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Jason Milne

Longwood University, milnejs@longwood.edu

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A Qualitative Analysis of Team-Sport Referee Experience

Jason S. Milne, *Longwood University*

Abstract: The sport referee is an integral part of the sporting experience. This paper explores the experience of the sport official, focusing on developing themes related to how an individual got into the refereeing, current issues sport officials experience both on and off the field, and relationships between the official and other sporting roles. Through interviews (N=10) with referees from a variety of team sports, I use the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) method to develop a series of themes that emerged from the data focusing on the sport referee experience. I developed initial themes that focus on the different questions from the surveys. Out of these initial themes, I used theoretical coding to develop theories that focus on the referee role that is in conflict with other sporting roles as well as the referee identity in and of itself, the importance of social and cultural capital for improvement and advancement of the referee, and the role of safety and fairness for the sport official. Future research should focus on the application of these ideas for the improvement of referee organizations, particularly increasing the number of referees who have an opportunity to advance. Future research should also focus on examining the refereeing system from other role-perspectives, focusing particularly on the difference between those involved in the actual game (players, coaches, and spectators), and those involved in the administration of the game (league administrators, etc.).

Keywords: Sport referees; Social identity; Social capital; Conflicting roles; Role theory

Introduction

The sport referee is a functional requirement of any competitive and formal sporting match. However, the sociological research on sport officials has been minimal. For example, less than 10% of the published articles in *Sociology of Sport* and the *International Review of Sociology of Sport* focus on the sport official. The research focusing on sport referees tends to focus on specific aspects of the refereeing experience. One area is the cognitive processes that referees engage in the decision-making process on the playing field (Burnett et al. 2017). Souchon et al. (2016) examined 90 handball games to determine the effect that competition level has on referee's decision making. Other's have examined the role of anxiety in the decision making among soccer referees (Johansen and Haugen 2013). One particular area of interest among researchers has been the role of home-field advantage in the decision-making process. For example,

Dosseville, Edoh, and Molinaro (2016) argue that referees are an important part of the decision-making process and examine how "situational, contextual, individual, and ethical/economic dimensions" affect that decision making process.

Other studies focus on factors that create stress for referees and how referees manage that stress (Kaissidis 1994). Gencay (2009) researched over one hundred Turkish soccer referees on the magnitude of stress that they experienced while officiating. For him, stress was defined as "tension," "stress," and "pressure" that the referees experienced while officiating. Overall, he found that most referees experienced very little stress while officiating. This result could be partially attributed to referees perceiving refereeing as an avocation rather than a vocation. Coping with this stress is another area of research among referees. Referees have a range of

psychological methods that they use to cope with the stress that the experience on the field. This can include avoiding those stressful situations such as not choosing to engage with a player who is dissenting with him or her or choosing to approach the player and mediate the conflict. Additionally, these styles could include monitoring the situation to insure it does not escalate or “blunting” engaging directly with those who are creating the stress (Kaissidis-Rodafinos and Anshel 2000).

One area of literature, particularly in the area of exercise science looks at the physical aspects of officiating. Mohtasham et al (2018) examined the role of knee injuries on the abilities of the professional level referees. Castagna, Abt, and D’Ottavio (2004) examined the activity profile among international level-soccer referees and compared those with national-level referees finding that those who referee domestic matches were more active than those who referee at the international level. The authors attribute the differences to the increased ability of the referees to know proper positioning for refereeing a match.

The economics literature tends to focus on the factors that may bias a referee such as favoritism (Babatunde, Simmons, and Maciaszczyk 2012). This bias may be in the form of favoring the home team or even racial bias (Parsons et al. 2011, Price and Wolfers 2010). This bias may also occur in the form of trying to keep the game close and exciting by calling a disproportionate number of fouls against teams that are winning (Thu et al. 2002).

Finally, several studies focus on the importance of the sport official to the sporting process and the protection that they need as a result (Davies 2008). Cleland, O’Gorman and Webb (2018) found that over half of all referees in Association Football (soccer) in England experienced some form of abuse, usually verbal and about 20% of officials experienced some physical abuse. In fact, most officials expect to have players, spectators, and coaches disagree with them, but do not expect to be physically attacked (Monaghan 2020).

This paper broadens the examination of the referee role by focusing on the referee experience both on the field and off. This research situates the referee within a larger sporting social world in which s(he) must interact. This paper explores the experience of the sport official, focusing on themes related to how an individual got into the refereeing, current issues sport officials experience both on and off the field, relationships between the official and other sporting constituents, and reasons why individuals continue with refereeing.

Theoretical Grounding

I use role theory (Merton 1968) to highlight the referee role and describe the relationship between that role and other sporting roles (coach, player, administrator, and spectator). Additionally, this paper uses a symbolic interactionist framework (Blumer 1969) to understand how referee’s give meaning to their experience within the sporting role, focusing on how referees conduct game management as well as interpret and deal with conflict between other roles.

Role theory is derived from the work of Robert Merton (1968) and elaborated with the work of Alexander (1985). For Merton (1968), role theory moves away from the traditional over-arching perspective that is functionalism and focuses on specific systems within organizations and groups. It is the job of the sociologist to determine the functions of each role not for the larger society, but within the self-contained system. Alexander (1985) extends this idea within the Neofunctionalist framework by arguing that it is the sociologist who examines how these roles interact with each other in the system but also to know that changes in the functions of these roles within the system occur because of individual’s needs (what he called individuation), and institutional constraints. Therefore, I situate the referee as a role within the larger sporting system, examining the expectations and constraints that referees face when engaging in the role.

Identity theory argues that the social situation of an individual leads to the development of specific identities. At the same time, these identities frame the realities of the individual. Role-Identity theory (Stryker

and Statham 1985) argue that the roles we undertake influence a variety of our experiences within the social world. As Crawford and Novak (2014) suggest, our roles come with expectation and norms about the appropriate way to behave. These norms are learned and then subsequently guide our understanding of the situation. For example, the role of the business manager differs based on the different roles of the employee. Conflict between the roles occurs not just because of differing resources, but also because these roles come with expectations about how the organization should run. These expectations frame the reality of the individuals within that organization. This paper will argue that the referee role creates a frame within which the referee interprets their role in relationship to others in the sporting system and then engages with others in that sporting system based on that interpretation.

Methodology

Using a qualitative design, 10 adult team-sport officials were interviewed regarding their refereeing experience. Officials were recruited using a convenience and snowball sampling method. Officials were those who have officiated different sports and who are at a variety of levels of the sport officiating from just starting their career to those who have refereed professional level matches. These interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2017. The 10 individuals represent both sexes and several sports, including soccer, rugby, baseball, softball, basketball, hockey, and American football with some of the officials refereeing multiple sports. Human subject approval was received from the author's university and protocols were put in place to protect the confidentiality of each individual. This included that all data would be stored in a password protected file and physical transcriptions would be kept in a locked drawer in the author's office. Additionally, those interviewed were told that the only identifying markers would be the sport they officiated and their sex.

Each interview lasted approximately one and half hours. While there was an initial interview protocol, the interview followed an open conversation. Questions were asked related to the various experiences of that

referees such as how the individual got into refereeing to their game management style and how they deal with others in the refereeing system and larger sporting role. Those questions include:

1. What sport(s) do you officiate?
2. How did you get into officiating?
3. How long have you been officiating?
4. What are some key issues facing officials in your sport these days?
5. How do you get ready for a game?
6. How do you manage players before, during, and after a game?
7. What are some of the key issues you think about as you officiate a game?
8. What is your philosophy in dealing with coaches? With spectators?
9. How do you advance to different levels in your sport officiating?
10. What are some of your favorite experiences officiating?
11. What are some of the worst experiences you have had as an official?

Follow-up and probing questions were regularly asked of each participant to ascertain each official's own experience as an official. I chose to stop the interviews at 10 because I felt that I had saturated the data, hearing the same responses from individuals consistently, even despite the differences in sport. These interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The author retains these documents and they are kept in a locked drawer in the author's office.

A key component to the qualitative method is the notion of being reflexive with regards to one's research. Specifically, the research must situate oneself in the research and describe how one's own experiences affect how they see a specific social context (Gergen and Gergen 2003). For 21 years, I refereed soccer. In that time, I refereed over 2000 games at a variety of levels from youth to semi-professional adult matches. I

see the referee role as an important part of the sport process while at the same I understand that there are many issues that affect the referee experience, such as how the referee deals with coaches, spectators, and players. And, while there has been some debate in the popular press about the role of technology as a supplement and/or replacement for the referee ("Embracing Technology in Sports" 2018), I believe that the referee is still a valuable and necessary part of the sporting experience.

In accessing the population, I encountered two significant issues to respondent's willingness to speak to me. First was accessing the population. Because of geographic distance, I had to use online video messaging, such as Skype™, in order to interview several of the sport officials. A second issue involved the willingness of the sport officials to talk with primary investigator. This hesitancy results from the position of the sport official as an independent contractor. In the refereeing structure, particularly for amateur matches, games are offered by a referee assignor whose job it is to assign the official to games that the assignor feels the referee is competent enough to do well. The sport official is free to referee any games that he or she is offered, but this also means that the referee must show that they are competent enough to do those games. Because the referee essentially must sell their labor to the assignor, maintaining good relationships with the assignor and with other members of the sport community is important. Harm to those relationships can often come if the sport official disparages members of that sporting community. As such, many of the officials were initially hesitant to speak freely about their experiences. On top of getting informed consent from each individual, I had to assure the interviewees that I was following the protocols set forth by the human subjects. I explained that all the information was confidential and that only the sport and their sex would be reported as a way to make sense of the data. Additionally, I assured each individual that name would not be released and that upon transcribing the interviews, the audio recording would be destroyed.

Ultimately, the 10 individuals represent a wide range of team sports. However, their experiences in many areas

are quite similar as will be demonstrated with the themes below. This is why I chose to end the interviews with 10. Certainly, more data could have been gathered, but I started to see the same ideas appearing between the different individuals and the different sports. This saturation led the researcher to finish the total number of interviews at 10. Below is a table with the demographics of those interviewed to represent the wide range of sport and gender.

Participant	Sport Officiated	Gender	Years of Experience
1	Field Hockey and Lacrosse	Female	8
2	Rugby	Male	4
3	Basketball	Male	16
4	Soccer and Rugby	Female	7
5	Rugby	Female	9
6	Basketball	Female	12
7	Basketball	Male	28
8	Baseball and Football	Male	10
9	Basketball	Male	10
10	Baseball and Softball	Male	15

Initial Themes

Using the grounded theory approach as proposed by Charnaz (2006) and the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), several initial responses were generated for each of the questions. These responses reflect the answers the respondents provided on the different questions.

How did you get into officiating?

Generally, there were four reasons why people choose to referee. First, several referees mentioned that as they got older or they were injured in playing their sport, they were no longer able to play their chose sport. As

one baseball official state "I couldn't compete any longer and I reached the age where there was nowhere I could truly compete and I wanted to stay involved with the sport. Other than coach....I did officiating because I wanted to stay involved in the sport."

Similar to staying in the game that they enjoyed when they were younger, other referees stated that they started refereeing as a way to stay connected to their family and friends. One basketball referee mentioned that they started refereeing as a way to stay involved with their children. "I have two sons...and they both played sports throughout their youth." Or as another basketball referee stated, "my friend was doing it and thought I should as well." This reflects the work done by Milne (2011) who argued that often referees will try to retain their identity within the sport by shifting their focus away from playing or coaching and to the referee role.

Another reason referees remained in the game was that they saw this as an additional income opportunity. While this was mentioned by only 2 referees/umpires, it is still a significant reason as refereeing can provide an additional source of income for many people. As one basketball official stated "I started with college intramurals because I loved the game, but it was also cash." Another rugby official stated "I was working at a sporting goods store right after college. And he (friend) stated that I should get into refereeing instead of working at the sporting goods store part-time."

The last theme that emerged was that individuals use refereeing as a way to "give back" to their community. Sometimes the reason for giving back was because of a need in the area. This was a very common theme as one hockey official stated "quite frankly there was simply a need for umpires in our area, specifically in high school." Others mentioned that they became a referee because they were encouraged by others in the community to get involved as a reaction to their fandom. "I liked yelling at the refs. One day, a ref told me I should get out there. So I did." In the era of a civic mindedness, individuals will find various ways to contribute to their community that are often parallel

with their own interests. In this case, refereeing becomes part of the civic duty for the individual as other areas for giving back may not be as available to them.

What are some key issues facing officials in your sport these days?

Concussions and head injuries in general are a major concern for sport officials. Many of the referees involved in team sports with significant physical contact (American football, soccer, and basketball) indicated that dealing with potential head injuries, and particularly concussions, has become the most significant part of the game. Referees noted that much of their initial training and re-training each year has focused on how to deal with head injuries. For most referees, this involves stopping the game immediately and forcing the player to leave the playing area and enter into some sort of concussion protocol.

A second issue that referees mentioned was dealing with increasing abuse by players and coaches and sometimes spectators directed towards the official. This abuse most often came in the form of verbal dissent regarding decisions the referee made. More experienced officials developed a "line" that they communicated to players, coaches, and spectators through the game as to what sort of dissent they would allow and what they wouldn't allow. As one official stated, "as long as they don't make their dissent loud and public, trying to undermine me, then I can deal with it." Many of these same experienced officials indicated that one of the things they learned early on how to deal with dissent. As one softball official noted "as an umpire, you learn to let the comments roll off your back." Many seemed to feel like the level of dissent was unacceptable as it got in the way of the ability of the referee to call the game. As one soccer referee stated, "dealing with dissent means I have to take my focus off the play of the game, this is why it is so frustrating." At the same time, most recognized that dissent was a challenge to the referee's authority and that minimizing dissent was necessary for player, coach, and spectator management.

The third issue many referees mentioned was not related to game management, but rather the organization of refereeing in general. Many lamented the decline in the number of referees. This decline is supported by national data which suggests that in some sports, for example soccer, there has been a 15% decrease in the number of certified soccer officials over the past years. Many of the officials in this study were concerned that without more referees, gaining more experience, the quality of refereeing would decline, and subsequently the quality of the overall match.

How do you get ready for a game?

In terms of preparation, referees noted that being prepared for the match was of paramount importance. Preparation includes preparing oneself mentally and physically for the demands of the game. Successful referees spend time prior to match researching the teams they are going to referee, noting who the problem players and coaches may be. As one rugby referee noted "I usually like to look the day before my match(es) at who the teams are and who my problem plays are. Preparation also involves making sure one is physically fit in order to referee the games. While some referees stated that they use refereeing as a way to keep in shape, others, particularly those who do higher-level matches noted that they often run and workout in order to keep in shape for refereeing. The ability to "keep up with play" is one of the key duties of a referee. Also, being aware of the proper position that is required to see the playing field is important and physical fitness allows the referee to place themselves in those proper positions.

Referees also note that preparation occurs right before the match begins. Referees consistently noted that they will spend time talking to their assistants about the expectations of each role. For example, in soccer, a referee will often tell the assistant referee that their primary duties include signaling offside, and signaling a foul when the referee has not seen the action. Referees in all the sports mentioned that this preparation with others is vitally important for a successful game. As one soccer referee stated, "I will talk with my assistants about some of the signals I'll use to communicate with them. For example, I'll put my hand low on my hip to indicate

which direction I think a throw-in might go or I'll put the number of fingers on my shorts to tell the assistants how much additional time I want to add to the game."

How do you manage players before, during, and after a game?

Managing players for the referee and umpire means being able to deal with any dissent that the players may levy throughout the match. Often players will disagree with a referee or umpires' decision. For many referees, the key in managing the players, letting them have their voice heard, but not in such a way that it undermines the referee's legitimacy. For example, one baseball umpire mentioned that he often allows the players to have private conversations with him while they are batting. However, as soon as the player begins to verbalize the dissent loudly in such a way that others can hear it, the referee will then change tactics and will eject the player out of the game or caution the player for the dissent.

Player management for team-sport referees also means trying to prevent confrontations between opposing (and sometimes the same) team players or between players and coaches. Games can "get out of hand" when a referee does not recognize and deal with problems that arise during the game. Referees manage these issues in several ways. One way is by talking with individual players who the referee might think will cause a problem. This will often occur in team-field sports such as rugby and soccer when a player feels that they have been fouled but the official disagrees. Many referees say that they might run alongside the frustrated player and talk to them in an attempt to calm down the player. Referees will also use formal warnings (such as cautions) in order to demonstrate to other players that the referee has the issue under control and that they (the players) do not have to as one official state "take matters into their own hands." For referees the goal is to prevent any issues from arising by dealing with the potential causes. As a soccer official stated, "I can't stop it (dissent) from occurring, but I can stop it from reoccurring."

What are some of the key issues you think about as you officiate a game?

The referees focused on the importance of safety and fairness as central duties. Several referees mentioned that their primary role is to ensure that the players remain safe first. In this age when concussions have come to the forefront, keeping players safe, especially in sports that involve contact (rugby and American football) or in heading the ball (soccer), safety is an important component. Second referees stated that their primary role is to ensure that the game is played within the rules of the sports. Fairness in the application of these roles was paramount to these referees. As one rugby referee mentioned, "my job is to make sure that the players follow the rules of the game." These are ideas consistent with the work of Russel, Renshaw, and Davids (2018) who provide an analysis of national-level football (soccer) referees. In their analysis, they find that sport referees at the elite level focus on maintaining safety and fairness as one of their primary foci. This philosophy extends to those who tend to referee at the amateur level. However, while Russel, Renshaw, and Davids (2018) also argue that accuracy in the calling of fouls is another key component for national-level referees, this was not mentioned as often by amateur-level referees. It may be that referees at the amateur-level are still learning the processes of refereeing such as what the different fouls are and when they are most likely to occur. Accuracy is generally a higher-level skill that comes with experience.

What is your philosophy in dealing with coaches? With spectators?

Game management requires the official to communicate with players. However, coaches and spectators are often an integral part of the sporting experience. For many referees though, coaches and spectators are seen as roles that often hinder the official's ability to do the job. As one official said, "I am there for the players." The implication being that spectators and coaches are roles that many referees wish they did not have to deal with. Some referees simply "tune out" the officials and spectators, choosing not to acknowledge any dissent from those roles. Others often have a player on the field talk to the coach

or spectators who are verbally dissenting. This method was particularly common among those who referee older youth and adult matches.

However, there are times when the official must address dissent by coaches and spectators. For dissent by spectators, officials will often utilize a team official (coach or other team official) to talk to the spectator. But for coaches, officials are able to use a variety of both informal conversations with the coach or more formal means such as an ejection or send-off. Many officials do not like using this method as it takes away from the game and puts the center of attention on the coach. Again, the implication is that coaches and spectators are a cursory role that, while it must be managed, is often seen as a significant burden by the sport official.

How do you advance to different levels in your sport officiating?

For most referees of team sports, there is an organizational structure to refereeing. Most have a system of advancement whereby they can advance in rank. This advancement in rank allows the referee to do higher-level/more difficult matches. For example, in soccer, there are 8 ranks that proceed from the entry-level (Grade 8 where over 90% of referees stay their entire career) all the way up to a FIFA-level referee (the referees who often work World Cup matches).

Officials note two factors that are important in the advancement process, knowing the rules and "being seen." Many referees indicated that in order to advance up the ranks and get assigned higher-level games, you must know the rules/laws of the game. But it is not just knowing the rules/laws that is important, it is being able to identify on the playing field when those rules are being violated and a foul needs to be called and when a violation does not need to be called (trifling). As one rugby referee said, "the more experience you get, the more you know what to call and what not to call." However, as one softball umpire stated knowing the rules is just the bare minimum of what you need to advance. Knowing the rules "...qualifies you to be an official." It is assumed that if you are moving up that you

do know the rules and you know them well enough to apply them in a game-format.

Being noticed by individuals who are higher in the refereeing structure is also important for advancement. As a soccer referee stated if you want to move up "the goal is to put yourself in contact with the people at a higher level as quickly as possible." There are two ways that referees get noticed, one is by working the best games and the second is by going to the right academies/camps. The assignor is a very important person in the arena of refereeing. As referees are generally independent contractors, they must work with an assignor to get the games that will help them advance. This means that the assignor is a powerful person. As one referee stated, "the assignor determines what games you get, so getting in good with him will help." Additionally, working for the "right" leagues is also important. Many referees indicated the politics that are often at work when determining which assignor to work for. In larger urban and suburban areas there may be multiple assignors who have games and working for the "right" assignor, the person who has the games that will help the official advance, is paramount.

Being seen is also about making sure that you go to the right camps/academies. In baseball, there are a series of camps put on by high-level umpires. Being invited to these camps is extremely important for advancement. As one baseball umpire stated that in order to get into umpiring the minor leagues or the professionals "you've got to go. You have to go to (name removed for confidentiality) umpire school for the entire month of January." Or in the case of one soccer referee, "going to the right referee academy is important if one wants to be seen by the right people in order to advance."

What are some of your favorite experiences officiating?

Officials indicated three overall areas that they consider their favorite part of officiating. First is in the opportunity to officiate high-level games. This notion of high-level can include professional, semi-professional, or amateur and youth matches played among high-level teams. For referees, the opportunity to officiate these matches is a testament to their ability

as well as an opportunity to demonstrate their competency at a higher level. As one baseball referee stated, "I love doing high level games because it tells me that the assignor thinks I am good at what I do." The opportunity to officiate high level matches then becomes validation for officials and their ability.

For other referees, the opportunity to travel to different parts of the country and the globe is one of the best experiences. Several officials who referee high-level matches enjoy the opportunity to travel and go new places. "The chance to travel around the country is what I love most. The great thing about refereeing is that I often have time to visit these areas when I am not refereeing."

Additionally, the friendships that are developed between referees as they engage in the sport is what many enjoy. The opportunity to work with new people but also to work games with the same referees multiple times offers many the opportunity to develop friendships. As one baseball official stated, "I love working with other officials who I know. It is great to see them and we have formed some great relationships through the years." For many these relationships provide support during those tough games that all referees have. "After tough games, we (the referee team) will often sit down over a few beers at a local bar and review the game. We'll talk about what went well and what didn't. I love this opportunity to debrief."

What are some of the worst experiences you have had as an official?

When asked to relay their worst experiences, referees mentioned three areas: losing control over the match, a lack of communication, and the inability to advance. Some referees were fearful of losing control over the match. This often happened when the referee had to make a controversial call. For others, losing control over the match resulted from teams who had a history with each other that the referee was unable to manage during the games. For others, the lack of communication, both on the pitch and within the refereeing organization created problems. For example, one soccer referee mentioned that one of the worst games they ever had involved several

miscommunications between him and the assistant referees. This inability to “be on the same page” created problems as the players were able to see that the referee and the assistant referees were not agreeing on calls. For this referee, it led to a breakdown in the game management where the referee ultimately lost control of the match. Additionally, a baseball umpire felt frustrated because they were not receiving timely information from the umpiring association about important matters such as recertification and issues to be aware of when officiating. Finally, several officials across multiple sports were frustrated by the inability to advance up the system despite that they believed they were a good referee. This frustration actually ended up forcing two of the referees to significantly limit on the amount of refereeing they did. As one basketball official stated, “I wasn’t getting the games I needed in order to advance, so I decided to cut back on how much refereeing I did. It really made me re-evaluate my officiating.”

Out of these initial codes, a series of themes emerged about the overall experience of the sport team official: Communication matters, functional roles based on conflict, and social cultural capital matter.

Initial Themes

One theme that emerged from the data in terms of how to create a successful game is the role of communication. Here communication is between three separate roles. First, there is the communication between the referee and the players. Referees believe that if they communicate early in the match to the players what their expectations are, they are more likely to get compliance throughout the game. This communication occurs in the pregame where referees will often inspect the teams and give them some of the key concerns that the referee is looking for. For example, several referees mentioned that they often talk about rule changes that may have occurred recently that the players need to be aware.

The second group of people that the referee needs to communicate with are the coaches. During the pregame the referee will often make the coaches aware

of the amount of dissent that the referee will tolerate throughout the match. Many referees mentioned that they will often tell the coaches that they want the coach to keep dissent to a minimum as that dissent undermines the referee’s legitimacy on the playing field. Several referees noted that they might only allow a designated player, such as a captain, to approach them with the concerns about the game. Other referees utilize more formal means of dealing with dissent such as administering a technical foul in basketball or a caution (yellow card) in soccer or rugby.

Finally, communication between the officials throughout the match is of paramount importance for the referees. The referees will often spend much of the pre-game talking about how they will communicate with each other on the playing field. For example, several referees and umpires mentioned that they will have specific signals that they will use to help communicate an incident. These signals are both verbal and non-verbal. As one soccer referee stated, they use hand signals on their shorts to indicate to the assistant referees the amount of additional time that they are going to add on to the end of each half.

Functional Roles Based on Conflict

The role of referee comes with a completely different set of norms that frame the experience of the official. These expectations in turn frame how the referee performs the role. The frame of the referee role differs significantly from the other roles of the game. Players, coaches, and even administrators have the goal that a team or individual should win. When a player steps on the field to play or a coach begins their instructions from the sideline, their goal is the same, create the conditions for their team to win. However, the referee role is two-fold, to make sure that the game is played within the parameters of the rules and that players remain safe. Every referee learns that these are their most important duties. So, the referee is not there to determine which team will win or not, but rather that the game is played fairly and safely.

Because of these two frames between the referee and the players/coaches, the game involves a series of conflictual relationships; there is the relationship between two competing teams and the relationship between the coaches. But, there is also the relationship between the referee and the teams as well as the referee and the coaches. Since the job of the team and the coach is to win and the job of the referee is to make sure play is fair and safe, this creates a relationship between the roles where the individuals view the game differently. Then, who is right in their interpretation of the game is a matter of who can control the meaning of the game? Here, it is the referee who has ultimate control over the meanings people give to the different parts of the game. It is the job of the referee to determine what is happening during the game, whether that action is within the rules of the game, and whether it is safe. The referee is the center of power for the game. But that power must be legitimized by the players and coaches. The referee's legitimacy in their role is also tied to their ability to manage the game. Players often talk about poor referees as those who are unable to create a general meaning of the game that the players and coaches can generally agree with. A referee's legitimacy is tied to their ability to manage game that is consistent within the laws of the game.

The players and coaches want the games played in such a way that they will win and will often work to manipulate the referee to call the game to their advantage. Many of the referees interviewed expressed that players and coaches will often try to "work" them; getting the referee to call fouls to their advantage. The goal of the players and coaches is to get the referee to construct the game in such a way that advantages their team. Players and coaches will often talk with the referee throughout the game pleading with the referee to call certain fouls or getting angry when a foul is called against their team. All this is done in an attempt to get the referee to construct the game in such a way that the team can win their game.

Social and Cultural Capital Matter

Referees and umpires stated that the advancement process is not necessarily one that is based upon merit,

but is rather tied to other conditions that are centered on the role of social and cultural capital and the role of time in allowing one to advance (Bourdieu 1986). Advancement in refereeing can be understood through the work of Bourdieu who discussed various forms of capital and their role in help individuals achieve success. Social capital is one of those forms, meaning the connections between individuals that an individual can use to help achieve societal resources. For referees, social connections are an important source for advancement. While a contentious idea, several referees mentioned that the advancement processed was more than the knowledge of the game and the ability to be successful on the field, but also about putting oneself in the right social networks to be noticed by the right people for advancement. This is partly because the system of advancement requires that others watch you to see your capabilities on the playing field. Being watched by the "right people" increases one's likelihood not just of advancing through the ranks of refereeing, but of getting noticed. As a referee, you are recognized by those in positions of power in the refereeing structure and advanced accordingly.

Cultural capital is the cultural knowledge one needs to be successful in a situation (Bourdieu 1986). For example, when someone goes to a formal dinner, knowing which utensil to use is an example of cultural capital. Here referees mention that knowing the language of refereeing is important for advancement. As one referee mentioned, "knowing how to talk to those in the refereeing community is particularly important." Knowing what terms of used by those in positions of power situates the referee within that community and increases the likelihood of getting promoted to the next rank. Also, knowing what to wear and when is very important. As one referee soccer referee stated, "I can always tell a new referee (in soccer) because they show up at the field with their socks pushed down. A good referee will not even get out of their car unless they are properly dressed with socks pulled up."

Finally, an important part of the advancement process is having the time to devote to the advancement and refereeing process. Often, for

higher-level matches a referee needs to be at the field a minimum of 1 hour ahead of a game, referee the match, and then stay for about 30 minutes to an hour post-match to discuss the match and write a report. This process takes time and for many people, having that time to devote to refereeing at higher levels is not possible. Job and family duties often prevent people from refereeing at a higher level. However, as Milne (2011) argues, those referees who consider the refereeing role central to who they are as an individual are more likely to continue refereeing. This idea of time also is consistent with the work of Veblen (1899) who argues that those who financial resources often have more time to devote to leisure activities. Many referees mentioned that one thing that keeps them from advancing is that time it takes to do all that is required in the advancement process. Refereeing for many is a leisure activity that while paid, is not a vocation but an avocation that people must work around full-time jobs. Individuals who are in jobs that grant them more free time, whether that is holding a higher position in a company as the higher one gets in a company, the more control they have of their schedule, or they have jobs that allow them to have a flexible schedule, such as a college professor, are more likely to have those opportunities to develop their refereeing skills.

Conclusion

The referee role is situated within the larger context of the sporting system. But, unlike most other roles in the sporting process, the referee's role is designed not to produce a winner, but to make sure that the players and coaches follow the rules of the game are safe. Within that context, many chose to begin refereeing as a way to continue to remain involved in their sport. For many, the desire to retain an identity associated with that sport has led them to refereeing as either injuries, age, or other duties have taken the individual away from the playing the sport and the referee role provides that opportunity to continue to give back to the sport. Within the game itself, many referees expressed that a successful match is one where the referee maintained what they believed was a fairness of play, communicated effectively with other referees, players,

and coaches, and managed players in such a way to minimize disagreement with the calls.

One limitation of this research is that it deals specifically with individuals who referee team sports. It is likely that those who referee individual sports will have different experiences and motivations than those who referee team sports. Future research should seek out referees/officials of individual sports such as swimming, fencing, etc. Additionally, this research focuses on referees who mainly officiate youth and amateur games. As one advances in the referee system, their understanding of refereeing and officiating is likely to change and their experiences might be different. It is likely that those who referee professional matches, many of whom officiate as their full-time occupation, their experience refereeing changes from one of an avocation to a vocation. When that happens, there are different systems the individual must navigate that set it apart from those who officiate as an avocation.

Finally, this paper examines specifically the experience of referees from the perspective of the referee. It does not examine how other sporting roles such as player, coach, or administrator interact with the referees from the perspective of those other roles. Research should focus on examining the refereeing system from other role-perspectives, focusing particularly on the difference between those involved in the actual game (players, coaches, and spectators), and those involved in the administration of the game (league administrators, etc.). Finally, future research should focus on the application of these ideas for the improvement of referee organizations, particularly increasing the number of referees who have an opportunity to advance as well as reducing the gendered nature of the system.

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