

1. The Diagonal System and its origins.

The Referees' Diagonal was the result of a complete revolution of the match officials' roles in 1891. The Referee, complete with notebook and whistle, made his way for the very first time onto the field of play to take charge of the game. Prior to this, two Umpires who waved sticks around in the air whilst making decisions controlled games.

The Sheffield FA Rule No. 12 of 1870 stated: *"Each Umpire shall be Referee in that half of the field nearest the goal defended by the party nominating him"*.

An earlier Eton rule of Control, stated, *"Two umpires must be chosen, one by each party; their position is to be at the "goals" of their respective parties."*

A similar Cheltenham rule of the same period, read, *"Two umpires are to be chosen before the commencement of the game; they are to stand at opposite corners of the ground, each commanding a view along the side rope and also along the line of the goal nearest him"*. The subservient Referee of those early days would be statically positioned on the boundary, taking a secondary role, and only referred to when the two Umpires were unable to come to a conclusion (following an appeal by players).

Very often, the Referee was never called upon to make a decision throughout the whole match! The Umpires' sticks were exchanged for flags, and they became known as 'linesmen', relegated to patrolling the touchlines. The prime duty of these fledgling 'linesmen' was to indicate when the ball went out of play over the boundary lines. They would keep out of the field of play as much as possible, and point their flags to the spot where the ball went 'into touch'; and would stand to one side to monitor the throw-ins.

It was eventually realised that a structured method was required, to enable the three officials to work together in maximising match control in an efficient manner. Judgement of offside was also becoming a major factor, as it became apparent that it was sometimes physically impossible for the Referee alone to make accurate offside judgements. Increased cooperation with his linesmen called for greater positional play between the three officials. When the first *Referees' Chart* was compiled five years later in 1896, a special column entitled, 'Hints to Referees' was included. This contained the first positioning advice for referees. They were recommended to stand near the centre-line at the kick off; to monitor encroachment and to ensure that the ball was kicked forwards. This helpful column also advised referees to keep up with play, and check whether the ball actually passed over the goal line when a goal was in question. It took a few more years yet, before an article appearing in Pickford's, "Association Football" (published in 1905), first mentioned a method that involved a structured positioning system for all the three officials that subsequently became known as the 'Diagonal System' of Control.

'In practice, the Linesman is entrusted with the oversight of the touchline, the referee the goal-line and goal positions. This is a useful division of the work, but it is not a peremptory one - the linesman should keep an active watch on the ball crossing the goal-line so that he can if required help the referee either by signal or by consultation. The linesman should act as far as he can as a goal-judge. To achieve this, the suggestion is made that one linesman should work more along the touchline on one half of the field of play, and the other conversely'.

William Pickford went on to become a member of the FA's Rules Committee in England for more than 40 years.

There have been subsequent suggestions throughout the history of football, that control of the game would be improved by abolishing linesmen altogether, and having two referees instead, one in each half of the field. In essence, this would be a return to the (two umpire) methods used prior to 1891. Several experiments have proved the two-referee method to be inferior to the diagonal system, which continues to be very efficient.

It was not until the late 1920s and early '30s that the diagonal system actually began to take shape.

Stanley Rous (later to become Sir Stanley Rous) developed the diagonal system of control after, according to Belgium Referee John Langenus (1930 World Cup Final referee), he had seen Belgium referees making a similar attempt at scientific positioning on the field of play. This was destined to become the blueprint for all refereeing.

A group of referees, including Rous in particular, used the system with some success when refereeing international matches on the Continent. But the 'Diagonal System' of Control had yet to receive recognition by The Football Association (FA); and there were a number of referees and officials who were opposed to it. The breakthrough came in 1934. Rous used the system when he refereed the Manchester City v Portsmouth 1934 FA Cup Final. Six days after the Cup Final, Rous attended an interview for the post of Secretary of The Football Association. Two months later he was confirmed in post and continued there

for nearly 28 years (1934-62) until he became president of FIFA. Following the Cup Final of 1934, Rous submitted a Memorandum for discussion with the Association, and after the pros and cons had been carefully considered, the FA approved the 'Diagonal System' for use in matches under their jurisdiction.

The system proved to be a success, particularly with The Football League (England) who sent out instructions to all of its referees, stating that they must use this method of control. The Diagonal System of Control was featured in a long article in *Football World* in 1939; and it was nearly 10 years later in 1948, when foreign delegates at the International Conference of Referees held in London, also approved the adoption of the system; which has since been used throughout the footballing World.

The Diagonal System of Control explained.

In the Diagonal System, the referee controls play by patrolling a line roughly diagonally across the length of the field from corner flag to corner flag. The two ARs are positioned on the touchlines on the opposite diagonal, patrolling that half of the touchline farthest from the referee. They assist on the goal line, at corner kicks and at penalty kicks next to their patrol area, and they also act if necessary, as a goal-judge. There are two diagonals that the Referee can choose to run. The most popular diagonal traverses a path from the right corner flag, to the opposite left corner flag at the other end of the field of play (known in the refereeing world as The Right Wing diagonal). The alternative diagonal traverses a path from the left corner flag, to the opposite right corner flag at the other end of the field of play (known in the refereeing world as The Left Wing diagonal). A Right Wing diagonal, places each AR on the touchline, alongside (and monitoring) the attacking team's right wing players. Conversely, the Left Wing diagonal places each AR on the touchline, alongside (and monitoring) the attacking team's left wing players. Other terms used by referees' to describe which touchline position they want their ARs to patrol, are sometimes referred to as "outside rights, outside lefts, left backs or right backs". In other words, the AR patrols that half of the touchline that is adjacent to a left back player's position, and so forth.

The great advantage of the diagonal system when it is properly carried out is that there are always two pairs of eyes, watching every movement on the field of play from opposite sides.

The selection of diagonal (Right Wing, or Left Wing) rests with the Referee, and is based on his observation of the position of the setting sun, the condition of the playing surface touchlines, and the positioning of the technical areas etc; for naturally, he will avoid as many drawbacks as possible. When the Diagonal System was originally introduced into The Football League matches, the Referee changed his diagonal at half-time, with the ARs adjusting their positions accordingly. This was done at the request of the Football clubs, to prevent undue damage to the turf on the sidelines patrolled by the ARs, who used only one half of each touchline length for the whole game. It was not long, before overuse of the touchline areas soon obliterated markings; and in inclement weather, the worn touchlines soon became quagmires devoid of any grass! The modern Referee should train to use either diagonal, depending on circumstances. Modern day playing surfaces are now, less prone to wear and tear. Modern boots are also less prone to damaging playing surfaces, than their hobnailed counterparts.

Senior & Junior Assistant Referees

It is an individual Referee's decision, to decide which touchline his ARs will patrol. There is nothing in the Laws to stipulate otherwise. Some referees prefer to adopt the Right Wing diagonal, and others the Left Wing. Some referees use the Right Wing diagonal in one game, and the Left Wing diagonal in the next. There is a growing tendency these days, for referees to always use the Right Wing diagonal, as keeping a set pattern is seen by some, to be more beneficial to all of the match officials. In theory, this minimises mistakes and uncertainty. But the choice of diagonal should always be based to suit match situations. Therefore, new referees should be encouraged to vary their diagonal, before they become too accustomed at only running in one diagonal direction.

Most referees prefer to keep their ARs patrolling the same touchline in both halves of the game. But some ask their ARs to swap touchlines in the second half - and some referees have been known on the odd occasion, to run the opposite diagonal in the second half, and make their ARs run the far end of the same touchline that they patrolled in the first half. This could lead to confusion! The general method is to keep ARs on the same touchline throughout the game - the senior more experienced AR normally takes the 'Technical Area' side (because he is more experienced in dealing with any unruly 'bench' occupants.) It is also useful for the diagonal to be changed in the second half, to move an AR away from unruly spectators, particularly in the corners, where the close proximity of aggressive spectators could pose a danger. It is also not unknown, for the diagonal to be changed in order to keep a closer eye on first-half feuds developing between opponents.

It can sometimes be useful to allow the junior AR to 'have a go' at controlling the technical area side of the field of play in the first half, when tensions are at a lower level. This will allow the Junior AR to gain experience with dealing with the Technical Area occupants, and management of the substitutions.

The Diagonal System of Control in the Referees' Chart.

It was not until the 1937-1938 season, following a complete new codification of the Laws previously in force, that the Referees' Chart (for the first time) included a full explanation of 'The Diagonal System of Control,' including 11 detailed diagrams and instructions for various positions that the Referee could take during the game.

In its Memorandum on Refereeing No. 5, dated August 1951, The Football Association (England) provided the following advice:

Normally, efficient control can be exercised by keeping roughly to a line from the corner of one penalty-area to the opposite corner of the other penalty-area, a distance of about 85 yards. When compared with the full distance between the corner-flags, of about 125 yards, it will be seen that to cover the shorter distance only entails quite a substantial saving in energy. It also means, particularly on a holding surface, that the referee is more easily able to reach the vicinity of play.

Following a complete rewrite of the Laws of the Game for season 1997-1998, the diagrams for 'The Diagonal System of Control' no longer appear in the Laws of Associated Football. The system is now established as the single accepted international method used by referees worldwide.

Modern Methods

When the diagonal originally made its entrance, referees were expected to run the full length from corner flag to corner flag. The modern referee is more astute, and uses his reserves of energy to concentrate on managing the game, rather than unnecessarily wasting energy by reaching the extremities of the diagonal when there is no need to do so. Placing oneself at an extremity, can also lead to Referees losing touch with play in the much faster modern game.