent pitches were right close together, and at one corner kick the referee had accidentally drifted across to the next field and simply continued officiating. But the significant thing is that for ten minutes, on the other field nobody had been officiating and everyone was completely happy!

And that should tell you what your place in the game is: you're not the most important people in the game. And yet too many referees imagine that they are. So that's my perspective.

So let me ask a few questions: Why do you referee? (Several responses from audience.) You love the game. You can be a part of the game without playing. I always preferred to play the game. Do you ever get any confrontations when you referee? No? What's your secret? How much training do you do every week? (Again some responses.) Serious physical training to enable you to keep up with the players that you officiate. (Several members in the audience get to expound about themselves at length.)

The reason I'm asking this--I've been deliberately provocative because I believe that all the people that have answered the questions that I've asked--and I could have picked another dozen in the room--should not be doing games beyond under-15, because I don't think any of the individuals are capable of keeping up with players over that age. I say that because my focus is always on the players. I think it is wrong, at any time in the game, if a player turns around when a decision has to be made, and the referee is not [within] 15 yards away. And the fact is that I would say that probably 60% of the people in this room do not do regular training. And that's all right, that's fine if you want to do recreational soccer at fairly low levels of the game. But what I want to emphasize is that the higher you go in this game the more effort you've got to put into it, the more training you have to do in order to provide the service--and that's what we're doing here, we're providing a service--to the most important people in the game, and those people are the players.

Three weeks ago I rode in a charity bike ride, and I rode 100 miles in about 12 hours. Prior to that I had done 63 miles in four hours. It's a fair pace, it's a fair level of fitness, but I don't referee anymore because I am not capable of refereeing. My right knee is arthritic, it's finished. I've had a number of surgeries. But I know I could go out there and stand in the middle, I could wear my black and white badge, and players would say, "I know who he is, you know, fine, don't mess with him" and I could stand in the middle and blow my whistle and conduct the game, but it's not right, because I would not be giving the best officiating performance that all those players deserve when they are playing this sport.

So, in the car on the way over we were talking about referee associations. And I asked the question, "What is the association doing to replace people like me? I'm 62, I'm not going to referee anymore, but what is the association doing to replace people of my age, my experience, so that the players they serve will have a continuing supply of referees?" This is one of the things you should be doing. A year from now I should not come into this room and see more than half the people--more than 60% of the people--clearly over 55 years of age. I'm not age-discriminating here, I'm just saying, what are you capable of doing? You should be recruiting, and that's your responsibility, you're there to serve the soccer community, and training and encouraging younger referees to replace all of you who love the game so much, but to be quite honest, should be moving down the ranks to doing the 12s and 10s and so on.

(Question from the floor: Why are there no linesmen in other countries?) Because anybody who is reasonably confident can referee a game under 14 years old without linesmen. We've become obsessed with them; there's little need for them, you can do an acceptable job of judging offside without them. I never saw a linesman until in my final year of youth soccer when I was 18 and got into the cup final. In the cup final they provided linesmen.

(Question about the two-man system and judging offside.) With the two-man system, if you get the offside right, that means you've neglected the entire midfield, and you've missed all the stuff that's gone on right in front of the defense. I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about the two-man system; it was discredited 30 years ago, it's just dying a slow death.

I must admit, I feel partly for this [obsession with linesmen] because I wrote the manual for linesmen in 1972-73, about that time, and we accumulated the principles of how to run lines and sold a 1000 copies of this book around the country. And then the playing associations were starting to provide linesmen, the pro league was doing it, and there was now something to show you how to do it. And now the next thing it's all over the place, and I think it's wonderful. But now there's a movement in coaching not to have no offside.

And so I want to talk about your relationship with the people. How many of you say something to the players before the game? (Various comments from the floor.) I'm amazed that in a room of this size that nobody is giving instruction. But it's been a tradition that referees give instruction. And I got it when I first came to play in Dallas--it was '69. And the first game we had with referees, in the regular season, the referee, a very authoritative person, and he was telling us, "I want you to retire 10 yards ...," and the fact is that while I'm delighted that nobody does it, it's the worst thing you can do. And most of you who still do it and are not prepared to admit it, ask yourself, when you make a speech to the captains, does he or she immediately go back to the players and tell them, now the referee said this and this and this? And I guarantee that the captains won't.

And now let me look at what I consider a few referee failings. How many have heard this: "In my game last week." and you're nodding affirmatively, and we do. And I've done it: "I sorted this guy out, I told him...this guy had a big reputation for misconduct, but I sorted him out. I'm the boss." Why is it that referees focus on misconduct actions we took? Is it because part of our reason for refereeing is to be in a position of authority? (Yeses heard.) I think you're being very honest. I think you're right. We take this job and we go out on a weekend, and for two hours we're in absolute command of 22 players on the field, a few people on the bench, the administrative team officers, and in some leagues who are too unwise to do anything else, they actually put the referees in charge of the spectators. And it's intoxicating. But the only thing you can't do is marry two of them. The captain of the ship can do that but the referee cannot. But it's intoxicating, and some people, it literally goes to their heads, and they get overwhelmed by the power.

Do you ever hear a referee saying, "This game started off, in the first minutes it was going to hell. I cautioned one player, and I tell you what, I worked with that player for 85 minutes and I kept him on. As a result of that no one committed a misconduct, because it was clear that the relationship I had with this player showed the other guys that I was not interested in just this certain one but I wanted to keep the game under control. Just a quiet conversation with him."

The reason I focus on it is because it has been my experience in many referee meetings the referees *only* talk about the negative actions they took towards players and not about the positive actions. For example, the long ball goes through to the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper comes tearing out of the goal, the forward is going in at full speed, you've got two players coming together at 20 miles an hour each, you've got a potential collision of 40 miles an hour, and there's a ball in the middle of it, and at the last second the forward

realizes that the goalkeeper is going to get the ball first, and veers off to the side, jumps over the legs of the goalkeeper and runs back. Great. No disaster there. How many of you go past that player as he's coming back upfield and say, "Thank you for not killing the goalkeeper"? How many of you do that? One, two...half a dozen. *That's* what we should be doing, and *that's* something to talk about. Because that player is going to remember this, he's going to remember that conversation. "Jesus, this referee complimented me for *not* kicking someone. When did you ever hear a referee doing that?"

I don't mean you shouldn't talk about these disciplinary actions you take, but I think many referees talk *only* about that, they don't talk about the positive actions they must do during a game to keep things under control.

For example, how many of you have ever discussed that you did a game last Saturday and by halftime you knew the nicknames and names of one half of the players on the field? Nobody. I made it my practice to learn the names of the players on the field, and generally by the end of the game I knew two-thirds of them. If I have to talk to a player, I wouldn't say, "Number 5, I'm telling you now....." I'll say, "Come on Kirk, cool it, all right?" Are you likely to get a better response using his first name than by saying "number 5"? *That's* the skill of refereeing. But what my observation has been, when referees talk together in meetings, they talk about some of the skills in refereeing, disciplinary actions, but they don't talk about *all* the skills, the ones that don't involve being hard-arsed and hard-nosed towards the players.

And let me ask you, maybe referees have an "us and them" attitude? (From the audience: "us and the coaches.") Do I need to say more? Have you ever gone to a coach before the game and said, "Excuse me, Coach, I've got a problem, I wonder if you could help me with it?" How is he, or she, going to react? Isn't this kind of weird? "Look, the reason--notice that there's been a lot of sloppy substitutions, so they instructed us that they want the Laws of the Game--that no one should come on until the substituted player leaves the field. Now it's going to be difficult for me, so if you could help me I really appreciate it, just to make sure--I'm going to have my linesmen up there helping--but if you could instruct your players before the game, it would really do a service for me." You're not telling him what you're going to do, "Coach, I'm telling you now, nyah, nyah, nyah," you're asking him for help. Is it more likely to work than acting imperiously and giving instruction? Oh, it is. My own experience tells me that.

Let's put it this way: I spent eight months doing an internship in Idaho Falls, and within three weeks I had totally changed the substitution situation in Idaho Falls, and I got into a referees' meeting, just like this, same number, and I said just what I said to you, and the next Saturday they all went out and *asked* the coaches for assistance. Within three weeks there no illegal substitutions anymore. It can be done. And everyone said, "What in hell's going on? Why does the referee think it's my problem?"

I want to encourage you to do this: to create a new persona. The referee is not the authority, the referee is a colleague of the coaches in providing for the most important people in the game, the players, an atmosphere where they can enjoy themselves. So how does the referee behave as a colleague? Well, let's take the first thing. How many of you in the last month have cautioned a player for dissent? Come on, be honest, there's no--this [tape recorder] doesn't record hands going in the air. OK, who had their hands up? What was the occasion that you cautioned the player--what happened? When did the player first speak to you? When did you book him? Do you remember what words he

said to you that caused you to caution him? Is there any other way that you could have handled that? Or wait a minute, let me ask you first. He doesn't know what is coming. I put no more pressure on you than I would put on anyone else. The reason I ask is, the player does something, and it's nothing different than what he's been doing so far in the game, and all of a sudden you're coming down heavy on him. (Audience contributions.)

OK, when she said, "Screw you, ref," what were your emotions at that particular moment? What was the age of the player? (Response: under 13 girl.) I felt like a parent, I was a little bit angry. I was having a child speak like that to an adult. Was it because she was a 13-year old that it got under your skin? ("Yes.") I can do the same conversation with a lot of others in this room who would have reacted exactly the way that you did, and cautioned the player for *entirely the wrong reason*. The 13-year old who said "Screw you, referee"--and I raised two daughters from the time they were whatever--to be outspoken, to be respectful, to be unafraid, and so on. And boy, did it cost me.... The fact is, they are now two very assertive young women, who are in good careers for themselves, and won't take shit from anybody. And that's exactly what I want. And if you don't think that a five-foot two, 100-pound woman who's now a surgeon doesn't take shit from a lot of men, well, you're naive in the world, but she handles it because I gave her--*we* gave her--the right or privilege of respecting adults, just as we would have given to boys of ten.

The point is that you reacted as so many men would have reacted because a kid spoke to you in a disrespectful manner. Now, is that dissent? According to the dictionary, it was disagreement. If--verbal disagreement, right. So, that means, then, that you caution every player who indulges in verbal disagreement during a match? What is dissent--verbal or visual disagreement with the referee. But do you caution every time? Is there a better way to handle it? (From the audience: "deaf, dumb and blind".) So you wouldn't have reacted at all?

Does anybody have any suggestions about how to handle situations similar to this without giving a yellow card? Obviously you can't allow the 13-year old player, or any player, to keep on talking to you like that for the rest of the game. So how would you manage it without having to give a yellow card? ("Stop the game, take her aside and have a word with her.") What would you say? What could you say to the player that might change her attitude? I think--I'm just wondering whether there's another way to handle it. And I would suggest that: "Heh, I didn't hear that, but the next time I will. Do you understand?" Make it clear that you did hear what she said, but at the moment you don't think it's severe enough to be worth the yellow card.

But can you give me another example? (More response from the audience.) You have to control the game. If this is the first thing done by the player, a 13-year old young girl, shouting to me because she doesn't like the decision I made against her, I don't think I'm going to walk into the caution, but I *am* going to say something, and I might say, *loud enough* that other players can hear, and that's the point, that you're not issuing just a warning to her, but you're letting the other players know that there is a limit to what I'm going to tolerate, and then, if it doesn't change things, then fine, you jump in.

You're in a game with some professional players, and there's a bad foul that occurs, and you pull the defender aside and say, "Look....nyah, nyah, nyah" and you give him the business. Five minutes later he does the same thing again to the same player. This time you say, fine, there's no warning involved, this is it, caution. So you hold up the yellow

card, and the guy is going on, “Oh, come on, he’s such a baby, I never touched him,” blah, blah, blah. And the player whom you have just protected is standing there, and he’s saying, “Oh, shut up, if we had a real referee he’d have sent you off for that.” (Laughter.) OK, is that dissent? What are you going to do? (From audience: “he didn’t direct it at me.”) The hell he didn’t! He wants to see what you’re made of. So the point is--and unless you’re very good at coming up with your--we understand our own emotions--we’ll overreact to that player. “Ah, you think that?” So, the fact is, what are your emotions? That happened to me, OK? And the player was Robbie Marsh, a world-class player, and he says that to me, I try to protect him, of course I’m a little pissed, but I know what he’s doing. So I turn and smile, and we get along fine, there’s no problem for the rest of the game.

But the point is, if I had responded to my emotions, as you responded with the 13-year old girl in your case, then I may have made an inappropriate decision. I’m not saying you’re wrong, but that’s the purpose here. What does the player say to us that causes us to react? And from my experience as a referee and a referee instructor, many, many referees caution people for dissent for things that they could just laugh off. But the players have a way--I raised two daughters--daughters have a way of doing it too--boys find the buttons and they press them. So the question is, what is it, dissent or conversation? A player says, “Jesus, what the hell kind of decision was that?” “A good one.” The point is, you’re showing that you’re not emotionally reacting to the comments that they made. For the entire game, you have a conversation with the players. If it gets too much, if it gets loud, if it gets public, you’ve got it wrong. But it doesn’t have to be responded to immediately with a yellow card. OK? Appropriate Use of Humor. He says, “How the hell can that be a foul?” So you say, “Well, I figured he had the last three.”

The Referee as Colleague. The people who have the most information about a particular game of soccer are the players. Have you ever been confronted at halftime with a player coming, saying, “Get a grip on that number 5”, whatever. What’s the normal reaction? “I’m watching, don’t worry about it.” Oh yeah, I’m talking to the referee, I’m not supposed to worry? But the point is, many referees do react, “Don’t tell me how to referee.” But the guy is giving you some information. And even if he’s not giving you information, you can still use it to your advantage. “Which one is that, that one there, number 5, the guy with the curly hair, the black guy, OK, good, I’ll keep an eye on him. Thanks very much for your help.” You’ve got someone coming to you pissed, and you don’t want to send him away pissed. You want to send him away calmed down. So the best thing is to agree with him. Now, because he might have information that you don’t have, you say thank you. And then you look.... A long ball to where number 5 is, and you turn quick and you look where number 5 is and he’s knocking the opponent. And if he is, good, now you’re about to get a player in your pocket. You blow your whistle. Now, you go to the player who gave you this valuable information and say, “You know, you were right, thanks very much for your help.” Now, how does that player feel? He thought he was manipulating you, and in fact you were manipulating him.

There was a person who asked me before we started about how to deal with coaches. The fact is, coaches are not allowed to comment about the refereeing. The only reason they do is because we allow them. I personally would choose to speak to both coaches before the game: “Hi, I’m Bob Evans, glad to know you. It’s John, aren’t you? Didn’t you do the all-star game last season?” (I know a little bit of information about them.)

You've got a conversation going, and you can ask them to help you on something--that's great-- and then the game gets going. And the first time he says something, you tell him, "I heard it, I'm not going to tolerate it." The next time, you go over to him and say, "Look John, you've got a job to do, so keep it to yourself, because you know what'll happen." And the third time, *out*. No hesitation. And he'll never do it to you again. And I know from my days of refereeing--I was in Monterrey, the coach of the home team got on my case, and I go "Nyah, nyah, nyah. Goodnight now." He got on my case right here in the Coliseum. I sent him off before halftime. The next time I went down there, three, four months later, same town, same coach, same team, I walked up to him to shake his hand, "Glad to see you again." No problem. Don't mess with the referee. He wouldn't have done that to Edgardo Codesal, no way. But *he* had a reputation in Mexico. I was just a fellow from Texas, what the hell do I know about football? The point is, you make your reputation, so you don't allow comments from coaches on the sideline. You give a friendly warning, second time it's official, third time, no more, that's it, gone. And it won't happen again.

But if you're an association that assigns your own referees you don't have to worry about getting no assignments. In high school, where sometimes the coaches control the assignments, you have to worry about that.

Let me emphasize one thing. I don't teach anything that I did not do. OK? I see some faces after I make some comment, and they're going "so harsh", or whatever. Fact is, I do not teach anything I did not do as a referee. You make your reputation, and as long as you continue to strive to improve your skills, and you're tough and hard-nosed, no problem. Pier-Luigi Colina, from Italy, is a son of a bitch. He's a friendly guy off the field, he's friendly with all the players, but cross him and he looks you right in the eye, and he puts those big eyes up like this, and the players know, don't mess with the guy. He's built his reputation, and you can do the same thing. (In the audience: "But you can't look quite that ugly." Much laughter.) As I look around the room, you're the closest to him! (To Jon Ziegler.)

Another thing--Referee as Colleague--share the pleasure of the players. If a player makes a hell of a shot, and it goes screaming over the top of the bar, and he's turning, sitting on the volley---he shouldn't have really gotten the ball in the first place--but he screams that shot over the bar, why not tell him, "What a great turn and shot that was"? The goalkeeper makes a great save, why not say "Great save, goalkeeper"? Share the pleasure of the players. Show them that you're enjoying what you're doing.

Be concerned with players' welfare. There's a lovely research study done on libraries, something called "Human Touch," and he discovered that people who are giving out books, giving the tickets to customers, if they actually made physical contact with customer, the customer reported a far more favorable response to questions about the staff in the library. The question is: would that apply to players? I certainly made it my practice, if a guy got fouled and I'm close to the action, he goes down, he's rubbing his knee, I talk to the player, I walk over to the player who's on the ground and say, "Are you OK?" "Yeah, I'm OK ref." I would extend my hand to him and pull him up. The point is, human touch gives you a chance for quiet conversation with the player. And then get on with it. (From the floor: "But we've been told to never touch a player.") OK, I'm telling you to change that. I don't know, are there any lawyers in the room? I mean, why do they tell you not to touch the players? What's the reason? Sued for what,

touching a player? I'm not talking about patting a 13-year on the butt, OK? I'm talking about a player who's on the ground rubbing his knee, he wants to stand up and you help him to his feet. That's what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about aggravating a broken leg.

The point is, my experience--and all I can do is talk about my experience--my experience has been that that establishes a relationship with a player, it shows you are concerned about his ultimate welfare, and it--I mean, the whole business of refereeing is the relationship between the players and the referees, the psychological interaction that determines whether you control the game or not. If you establish this relationship then it works in your favor. So I recommend it. All I suggest is try it. If it doesn't work for you then don't do it anymore. If it does work, heh, keep it going.

Then the other thing is: Applaud Cooperation, as I said. The player who jumps over the goalkeeper--if you happen to talk to a captain, "Heh, listen, get a grip on your number 6," and he does it, goes to the player, go to the captain again and say, "Heh, thanks very much for your help." Applaud their cooperation.

I've a few situations here that I want to talk about. Have any of you had a dispute with a coach at the end of a game? Without giving away too many of your failings, what sort of things have they told you? OK, "You're a lousy referee. Worst referee I've ever had." OK, "You extended the game too long." What did you say to him? OK, can I make a suggestion? Did he accept your explanation? (No, he said, "We don't add any time at this level." I said, "We certainly do.") OK, what kind of watch do you wear when you referee? (Countdown.) Oh, good, "Look, it's zero." He assumed that you added time, and you agreed with him. "No, no, no, look it's zero." End of discussion.

What other kinds of comments have you had at the end of a game? ("I was told I had given too many cautions.") How many did you give? ("Two. He hates referees.") Why is that? ("He's English.") For 200 years they ran the world. Twenty-five percent of the world's surface was owned by the English. There were no referees to tell them they couldn't do it. So it's in the national psyche.

Let me make a suggestion. It's your responsibility to survive the emotions of the players, believe it or not. You're to control them. If someone comes onto you pissed, it's your job to send them away unpissed, however you can do it. You tell them lies. If you have to manipulate, that's O.K. You have to walk away, that's fine. But you don't want to aggravate the situation--no disrespect to you, you have four exchanges there, OK? He said something, you said something, he said something, you said something. Now you're getting into the teenager-and-dad argument. Who's going to get the last word? And I got along a hell of a lot better with my daughters once I realized that the best thing you can do is let them have the last word.. So let me make some suggestion. Here, you can take your notebooks out and write these down--you can try these: Confrontations at the End of the Game. Coach comes out, "-----, the worst referee, I never want to see you again. "So you very calmly look at him and say, "You know, you're right, I've had an off day." What can he say? Of course, I mean the worst your colleagues can say is of course, you're Welsh. What more can he say? You've agreed with him. OK, let him have the last word. What's the skin off your nose? You're not prolonging an argument, and he's not going to keep being irritated at you. He's going to argue with you because he wants you to argue. If you're not going to argue with him, you're going to say, "You're right, I had a bad day." He can't say anything else. "Well, shit, referee," and he walks away.

If he has a suggestion for you that is beyond, you know, “Shove that thing,” wherever, you say, “Thank you for your perceptive comments, I’ll keep it mind for my next match.” What can he do? So the question is, how insecure are you that you can’t tolerate the idea that someone is walking around out there who thinks you had a bad day? That’s the key. The gentleman here could not tolerate a 13-year old questioning his authority. And all the referees who get involved in arguing with the coaches are really dealing with their own psychological insecurity, they don’t want to have questions of their authority, and they can’t tolerate someone out there thinking they had a bad day. Well, get over it. They’re not going to be all OK with it, but there is nothing left to argue about anymore. They were arguing because they had a different opinion from yours. What you’ve done is agree with them; no argument anymore.

The greatest pleasure I had in refereeing was to go onto a field with 22 players who’d never seen me before, and I had to establish before the game and in the early part of the game what the game is going to be like, and deal with these 22 players. By the end of the game I know two-thirds of them by their first names, we’d had a great time I hoped, and that was generally it. But occasionally things went wrong. So this was my action when things went wrong. By this time, by the way, I’ve done World Cup preliminary matches, I’ve been in Olympic preliminary competitions, I’ve been to two tournaments in Asia, I’ve been to Mexico many times for CONCACAF Champions Cup, I’ve refereed the Cruz Azul and Guadalajara and Monterrey and all the rest of it, and someone complains about my refereeing. So I would say, “I’m sorry about my officiating, maybe next time you’ll have a referee with more experience.” At the time I was the most experienced referee in the country. So as your colleague here would say, I was taking the piss out of the guy, so he didn’t know. And I’m not to joke at his expense, he didn’t know who the hell I am. But the point is, I’m not going to get into an argument. That’s it, you end the confrontation.

On a lot of these [items] I fell of the schedule here because I was enjoying the discussion.

In a discussion with a player, let the player have the last word. “What call was that, please?” “It was obstruction.” “Bah, how can it be obstruction?” If he wants to keep going, then you may have to intervene. “How can it be obstruction, I was in playing distance.” You go up with your humor. “No, no, it wasn’t, I measured it maturely.” A bit of nonsense. But the key here is--OK, I’m making humor at the player’s expense, and the reason I can do that, or the reason I did that--I didn’t do it throughout my entire career, **Ed Bellion** (co-author of “For the Good of the Game”) used to do that. I did it the last two years of my career because by that time I was totally confident of my ability as a referee and what I could do and not do on the field. And so a player suggesting I didn’t know what I was doing did not disturb me a little bit. And so I could come back with these answers, and so the secret of course is to develop--is to grow that confidence in your own ability, so sure of yourself in what you’re doing, that nobody can disturb your equilibrium. That’s the key. It’s a psychological game between you and the players. And the way you do that, of course, is to come to anybody who teaches refereeing, you learn from everybody what you can learn, and if you disagree with stuff that I say or anybody else says, fine, you put it aside, but you do learn and keep trying, and you keep improving, and so on, and you develop this ultimate confidence that enables you to backchat with players.

And I said this: listen to what the players are saying, those would have some information to give, do not take a defensive posture, turn challenges aside with harmless responses. “Jesus, how could you call that a handball?” “You don’t have the eyes for it,” or something. “Listen, you’re two-nothing down, you’re the center back and both goals have come down the middle, and I’m not.....?”

Build a rapport with the players, learn names, express concern, work to keep a cautioned player on the field, don’t seek ways to send him off. Let me ask you this: how many have had that wonderful feeling when you’ve cautioned a player in a match and you’re waiting for him to do one more stupid thing? He knows you’ll send him to the bench. OK, how many of you have gone onto the field and realized at some point that you just don’t like him? A particular player. What a difficult one. Nasty, unpleasant, he doesn’t appreciate how brilliant I am, who knows what? And you subconsciously wish that he’d do something stupid so you can nail the bastard. Resist the temptation. Keep him on the field. I’m only going to keep him on the field *if* he complies with the laws of the game. By cautioning him I know that he’s safe. But somebody decides because he’s been cautioned that they’re going to needle him. We’ve all seen this? If you are aware of it, and the guy is going after it now, and what you do, you go up to the guy and for the next five minutes you run around with two players. And eventually the guy who’s doing the fouling says “What the hell?” You’re demonstrating that you’re taking care of him. If you leave him angry and you do nothing about it, within ten minutes he might kick somebody, and then you’ve got to get rid of him. You work by using psychological games.

Any questions? I’ve finished what I was doing, which was sort of general psychological stuff.

(Short question/answer session, not taped.)