



Meet the Referee

#010 [AP634]

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Q1 - Name (including any nickname)

Mark Cooper (Sparky)

Q2 - Category

Cat 6

Q3 - Why did you become a referee?

I decided to become a referee as I was beginning to lose interest in football. It was an attempt to salvage my interest in the game. At the time, my school decided to run a refereeing course on a Friday afternoon and I decided to go on it in the hope it would reignite my passion for the game and it actually paid off! The more I studied the course, the more I fell in love with the game again, to the point I made the decision that should I pass, I would give active refereeing a try. So then once I passed the tests, I attended training sessions in Perth and ever since, I've never looked back! That was over a year ago now! How time flies, eh?!

Q4 - What challenges do you find in refereeing?

There's lots of challenges you face as a referee, one for example is when you make a decision and you start hearing spectators and coaches shouting abuse at you. You're never going to please everyone at the same time because there will always be two sides to the story. But if you're like myself, you learn to ignore it and put it behind you unless it's excessive, that's when you step in and do something about it to stamp it out and to enforce your authority. But with every passing game, you learn something new or just by talking to the more experienced referees at training, they can massively help improve your skills and abilities as a referee by giving you advice. Then all you do is take those tips you've been given into your next game and put them into practice and you start building up from there. It's almost like building blocks that you just keep adding on top of and eventually you'll have made a tower!

Q5 - What's your most positive memory within refereeing?

This was a tough one, as I was between two. But I remember at the end of this one, I came away with a huge smile on my face! I was refereeing a Club Academy Scotland game between St. Johnstone and Dundee and one of the St. Johnstone players deliberately handled the ball inside the penalty area and I saw it and gave the penalty. Once I'd got myself and the other players into position, I blew my whistle for the kick to be taken. The penalty taker kicked the ball to the right of the goal and the keeper pushed the ball on to the post before the ball would come back out to the taker and he would kick the ball again, this time into the goal. Straight after, I had the whole St. Johnstone team shouting at me "Surely that's double touch, ref! C'mon he's kicked that ball twice!". And seeing as how I was inexperienced and new to refereeing, one of the tips I received was that if I were to make a decision, stick to my guns and just be confident, that I had to sell that decision! I put that into practice when I awarded the goal. I then came home to ask for some of the other referee's take on the situation after the game and to have all of them in agreement with my decision was a really good feeling! I'm glad I kept my focus up during the game as I came away from it with an increased sense of confidence and pride!

Q6 - What's your most prestigious appointment?

As I've only been a referee just over a year. I've only been appointed Club Academy Scotland and Ladies U13 Scottish Cup fixtures. But it was a surprise to have been given the opportunity to be AR2 at a Scottish Women's Premier League game between St. Johnstone and Motherwell in August 2018. I enjoyed it a lot, having never been an Assistant Referee before. Since then, I was appointed another one on October 21st between St. Johnstone and Kilmarnock.

Q7 - If you could change any Law within football, what would it be?

If I could change any law, it would be that players and coaches should treat the referee with respect like what they do in Rugby. If we could implement that element of respect into the game, it would maybe help teach the younger players coming up through the development system the correct way to talk to or treat referees. At the end of the day, we're there to do a job and at times it isn't easy but I don't think spectators and coaching staff understand that sometimes.

Q8 - What's your secret talent that no one knows about?

I have many talents and many uses a lot of the referees know. But one that I know that is weird and wonderful and no one knows about is that I can actually juggle. Just give me 3 juggling balls and away I go!

Q9 - Who is your role model within the refereeing movement?

I don't really have a role model as such because there is so many role models. I look up to Gordon Crawford as he taught me the course and is always looking to help me become a better referee. I also look up to Gordon McCabe who has recently become a FIFA Futsal referee and he also helps give me tips during training to put into practice on the field. I also look up to Chris Fordyce and Mike Roncone as they are at the highest level of refereeing and it's my dream to one day be where they're at too!

Q10 - What is your ambition within refereeing?

In a way, my ambition is almost like a life lesson and I can put it to use in anything, including refereeing! My ambition is to be the best I can be (hopefully right at the top), to work hard in improving myself to become better and never give up. Eventually I'll get to where I want to be. I know my ambition is still a long way away but I'd like to be able to hold my head up high the day it happens and say that I made it happen through all my hard work and through all the struggles that it had to throw at me along the way. But it would also be thanks to the support of my amazing friends and family and, well, let's not forget all the folks within the association that helped me get there!

