

# Whose Game is it Anyway

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**By Bob Evans, Ph.D., former USSF National Director of Instruction**

- *(excerpts)*

A wise man (*George Santayana*) once said, that if we do not learn from history, we are condemned to repeat it. So in my delving into history, I came across, the name of Edmund Burke (1729-1797). He was notable, as a great orator, whose voice thundered across England, in times, of great upheaval... (*during*) both the American and French Revolutions. But, he was also, notable to us, because he was one, of the few (*in the British Parliament*)...to support the American colonies, in their disagreements, with England and King George III.

For Burke was concerned, about POWER...He said, in a speech in 1771, "*The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.*" And that brings me, to the subject, of referees. The Laws of the Game, give the referee great powers...for two hours or so...the referee is, the powerful, Captain of the ship, the only policeman, the judge, jury and executioner, of any party ... Therein lies the problem, for people like power, and in their affection for it, they abuse it. Burke was right.... The abuse, IS all the more dangerous, because the power. IS so great.

Consider some examples; a referee goes to caution, a player, after a foul. The player understandably upset. asks the official, "*What am I being cautioned for?*" The referee answers, "*For being stupid enough to commit a foul like that.*" *THERE*, was an abuse of power. The referee, must inform the player, of the reason, for the caution, but does not, have the right, to insult him, at the same time. After all, what would happen to a player, if he told the referee, that *his decisions were stupid?*

Another example. At a break in a game, (for) injury, a coach asked the referee... "*Excuse me ref, but can I ask you about the decisions at the indirect free kick, a moment ago?*" Back comes the negative, response; "*I don't have to explain anything to you! If you don't like the decision, that's too bad! And, if you talk to me again, you're out of the game!*" **There was an abuse of power.** The laws, do not allow dissent, from players or club officials, but surely, we can answer questions, that are politely put. The game is for the players....and it is the referee's duty, to ensure, that all players, get the maximum enjoyment, out of playing, in a match. The referee protects them, from physical attack; he ensures that, they are not cheated, by their opponents; he creates an environment, in which a sporting contest, can be fairly conducted.

The referee is NOT a dictator. He (*or she*) cannot expect the players to bow down to his (or her) will, simply because he (*or she*) is there. Some Referee do's and don'ts:

1. When taking disciplinary action ...say no more than the law requires: "This is a caution (yellow card) for unsporting behavior...If you commit another like that; I may

have to ask you to leave the field.” If anything more needs to be said, do not get into an argument. Never insult a player. Let the player have the last word of disagreement. Then remove yourself from the discussion.

**2.** Learn *not to be too sensitive*, to disagreement, about decisions you make. The players will not agree ...all the time...the fact is, you make mistakes! WE all do.

*“Well you may be right, it might have been the other way, but we’ll live with it the way it is.”* After all, when someone disagrees with you, they are not attacking the very soul of your being...you do not need to over-react.

**3.** Set a pleasant atmosphere... a technique, which works for me, is to seek out the coaches, before the game and introduce myself. With a smile, I may say something like this: *‘Well it’s a lovely day for a game, and I’m really looking forward to doing this one. I hope your players enjoy themselves.’* AND I never give threatening speeches to captains, at coin toss. All that is necessary is ... a few words & *“Good luck to you both.”*

**4.** If you have had a major disagreement with some players or with a particular club, stay away from them for a while. Give hard feelings a chance to soften. You are not a tougher referee, when you go straight back... with teams, you have had problems with: *you are an unwise one.*

You are forgetting, that the players ,have the right to a pleasant game.... ...

***YOU are the one, who must give way.*** The players are more important, than the referee. There will always be other games. Underlying this discussion is a disturbing thought... *“Those who have been once intoxicated, with power, can never willingly abandon it”* (Edmund Burke). Burke understood, that because he was writing, about the colonial government, in its dealings with, the American revolutionaries.

But we know too, because we can all, think of referees, who will not change their dictatorial and harsh ways. But the great hope, in writing about this, is that we can reach referees, who may be wise enough, to change their ways, *for the benefit of the players-whose game this in fact—really is.*

***And if not, well they may , have to get along, without them.***

*“It’s not the note you play that’s the wrong note - it’s the note you play afterwards, that makes it , right or wrong.” - Miles Davis A most influential US Jazz figure (1926-1991)*

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