

TOUCH JUDGING BY STEVE SAVAGE,

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The Panel of National Touch Judges has been in existence for some sixteen seasons. Throughout the National Leagues the 'team of three' is now an accepted concept in terms of officiating. Touch judging is a completely different skill from that of refereeing, with varying roles and responsibilities. It is important for everyone to remember that the Touch Judge (or "lino", as named by spectators) is *not* there to referee the game. The Referee is the leader of the 'team of three', who briefs his Touch Judges before the game on his expectation and requirements.

The Panel of National Touch Judges numbers are around ninety and throughout the season their performances are reviewed and each season the list is revised. The route to PNTJ is from local societies, to federation, to groups, who each year (around March time) recommend suitable potential members. Aspiring Touch Judges should have passed the Touch Judge Development Course Award (which includes an examination on the laws of the game), be able to succeed at the prescribed fitness test (currently be able to run 2,400 metres in under 12 minutes or attain 12 minutes 30 seconds on the JAM test) and have received a suitable Touch Judge Coaching Report.

Development Panel Touch Judge performances are assisted by a team of Touch Judge Coaches (seven in total) and are subject to match reports by their Referees. Appointment levels are then constantly reviewed and their levels and appointments vary accordingly.

For Touch Judges aspiring to the highest level there is an Elite Panel of Touch Judges (16 in total) and they officiate at Guinness Premiership and European level.

Touch Judges' main responsibilities are:-

- a) To signal touch, touch in goal, kicks at goal and foul play.
- b) To communicate to the Referee any obvious infringements to which the Referee is unsighted and where the infringement has a <u>critical</u> effect on the game.
- c) To advise the Referee of trends at stoppages in play.

(The best Touch Judges not only highlight problems *but also* provide solutions).

Communication between the team of three is via radio systems. These are in place in the Premiership, National Division 1 and Division 2. This kind of communication greatly enhances the 'team of three's' officiating performance, where the Referee can receive advice from the Touch Judge. Touch Judge advice, it must be stressed, is



purely *advisory* and the Referee decides whether to act on the information given. The Referee has responsibility and accountability for the match and for all his decisions.

Touch Judges are expected to attend the Annual Conference and the Regional Panel Meetings. On occasions they will be asked to review DVDs of their performance and to record their observations.

Touch Judges are a dedicated and important part of officiating, providing a good service that benefits the playing of the game. The RFU structure for Touch Judges is possibly the most comprehensive in the world and is one of which the Referee Department at Castlecroft is very proud.

Best wishes to all 'flag wavers' for the remainder of the season. I am sure all spectators will agree!!!