

BERKSHIRE RUGBY REFEREES

**New
Referee
Information
Pack**



Revised May 2026

1 Welcome to Berkshire Rugby Referees

Welcome to the world of refereeing in Berkshire.

In rugby playing terms, Berkshire is a small county. However, rugby in the county is of a relatively high standard.

Amongst the 21 clubs affiliated to Berkshire Rugby Referees (BRR) are one in the national leagues and several at level 5/6/7 playing in National and Regional leagues. These 21 clubs also include some from other counties whose grounds are close to the Berkshire border and for geographic (though we like to also think quality) reasons affiliate to us for their referees rather than their native county.

BRR has approximately 40 active referees who officiate at these clubs as well as at the many rugby playing schools and club youth sections. We are proud that past & current BRR referees have progressed to refereeing on the PGMOT (the RFU's elite panel) and as ARs in the National Leagues

The objective of BRR is the provision of referees to allow games of rugby to take place, primarily within Berkshire, of the appropriate standard for each game. This is facilitated by recruiting, training, advising, grading and appointing referees, by exchanging refereeing appointments with other Referees Societies, and by any other means deemed to be appropriate by the Committee.

To support these objectives the BRR has an active training and exchange programme for its referees. as well as providing key support to the Southern Federation, comprising Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire, as the next level of referee development. There is an experienced panel of Match Official Developers (advisors and coaches) who provide feedback on referee performance and reports for the Grading Committee.

But it is not all work and no play. The monthly meetings (more of which later) provide a regular vehicle for social activity as well as a basis for continuous training. Also, we provide preseason training with an experienced physical trainer, tailored specifically to the needs of a rugby referee.

BRR maintains strong links with clubs to ensure the referee's visit is enjoyable. The Gwyn-Francis Trophy, awarded to the club voted by referees as the best hosts for the season, is highly sought after by the clubs.

The remainder of this document outlines the ways in which BRR operates to enable an enjoyable refereeing experience. Those referees who have moved to Berkshire having refereed elsewhere may wish to skip the next section of this document which addresses the benefits, challenges, and enjoyment to be obtained from refereeing.

2 Welcome to Refereeing

WHY REFEREE?

There are many answers to this question.

Becoming a rugby referee can be a highly rewarding experience for several reasons:

1. **Stay Connected to the Game:** If you love rugby, refereeing allows you to stay actively involved in the sport, even if you are no longer playing.
2. **Develop Key Skills:** Refereeing helps you build leadership, decision-making, and communication skills. These skills are valuable both on and off the field.
3. **Support the Sport:** Rugby cannot function without good referees. By becoming a referee, you play a crucial role in ensuring the game is played fairly and safely.
4. **Personal Growth:** Refereeing can boost your confidence and help you develop as an individual.
5. **Community and Camaraderie:** You will become part of a community of referees and rugby enthusiasts, which can be a great way to make new friends and connections.
6. **Unique Perspective:** As a referee, you get the best view of the game and can enjoy the action up close.
7. **Financial Incentives:** Many referees are compensated for their time, making it a way to earn while doing something you enjoy.

If you are passionate about rugby and looking for a way to give back to the sport, refereeing could be a fantastic option for you. Have you ever considered becoming a referee?

WHAT IS THERE TO ENJOY ABOUT BEING A REFEREE?

There is the opportunity to travel to new venues, both locally and nationally, and make new friends in the game.

No matter where you referee, you will be the closest onlooker to the action! You can still feel the atmosphere, the adrenaline still flows, and you get all the beneficial competitive exercise that you can take because you have to be where the play is at all times! You are sprinting against the fast runners, thinking at speed, reading the game with the playmakers and outwitting those who like to test the referee. Three-dimensional chess at pace!

THREE DIMENSIONAL CHESS! IT MUST BE VERY DIFFICULT TO REFEREE?

Sometimes it can feel like that, especially at the start. However, there is a lot of help that is available through BRR. If you have played the game, you already have a rudimentary knowledge of what is required, together with empathy for the players. As you become more experienced, the science and art of refereeing becomes easier, but every match still presents you with a challenge and no two matches are the same.

I HAVE HEARD THAT BEING A REFEREE IS RATHER A LONELY VOCATION.

It can feel that way at first, especially when you do not know your way around the various grounds. Also, you may not know very many players or administrators in the clubs, particularly if you have not played rugby for some years. This is where your attendance at the monthly BRR training meetings can help, as you will soon get into the swing of things and meet other referees. However, you will soon be recognised and welcomed by players and club officials, and you will feel part of the local rugby scene quicker than you would probably expect.

Referees' Societies and the RFU are trying to improve communications to reduce the feeling that you are alone. You can help yourself, and others, by joining in BRR meetings and other functions.

Acknowledgement:

This section was extracted from the RFU Booklet "How to become an RFU Referee".

3 Membership

Any person may become a member of the BRR after completing the Ready to Ref (R2R) course, having had one match “observed”, proposed by an existing member (typically the Membership / Recruitment Lead), and being approved by the BRR Committee.

To formalize membership, there is an annual membership fee of £10 (which you will more than make back in free kit!). For U18s and those in full-time education, the membership fee is waived.

Active referees will be appointed to matches according to their grade and experience (see Grading and Appointments below).

Before being appointed to a match, the BRR has a duty of care to satisfy itself that the person is competent and safe to referee the matches.

If an experienced referee wishes to join BRR, i.e., joining from another Society, references will be required.

For new referees, a suitable course must have been attended and passed - R2R is the RFU's only formal entry-level refereeing qualification. BRR will assist in obtaining the match for referees to be observed. An experienced referee/coach/mentor will then accompany the new referee to watch how they perform, and understand their capacity to develop/improve.

Your First Game

Pre-Match Preparation

1. Know the teams, the venue (including how to get there), kick off, and any specific match or tournament rules.
2. Inspect the field and equipment before the game starts.

Essential Equipment for a Rugby Referee

1. Referee Kit: Wear a BRR referee jersey, shorts with pockets, and socks to maintain a professional appearance. Black boots are not essential but often aid the appearance of professionalism – first appearances do play a part!
2. Whistle: A high-quality whistle is crucial for clear signaling during the game. In fact, have two in case you trip and your whistle ends up in the mud. ACME thunderer has been a firm favourite for many decades.
3. Cards: Carry yellow and red cards to manage player conduct.
4. Watch: Use a reliable wristwatch to keep track of game time. In fact, it is useful to keep two to keep a note of elapsed time and running time. This helps with yellow cards and blood injuries. Several refereeing apps are available for smartwatches – speak to other referees to get their feedback and recommendations on which is the easiest to use.
5. Wallet, scorecard and pencil: Record scores, player numbers (in case of cards being issued), and any incidents during the match
6. Coin: For the pre-match coin toss to decide which team kicks off and who starts at which end.
7. Flags: Providing a flag makes getting each team to ‘volunteer’ a touch judge more likely!

Additional Tips

1. Communication: Clear and effective communication will help you to manage

players, coaches, and other officials.

2. Confidence: Be confident in your decisions and maintain control of the game. If you've decided, stick to it!

4 Referee Development

BRR supports and follows the RFU referee development pathway.

Firstly, there is the R2R course. Those wishing to join BRR must complete the full course. Details of the courses, calendar of scheduled courses and application forms can be found on the RFU website, following the link <https://www.englandrugby.com/run/refereeing>

To assist you in your continued training, there are an increasing number of professionally produced online webinars and training modules from the RFU which BRR can point you towards

BRR holds monthly meetings throughout the season, where aspects of law and game management are discussed. At these sessions the interpretations of the laws are explained to ensure that all Berkshire referees' interpretations are consistent. BRR attaches major importance to these monthly meetings and expects all members to attend regularly. The meetings are held at 7:30pm at the Reading RFC, on the third Tuesday in the month except for December, June and July when there are no meetings. As well as our guest speakers, normal business will be conducted. A drink is provided for attendees before the meeting, while we have food after – which doubles as a chance to socialise.

BRR participates in the Southern Federation (a cooperative partnership with 3 other neighbouring Societies: Bucks, Hants & Oxon), which forms the stepping-stone between county-based and regional (and ultimately National) refereeing.

5 Progression and Grading

PROGRESSION PATHWAY

There is a well-structured national hierarchy through which referees progress. A progressing referee will gain experience firstly in BRR, then in the Federation Development Squads and finally onto the National Panel (the top 60 or so referees in the RFU). For the exceptional few, it can take a short time to get to the top. Some have progressed to the National Panel in two seasons. Also, as a referee progresses up the pyramid, the competition gets particularly keen.

Remember, however, a successful referee is not necessarily the one who gets to the top, but the one who gives and gets most enjoyment. You play a key role in the community game, and the best refs recognise the importance of their role at all levels of the pyramid.

MONITORING PERFORMANCE

BRR will monitor your progress via assessor, referee coach and club comments, so that you, if you have the ability, can progress to matches where players are faster and more proficient. You can then also enjoy exchange appointments with other societies, and eventually onto a nationwide basis. The Society will maintain a great interest in your progress and can draw on your experiences in its discussion meetings and training schemes.

During your first year as a referee, you will join BRR's "academy" which will act as an additional layer of support for your development. This will involve further academy only sessions, held on online the 1st Thursday of each month, covering topics of value for new referees. There will also be focused effort to facilitate deliberate coaching and support of new refs, such as greater mentor/coach/experienced ref support at their matches, team of 3, and shadowing of higher-level referees.

GRADING

Each league within the RFU structure is assigned a level (assigned to the Men's game at this time). For example, the Premiership is level 1, Regional 2 is level 6 and the Berks Bucks & Oxon Division 2 is level 8.

Referees are graded according to the level of game for which their abilities are suited. So, a level 8 referee is felt suitable for a BBO Div 2 game.

New referees joining BRR are initially given a 'provisional' grading, until such time as they have been officially graded.

The Grading Committee meets at least twice per season, and members may be graded or regraded at other times in special circumstances. Through its official Match Official developers, BRR attempts to watch all referees at least twice per season. In addition, the Grading Committee will monitor feedback received from clubs

6 Appointments

APPOINTMENTS

The Appointments Team will notify you, on a monthly basis, of the matches to which you have been appointed. The schedule of appointments is made by taking all fixtures of which BRR is aware and assigning a referee of the appropriate grade to each game.

Because of fluctuations in the number and levels of matches available to BRR, it is not always possible to appoint you to a game that matches your grading, and you will sometimes be expected to officiate at matches below your current level. However, for development purposes you may also be asked to officiate at games one level higher than your grade.

Members will normally be advised of their appointments around the third Tuesday of the preceding month.

To cover for last minute withdrawals and fixture changes, there is also a reappointments process which operates in the few days leading up to each block of fixtures. You may be contacted on a Thursday or Friday and be asked to officiate at a different game.

AVAILABILITY

You do not need to commit to refereeing every week and known unavailability will be taken into account when scheduling the appointments.

The Appointments Team will, by email, request members to advise on their availability for the following month via the 'Who's the Ref' website www.whostheref.com (WTR). If there are any subsequent changes in their availability, members must advise of these changes via WTR as early as possible and not wait until they have received their appointments.

If, for injury, illness, work or family reasons, you find that you cannot fulfill an appointment, you should immediately decline the fixture on WTR then notify the Re-appointments Lead and home club contact. If one is appointed, you should also notify your Developer.

MID WEEK

Whilst most appointments are for matches played on a Saturday or Sunday, a considerable number of games are played mid-week by schools and universities. If it is possible that work or other commitments may mean that you cannot officiate on a weekend, but you can on these other days, the appointments process can accommodate this.

7 General Information

KIT AND INSIGNIA

Unless there is a clash with players' shirts, the preferred colours for shirt, shorts and socks are those supplied by BRR's kit supplier, which you can purchase through the BRR website. Active BRR referees are entitled to wear a BRR shirt. A BRR shirt can be expensed after the first official appointment, and a more extensive provision of kit is available (expensed) after completion of a set number of games (currently 10 BRR appointments).

It is recommended that you carry with you to a game at least two shirts of different colours to avoid a potential clash with the teams. Always worth double checking with teams at the point of confirming the fixture what kit colour they are wearing. With many clubs in Berkshire having a green colour tone, it is advised to first purchase the blue or red jerseys.

INSURANCE

Referees appointed by BRR are covered by the RFU Insurance Scheme against death, disability, and public liability whilst officiating as a referee, touch judge or adviser, providing:

- i. the game is arranged and played in accordance with the Laws, Rules and Regulations and Directives of the Rugby Football Union, and
- ii. the member is officiating with the knowledge and approval of BRR

Who is insured – any person acting as a referee, touch judge, coach, trainer, instructor, or voluntary medical attendant during a Rugby Football Union approved activity.

BRR referees are also covered against death and disability whilst travelling directly to and from appointments.

REWARDS/AWARDS

The Society operates an awards scheme which recognizes significant milestones in a referee's career, mainly based on the number of games in which you have officiated.

- 1 game – BRR jersey (expensed back)
- 10 games – full set of BRR Kit (expensed back)
- 50 games – BRR Kit bag
- 100 games – commemorative gold whistle and further kit allowance in the BRR online 'shop'

The Committee may nominate for election to Life Membership by the Annual General Meeting, any member considered to have rendered exceptional service or brought distinction to BRR.

TRAVELLING EXPENSES

For travelling to appointments, Referees, Advisors and Coaches are entitled to claim from the BRR:

- all reasonable public transport fares incurred.
- up to 45p per mile (in line with HMRC mileage rates) where a private car is used.
- in exceptional cases the reasonable cost of accommodation (subject to prior approval from the Treasurer).

Claims should be submitted within one month to the Treasurer, using the official Claim Forms on the BRR web site and include copies of any receipts for fares and

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accommodation <https://berkshirerugbyrefs.co.uk/expenses/>, .

For those referees that reside outside of Berkshire, expenses are paid from the county boundary, except where the referee is travelling to an exchange appointment, where it will be from their home address to the destination club.

8 Discipline and Management of Abuse

INTRODUCTION

From arriving at the ground and in their first meeting with the players and coaches, the referee needs to demonstrate that they will be in control, not in an officious manner, but empathetically. Having created the correct impression pre match, there should be some goodwill towards them when the match starts.

THE MATCH

We all know how important it is that good discipline is exercised by all during rugby matches and we hope that games will run smoothly. However, no matter how good the pre-match interactions are, it is inevitable that tensions will surface from time to time and the referee then must take appropriate action. Sometimes that will be apparently ignoring an offence, which can upset the team that has been offended against, but the lack of action by the referee may be because the offence was considered trivial and did not materially affect play, or advantage was played. At the next stoppage the guilty player should be spoken to, loudly and clearly, so that all persons within earshot are aware that the "offence" has been seen and why no sanction was imposed. No transgression should be too trivial to take some action, and the action needs to be commensurate not only with the actual offence, but also with the previous conduct of the player, of his team and the general temper of the game.

The formal sanctions are the yellow and red cards.

Yellows need a note of the time, number and offence. Don't forget that two yellows equal a red.

When the referee issues a card, the referee should stop the playing clock and take however long is necessary to make a note of the offender's name and number, and the nature of the offence.

For a red card, further information should be sought such as the manner of response of the carded player, the type and severity of any injury, the time of the incident and the score at that time. Upon reaching the changing room after the game, the referee needs to ensure that their notes are legible, complete and understandable. When talking to any person after the game, except an appointed Assistant Referee, mentor or appointed advisor, the referee should not discuss the sending off. They should say only that they will be submitting their report, and the appropriate people will be advised, by the disciplinary secretary of the player's county, what the next stages will be. Once you have issued a Red Card, it is not within your gift to rescind it and a Sending Off report must be completed.

REPORTS

There is no reporting of single yellow cards for levels 5 and below. ALL dismissals of players must be reported on the "Sending Off Report" form below. As players are banned until authorised to play by the County Disciplinary Panel, which cannot be done until the circumstances of the dismissal have been considered, it is a requirement that the report is received by the County Disciplinary Secretary within 48 hours.

To facilitate this, referees should follow the procedure below.

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Contact the Society Disciplinary Officer by telephone as soon as is practicable.

Complete the Sending Off Report and email it to the Disciplinary Officer.

The referee and the Disciplinary Officer will agree the final version of the report.

The Disciplinary Officer will forward the report to the Berkshire RFU Disciplinary Secretary, or the secretary of the appropriate body if the player's club is not Berkshire.

For schools and club youth players who have been sent off, the report will be completed as above.

The report will be forwarded to the Headmaster of the player's school or to the player's club secretary and to the County.

The Headmaster or youth player's club secretary (via the club disciplinary panel) shall be responsible for taking disciplinary action against them.

Any sanction applied to the player must be reported to the County, however the County does not have any further involvement unless the school or club applies an inappropriate sanction.

ABUSE

There is often 'banter' between the referee and spectators, coaches and/or players, which is usually friendly and not obviously critical, but sometimes comments or actions overstep what the referee deems acceptable. This requires action by the referee, who has the escalating tools of caution, penalty, yellow card and ultimately red card if the abuser is a player. These powers of the referee continue after the game until the referee has entered their changing room. Coaches and spectators whose comments are undermining the referee should be requested to stop, and if they continue should be requested to remove themselves from the touchline.

If the referee believes the abuse or actions go beyond what is acceptable, whether during the game or afterwards, it must be reported following the same process as that for red cards, namely:

Contact the Society Disciplinary Officer by telephone as soon as is practicable.

Complete the Match Official Abuse Report and email it to the Disciplinary Officer.

The referee and the Disciplinary Officer will agree the final version of the report.

The Disciplinary Officer will forward the report to the Berkshire RFU Disciplinary Secretary, or the secretary of the appropriate body if the player's club is not Berkshire.

BRR, the Constituent Body (County RFU) and the RFU will fully support referees who are abused.

Reportable Injury

To be completed in the case of serious injury only – for this, we mean where someone is hospitalised (or when an ambulance/paramedic attends and the injured person is taken to hospital).

The referee should seek further information such as the type and severity of any injury, location on the pitch plus conditions, the sequence of events that led to the injury, the time

of the incident and the score at that time. You will also require contact details for the parties involved to complete the form.

FORMS

If you require one of the forms mentioned above, they are available on the BRR website

9 Do's and Don'ts for New Rugby Union Referees

Pre-Match Preparation:

- Do confirm the colours of both teams with the match organiser.
- Do ensure you are DBS checked.
- Do contact the home team or club representative in advance to confirm match details. Save the number for match day in case you are delayed on the way to the match.
- Do review the match rules and any specific league requirements beforehand.
- Do research on the two teams during the week before the match. See where they are in the leagues and get a feel for their respective strengths, especially if it is a promotion or relegation match.
- Do turn up for your game looking smart—remember all eyes will typically be on you from the moment you arrive.
- Do bring flags.
- Do make sure you are properly hydrated (straw colour urine). Use water or electrolytes. Avoid sugary energy drinks.
- Do check weather conditions and prepare accordingly (e.g., bring extra gear for rain or cold).
- Do bring loo roll—after an experience at Hungerford.
- Do not referee your home team wearing home team kit—look impartial.
- Do not read the Law book or Law App the night or day before the game.

Warm-Up and Logistics:

- Do warm up thoroughly. Use the RFU Activate videos on YouTube or talk to experienced referees. Practise it and get it into a repeatable routine.
- Do warm down. Give your body the best opportunity to recover, especially if you are jumping in a car to drive home for any length of time.
- Do confirm where you can park and the correct entrance for the ground (e.g., refereeing at Maidenhead may require a permit or special parking at Windsor RFC).
- Do have instructions as to where to go (e.g., you might be refereeing at RAMs but the game is at Shire Hall).

During the Game:

- Do arrange for touch judges and brief them only to show where the ball has gone out or if a kick was successful.
- Do identify captains and understand team numbers (particularly at lower levels).
- Do inspect the ground/flags/post protectors and get the home team to sort any issues.
- Do practise whistle tone for penalties, free kicks, and knock-ons.
- Do practise your primary, secondary, and tertiary signals.
- Do maintain clear and consistent communication with players and touch judges.
- Do use positive reinforcement to encourage good sportsmanship.
- Do not be influenced by the crowd. Referee what you see.
- Do not swear at players, coaches, or spectators.
- Do not issue a red card and then rescind it later. It is not your gift. Once you issue a red card, you must follow through.
- Do not hesitate to take control of the game if it is getting out of hand.

Pre/Post-Match:

- Do let Reappointments know if the club has not contacted you.
- Do find out at the bar where you are changing.
- Do not walk into any changing rooms without talking to a club representative first—especially important at age-grade or opposite gender matches
- Do fill out any required match reports promptly and accurately.
- Do review your performance and seek feedback from experienced referees.
- Do not dwell on mistakes. Learn from them and move on. Be a goldfish (have a 10 second memory!)

- Do not forget to update your appointment availability with plenty of notice. This helps the appointment team match you to a game early.

Professional Development:

- Do attend referee training sessions and workshops regularly.
- Do stay updated with any changes in the laws of the game.
- Do seek advice or mentorship from more experienced referees.

This comprehensive list should help new rugby union referees navigate their duties and responsibilities effectively. However, use what works for you.

11 Referee's Ultimate Christmas Stocking Fillers

Essentials for the Kit Bag:

- Kit Bag
- Boots – possible metal studs & moulded boots, for differing conditions
- Spare Studs and Stud Spanner (if applicable)
- Waterproof container (for your whistles, cards, and other small items)
- Laundry Bag (for muddy kit)

On-Field Necessities:

- 2 x Acme Thunderer Whistles
- Whistle Lanyards
- Red/Yellow Cards and Wallet
- Flags
- Coin (for the toss), or even poker chip (!)
- Scorecards
- Pencil/Pen

Clothing Must-Haves:

- 2 Pairs of Socks
- 2 Sets of Shorts
- 3 Jerseys in Different Colours

Note: Membership of BRR allows you to expense 1 shirt after your first game. After 10 BRR appointed games, the rest can be expensed.

Tech and Timekeeping:

- 2x Stopwatch/Timer

Post-Match Gear:

- Post-Match Polo/T-shirt/Shirt (again, can be expensed after 10 games)

This list ensures that referees are well-equipped for any match and prepared to maintain their professional appearance and efficiency on and off the field.

Practical Additions:

- Water Bottle: Essential for staying hydrated during matches.
- Small First Aid Kit: For treating minor injuries on the spot (i.e., blisters)
- Energy Snacks: Quick snacks for an energy boost during long matches.

Comfort Items:

- Sweatbands: To manage sweat during intense matches.
- Hand Warmers: Great for cold-weather games.
- Sunscreen: Important for outdoor games to protect against UV rays.
- Towel: Handy for post-match clean-up.
- Foam roller and/or bands to warm up
- Thermal base layers, for when you remember rugby is a winter sport!

Tech and Accessories:

- Portable Phone Charger: To ensure devices stay charged.
- Referee Notebook: For additional notes or observations.
- GPS-enabled Smart Watch: Useful for tracking performance and fitness levels.