



Cumberland FA
YOUR GAME, YOUR COUNTY FA...

Cumberland FA's #AskTheRef Series



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Scott Taylor caught up
with Carlisle based former
Football League
Match Official
Colin Seel

Carlisle-based Colin Seel had 21 seasons on the Football League as a match official (1966-73 linesman and 1973-87 referee) and recently took part in our #AskTheRef series during COVID-19 lockdown.



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Q1 How long have you been a CFA referee, and how old were you when you started?

I registered with the Cumberland FA in January 1962 aged 23. So that's 58 years of active service to date!!

Q2 Did you play football before becoming a referee, and if so who for?

Yes, I played non-registered football locally, and subsequently during National Service in the Army.

Q3 What position did you play, and were you any good?

I preferred the old Right Half (No. 4) position – basically a right-sided midfield player. I was so good that I “retired” officially as a player in 1962 – though I continued to play 5-a-side up to about 64 years old!

Q4 What do you remember most about starting off as a referee?

I remember vividly the professionalism of the referee induction training I received during my time serving my National Service in Aldershot. This was under Staff Sergeant Brian Jakeman (YES I still remember his name!). He was a regular soldier in the RASC in Aldershot, an Army Referee Instructor and a Linesman on the Football League. It was a minimum of about 10 weeks (twice a week) instruction and referee “field training” that was required before registration with the Army RA could be considered. The training, as with all Forces training, was professionally and thoroughly applied.

Amongst the many lasting “mementoes” passed down to me by him were a couple of “gems” which have remained with me since those long past days:

*(1) **NEVER** refer to the Rules of football – always address them correctly as **THE LAWS OF THE GAME.***

(2) And never allow a game to kick off earlier than the advertised Kick Off time.

Brian always reminded us that – particularly in matches where there are paying spectators – just one single fan might enter the ground even just one minute prior to Kick Off time and might subsequently miss the only goal of the game, if it was scored two minutes prior to Kick Off. This would be because of an incorrect K.O. timing decision by the Referee.

Q5 Any advice for young referees just starting off?

***Forget about any monetary benefit you might gain from refereeing!** Firstly such gains will initially be relatively small scale (even in today’s modern football) and much more importantly, the young referee should be concentrating on how*

*much pleasure he/she can derive from the Game, and how vital a role he/she can play in allowing the players (and any spectators) to **ENJOY** the experience. So, I feel getting as much experience as possible, this would be more beneficial than any match fees!*

Q6 Who's been your biggest influence in refereeing?

Very difficult to answer this one! Brian Jakeman (see my answer to question 4) was obviously a vital and early influence. However there have been many other more senior colleagues whose comments and advice have been absorbed over many years.

Q7 How many years did it take you to get to the Football League?

I was elected to the Football League Linesmen's List in June 1966 – just short of five years after qualifying in Aldershot in September 1961.



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Q8 Were there any setbacks along the way?

Difficult to describe any of my experiences as “set-backs”, there were however several “challenges” to be confronted. I am sure other colleagues will have more dramatic examples of “set-backs”.

Q9 How did you balance between refereeing and your 9-5 job?

With great difficulty! At the time I was elected to the Football League I was working at Cumbrian Newspapers. An essential employment requirement was for me to work every alternative Saturday. This often meant I had to take annual leave or “swapping” work days with colleagues if I received an appointment on any of my “working” Saturdays. The monetary “compensation” I had to pay to a work colleague to cover for me was often greater than the fee I received for fulfilling my appointment!



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My ambition to progress in my refereeing career was greater than the greater security I would have derived by remaining at Cumbrian Newspapers. I therefore left in 1967 to join the less secure Carlisle Journal newspaper group (subsequently Carlisle Web Offset Ltd.). The Carlisle Journal offices in West Walls burned down within a week of me joining them!

When work was resumed, I was required to work alternative shifts of 6am — 2pm and 2pm — 10pm at 20% less salary than my previous employment! This did however allow me every Saturday off.

However, there was the additional problem of me having to constantly switch shift work patterns whenever they clashed with evening appointments.

Over the remainder of my Football League career there were constant employment difficulties, such as an inability to accept workplace promotions, or utilising a large part of my three weeks annual leave to fulfil Football League duties – therefore often reducing the amount of holiday time I could have been spending with my family.

I actually changed my jobs on three separate occasions because they interfered with my referee commitments – on one occasion walking out on my current employment prior to having to secure an alternative situation!

Q10 If you could referee one ex player from the past who would it be?

*Again, very difficult as there were so many that it was a pleasure to be on the Field of Play with. If obliged to choose only one such candidate, then **Bobby Moore of West Ham United** would probably clinch it for me.*



Q11 Which referee from the past would you say was the best referee ever?

*How long is a piece of string? I have known, watched and/or officiated with a great number of fantastically talented Match Officials each with their own characteristics. Again, compelled to choose one such individual I would possibly nominate **Mark Clattenberg**, who I had the pleasure of assessing as he “breezed through” a Northern League Second Division game on a wild, windy and very wet Tuesday evening at Penrith AFC’s Southend Road. I recall – slightly tongue-in-cheek – informing him that I would look forward to one day seeing him officiating in the FA Premier League!*



Photo courtesy of Twitter @clattenberg1975

Two other contemporary referees I knew well were Neil Midgley of Salford (far right) and Spennymoor-based George Courtney (right). More were



brilliant referees who could have been misinterpreted as being “ARROGANT”. They weren’t, they were both merely totally immersed in “Self-Belief” ... there is a great deal of difference in such a comparison!

Q12 What’s the most memorable game you have been involved in?

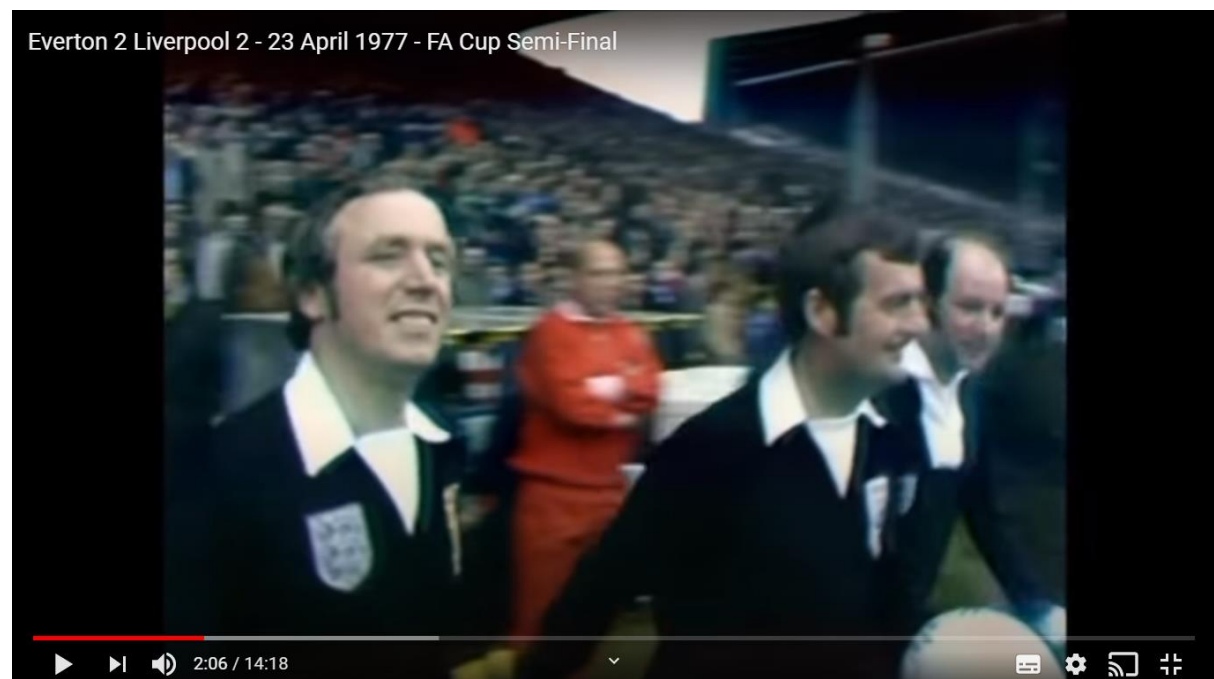
I have been involved in many games that could be classed as “memorable” – at least to me they were! Officiating in four FA Cup Semi Final ties:

Arsenal v. Stoke City (at Villa Park, 1972)

<https://youtu.be/XpPX1U9LXT8>

Liverpool v. Everton (Maine Road, Manchester, 1977)

<https://youtu.be/TNWVJr3x1YQ>





Everton v. West Ham United (Villa Park, 1980) plus the Replay at (Elland Road, Leeds)

https://youtu.be/_zvhmRPE1eM

Replay 1st Half Action <https://youtu.be/zvKW1IMGoYs>

Replay 2nd Half Action <https://youtu.be/RZNu9rbtoqI>

These were perhaps the “highest status” appointments as far as public awareness of them was concerned nationally.



However, the Final of the FA Vase, **Almonsbury Greenway v. Billericay Town (1979)** at the “Old Wembley”, Linesman plus the penultimate Wembley Amateur Cup Final between **Slough Town and Walton & Hersham (1973)** were immensely memorable and honoured occasions for me and my family.

Almonsbury Greenway v. Billericay Town (1979)

<https://youtu.be/lnAxpJ5XN8U>

Slough Town and Walton & Hersham (1973)

<https://youtu.be/QOUoQHJmLw>

The full spectrum of appointments can perhaps best be encompassed by a 1967 Boxing Day “full house derby” game appointment as Linesman between **Newcastle United and Sunderland** very early in my career through to a dramatic **FA Cup Third Round Tie between Leeds United and Manchester City (1978)** which had to be halted by a spectators’ pitch invasion late in the second half, and during which I had to “manage” the resumption of play only after mounted police had cleared the Leeds United fans from large areas of the playing surface!

FA Cup Third Round Tie between Leeds United and Manchester City (1978)

<https://youtu.be/p3YfKuVHgxs>



*Culminating in my appointment to referee the **Football League Super Cup Final (First Leg) between Liverpool FC and Everton at Anfield in 1986.** This was a competition born out of the necessity of Football League clubs being barred from European competitions following the tragic events at the Heysel Stadium. The first ties of a short-lived competition were staged in September 1985, but the*

two-legged Finals weren't completed until 12 months later. With the eventual re-instatement of the English clubs this competition now holds historical significance as being the one and only occasion it was ever staged!

Football League Super Cup Final (1st Leg) Liverpool FC v Everton (1986)

<https://youtu.be/HrzBvnfcDes>

I have particularly fond memories of refereeing a 7-a-side youth final in the 1970's. This was the final of a national competition sponsored by Sir Fred Pontin of Family Holidays fame. Pontins sponsored The FA Charity Shield for a short period from 1976, and this included the **Charity (now the Community) Shield Final which was staged between Liverpool and Southampton at Wembley Stadium (1976)**. Immediately before the "main event" of the day the Wembley surface was taped off to allow an under-18's 7-a-side Final to be staged. This was played between youth players from **Arsenal FC (captained by Graham Rix) and Stoke City (Captain: Garth Crooks)**. The Football Association treated the Match Officials with the same respect as the senior match, as we played out our Final in front of approximately 70,000 fans! Rix was to go on to have a fantastic career as Arsenal first team captain, providing the cross from which Alan Sunderland headed the winner against Manchester United in the 1979 FA Cup Final.

However, the occasion of which I have constantly been reminded was an **FA Cup Third Round match between Sunderland and Manchester United at Roker Park in January 1986** when the then United and England Captain Brian Robson was **SENT OFF!** Dependent on which club you supported at the time I either gained fame or infamy! Match of the Day had Jimmy Hill posing the question: "Doesn't this referee realise he has sent off the England Captain?"

Didn't Hill realise that rank or status doesn't enter the equation when a Match official is judging as aspects of the Laws of the Game? I have never made any "Claim to Fame" regarding the incident, nor felt I ever did any more than I would have had to do at ANY level of football refereeing. My senior linesman was actually the person who drew my attention to the incident, and his calm, accurate and precise report to me was the epitome of how an assistant official should act.

Q13 Did you have any pre match rituals?

*I tried desperately **NOT** to adopt any such practices. As far as I am aware I **DIDN'T** for example, put one particular boot on before the other, or sit in a given place in the changing rooms. Far from needing or wanting to adopt such “extras” I had enough on my plate in preparing myself physically and mentally to meet the challenges of refereeing a Football League match. I did however take great care to fully involve my Linesmen in every aspect of the match preparation by all three of us (or if on those rare occasions when a Fourth Official was appointed – involving them too). I was always especially being aware of my need for them to be active and positive contributors to the match and to believe they were vital members of a “Team” of Officials.*

I always believed they were participants in the whole occasion, rather than just being “helpers”. Some of the then current Football League Referees were less inclined to adopt such a “Team” approach and could be inclined to regard themselves as “The Boss” with two flag-waving colleagues merely there to back them up!

Q14 What one piece of advice you would give to a 16 or 17-year-old promising referee?

To any 16 or 17-year-old aspiring Referee I would first of all be insistent that they study, learn and fully absorb the Laws of the Game. To the reader this may appear to be a very obvious requirement. However if a Match Official is to carry out his/her duties diligently and efficiently – and more importantly gain the respect of players, team, club and competition officials – they must carry out their duties with a sense of pride, dedication and the appearance of a referee who is fully aware of what is required of them.

Self-confidence and skilful control of the match situation are vital of course, but in the main these attributes should automatically follow the path of a referee who knows what they are doing – and applies their knowledge confidently and correctly. There are many other aspects that people in my position may offer to the young aspiring referee, possibly almost as many different aspects as the number of people you could pose such a question to! The match official(s) must attend to their pre and post-match “secretarial” duties, they must ensure they adhere to all the many aspects that other senior officials inform them of.

There are many, too many, to list individually in a brief piece such as this however, here are a few tips:

- *Ensure you have a thorough knowledge of the Laws of the Game.*
- *Turn up promptly for your matches, meetings or any other required attendances required of you.*
- *Listen to those people who can offer helpful advice, and if you require more assistance ... ask for it!*
- *There are a lot of people able and willing to assist you – are you willing to ask for such help?*
- *Wear a smile whenever you can – yes, even occasionally on the Field of Play – remember it is meant to be a pleasure, so enjoy yourself, and try to ensure others do the same whilst involved in any match you are officiating in.*
- *Displaying a self-confident manner is a desirable virtue – acting or appearing to be **ARROGANT IS NOT**. An arrogant attitude and/or manner is just about the most undesirable attitude anyone can portray – particularly from a Match Official.*

*Increasingly I hear mention of the monetary gains a young referee might gain from their fledgling career. Without a doubt the match fees today's potential referee could earn – even at the lowest level of officiating is substantially higher than in previous eras. (See Question 4.). If a young referee qualifies and goes out and enjoys the participation in a match, then whatever fees they earn is a pleasant “bonus”. However, if the young referee considers this as a PRIME reason for “taking up the whistle” – **THEN FORGET IT!** You are likely to receive more adverse comments (and sometimes, sadly, even worse) than you are to receive £1 coins. However, with the right attitude, you will derive so much pleasure from officiating, and pride in the contribution you are making to our Game.*

Q15 Looking back, what did you wish you had achieved in the game?

*After the career (and I hope goodwill) which I have enjoyed in a career which to date has lasted almost 60 years, how can I wish to have achieved more? **But I do!** I would like to have had a greater self-belief – without the accompanying arrogance which often accompanies it. Rarely did I feel satisfied with many of my performances, even if others were lauding my “achievements”. I **ALWAYS** felt I could have done better... but on reflection, perhaps that isn't a bad philosophy!*



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I refereed every round of The FA Cup from the First Round Qualifying to the FA Cup Semi-final, but regret I never appeared in an FA Cup Final – which was the ultimate dream of every young trainee as I was setting out on my career. That's disappointing, but hardly something that leaves me with any bitterness.

Scott Taylor asked the Questions for Cumberland FA's #AskTheRef series - May 2020