

AC Laws – Getting it right

In my last column I wrote for the third time about hoop and roquet. Since there has been no feedback we can assume that this time the message came out right. This leads to a discussion on how easy it is to get it wrong sometimes, even when we don't intend to, and even when we really do know the laws. Three aspects to the discussion are:

- Simple language – sometimes makes it complex
- Source of authority
- How a good referee gets it right and educates the players

Simple Language

Everybody yearns for laws written in simple language. Unfortunately late last year I wrote about hoop and roquet, intending to clarify and emphasize a point, and in trying to keep it brief and in simple language it was left open to other interpretations. Let's be clear, the misinterpretation is the writers fault, not the reader's. It is just unfortunate that simplifying the language and discussion leaves it open to other interpretations.

When referees discuss the laws, when all players discuss them, they simplify, for that is how we build our understanding, and apply to the specific case at hand.

There is nothing wrong with this – what is a problem is when the understanding is applied to a new slightly different problem when the nuances and complexities may induce a different part of the law to apply.

The dangers of simplifying the laws are there for all to see. As referees and players we must refer to the laws book and the official guidance on the laws (ORLC and Referees Manual – both available online), as the authority, and NOT rely on memory.

Our memory does play tricks, and please do not think you are different to everyone else.

So the advice is simple – read the laws book.

Source of authority

This is not a discussion of on lawn referee decision making and player etiquette!

On the lawn a referee is trained to make a decision and to communicate that decision. As players, we accept that decision and get on with the game. This is right and proper. However, in discussion after a game as to why the decision was made, or as happens often, in discussion in the clubhouse, a good referee will show the players where the law is in the laws book, and explain why it applies in that way.

This leads us to the “source of authority” in decisions on the laws. A referee through their training and experience is better placed than the non-referee player to be able to interpret the laws and to give advice on which laws apply. However, the statement “I have been a referee for a large number of years” is NEVER sufficient to establish the validity of a laws interpretation.

I observed a discussion recently where this was played out. It was a clubhouse discussion on a point of law, not involving any decision making on the lawn. The referee who stated “this is the law because I have been a referee for a long time” was in fact incorrect on the point being discussed. Another referee pulled out the law book and the discussion was over very quickly and very simply. The use of the law book in the discussion made it non personal, there no egos to defend, it was simply a technical discussion, and everyone went away knowing more about the laws as a result.

Making the mistake is NOT a sign of a poor referee – getting the book out and reading about it is a sign of a good referee. We are all victims of our own selected experience, so don’t get caught out with it.

How a good referee gets it right and educates the players

This is simple. First, the good referee will refer to the laws book, the ORLC and the referees manual. The laws book is the authority, not any one person’s opinion. The other two documents provide guidance in how to interpret some of the laws, but the laws book is still the authority.

Second, a good referee keeps an open mind. They know their stuff but they refer to the laws book to educate others and to confirm their knowledge.

Conclusion

The way to read the laws book is to get out onto the lawn, put balls down and work through it. Our laws are fairly straightforward, contrary to the views of some. By working through an example on the lawn the laws will become clear and the all the ifs, buts and otherwises will fit into place for that example.

Greg Whymark

State Director AC