

A FEW GUIDELINES ON THE MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP BY REFEREES

At present, the teaching and management of leadership is a matter which is widely dealt with among company executives and senior managers of the Public Administration, present in their training itineraries and is also the object of monographic treatment in Courses and Seminars, even in specific University Postgraduate and Masters' degrees. It is intended, through selection and/or training, that those who assume executive responsibilities gather the condition of a leader in both the subjective and objective sense of the term, adopting the decisions which are necessary in the most appropriate sense to the aim which is pursued, without the influence of their consequences themselves, and achieving the implication of their own environment as well as minimizing the refusal which can be generated among their recipients.

By starting off from this premise It is obviously necessary that the referee can assume and manage appropriately the leadership attributed by their own role, which they have to adopt, at a certain time and place (the match) and in generally hostile environments, at the head of a team of several people, executive decisions of different nature and effects, which take place in a concentrated, consecutive and continuous way (even enchainned), which always generate a beneficiary and aggrieved party and that are always subjected to analysis by the interested party, third parties and the mass media.

Refereeing leadership, which has different subjects and collectives as recipients, is an essential tool to prevent and solve crisis situations during the game, diminishing conflicts, accelerating the rate of decision-making, increasing the percentage of wise decision and reducing the negative response to the former. It consists in that the player, the coach or the spectator admit and assume a decision which is against their interests, even disagree with it, considering the prestige, the appearance and reliability of the referee who is adopting it, since it would be objected or disapproved were it not so, or else it would be so with more determination. To sum up, a referee must be a leader:

- For members of the refereeing team, by making it possible that coordination instructions taught to assistants are respected, that providing there is a possible error of some importance this is transmitted for its possible correction (assuming the risk resulted from an active intervention against a decision which has already been adopted by the referee) or that there is sincere and adequate feedback among them all.
- For the players, by avoiding protests or disputes about decisions already adopted (for instance, after blowing for a penalty) and the pressure on the decisions to be adopted (for instance, after signalling a foul in which it is understood that there may exist a clear goal-scoring opportunity, to force and avoid the sending off respectively).
- For delegates, trainers and coaches, so that the decisions adopted by the referee are respected and not subjected to protests or offensive gestures.
- For the public, diminishing protests, insults and incidents.
- And even for the Law Enforcement Forces and the private security of the event, providing that the legitimacy of the decisions adopted can affect the attitude that both of them need to adopt in order to protect the refereeing team, even putting their own physical safety at risk.

Obviously, leadership displays its effects mostly in the trivial games or in those whose perception is not adequate for its distance, angle, etc., that is, in the decisions which are usually under protest in an unconscious way, without cause, just because they have not been favourable (a foul in the centre of the pitch, a throw-in, etc.); we must not undervalue this circumstance, providing that it enables a more relaxed and correct direction of the match, and works against the increase of tension motivated by apparently sterile plays, that is, the circle in which certain players get involved as a consequence of two or three signals against their team close in time. However, it also acts with respect to the important decisions.

This is because refereeing leadership (understood as an immediate fulfilment unquestioned in its decisions) as a principle has no fear of disciplinary decisions which can be adopted (cautions, sending offs or report misconduct in the minutes); it stands on the extradisciplinary perception which exists about the performing referee. That perception may have been predefined by previous direct experiences, by the information that third parties have transmitted to the interested parties (with special attention to mass media) or developing from the course of performance in the match in particular, being in any case the latter component the most important as it has the peculiarity of overcoming the former two, both favourably and unfavourably: the image or respect that we have won previously is easily forgotten if we fail in our present performance, and the possible previous bad image is solved (if not completely,

at least in an important way) in the most recent precedent. In this sense, referees must take into account that these, among others, are the factors that have a special impact on their leadership:

1. The image itself. A careless appearance or hygiene, inadequate clothing or footwear, wearing the refereeing equipment in an untidy way, etc. brings discredit, affecting negatively to the leadership that we want to practise.
2. The way of speaking. Correct public speaking, not using rude words or raising the voice, the balance between colloquial and an excessively polite (even affected) language, not speaking more than it is necessary and not defining one's position about third parties that are not present or events which have not been observed in first person. It will be in favour of mutual respect, and especially of the one who must later exercise decision-making powers.
3. Body language. Wild or excessive gesticulation or that which can be interpreted as offensive, rude or too authoritarian must be avoided.
4. The celerity and conviction in the decision-making. If we caution infringements avoiding those few seconds during which protesting and pressure take place, we will close a door to the idea that we can be influenced by them; We must take into account that in every decision to be adopted there will pressure from two opposed directions, and that the harmed party will always think that the attitude of the other has been determining and will try to imitate and even exceed that of the adversary on the next occasion. On the other hand, a firm and loud whistle blow, a firm and adequate gesture and the correct inattention to protests (not causing confrontation nor admitting possible provocation) nourish the idea that these are futile and prevent them from being reproduced.
5. Empathy. On the field of the game each protagonist has their perception of what happened, and according to it they evaluate the referee's decisions. It is impossible to convince that one who has seen (or thinks he has seen) "something" in first person of the fact that such action or circumstance has not existed; that is why the referee should not aspire to do it, instead the referee should try to make the interested party understand that the refereeing perception has been different from theirs, and therefore the decision adopted is not the expected one, without insisting on who is right or on what has actually happened. On the other hand, the referee must understand (and assume) that the important decisions (penalties, sending offs, uncertain goals...) are going to cause protests, even collective ones, and prepare to solve them, weighing up adequately what is admissible and what is inadmissible and the limit from which to apply disciplinary measures, as well as on whom to apply them; nor feeling tempted to elude decisions that cause conflict or willing to show authority above all once they are adopted.

6. Wise choice. It is a component that works principally in the professional categories, as in these the plays are subjected to analysis and in-depth study with abundance of details by the mass media, to the point that each day we can talk about the fact that the public opinion (although not always correctly) thinks that a certain important refereeing decision has been right or wrong. In the latter case, the presumed error works against the referee's leadership (let us remember, perception from previous experiences), and especially in the next occasion when conducting the harmed team, all the more so when the match is held in their domain.

To finish with our commentary, we will refer to the way in which referees manage their stress during the match, something which is part of the leadership because it constitutes a conditioning component of itself. Just confronting the difficulty and uncertainty which is involved in every match is a stressful component which has to be controlled from the viewpoint of training and self-confidence; if referees are aware that they are prepared to face and solve appropriately any incidents that may occur in the match (physical, technical and psychological preparation), despite their being conscious of the difficulties, we will come up to the so-called positive stress or concentration, state of alertness to be adopted as this is more satisfactory in order to face the decision-making than relaxing, in which by undervaluing the demand of the event or due to a false feeling or idea of self-confidence referees will face the match from a passive position which implies the risk that the incidents surprise or overwhelm them. On the contrary, when there is insecurity, because some of the factors which affect the balance previous to the match are altered (the media pressure has exceeded the limits of what is admissible for the recipient, the state of physical condition is not the adequate one, mental fatigue increases or comes from unfortunate actions), we will be facing a predisposition to "negative stress" which generates anxiety and nervousness, which is not satisfactory at all for the way referees must manage and exercise their leadership. In these situations, specialized psychological support is a tool which is especially useful to minimise the impact of the stressful factor, whether it be directly (in particular, if they are aware of the existing situation) or as a preventive way, through the acquisition of techniques to control both pre-match and post-match stress: the latter can become, given the short time between one and the next performance, the pre-match stress of the next designation.

In the case of referees of recent incorporation, or even with certain experience (already in regional categories), the acquisition of an adequate (and reliable) self-esteem to face matches in minimum leadership conditions, and especially the important matches, must be a primordial objective for the training organizations of the

referees' autonomous Committees. Despite being conscious of the limitations that they have, it is entirely counter-productive to leave it to the cold reports' content or to the slanted and uncertain feedback provided by relatives or colleagues that may have been able to witness the matches.