

Special needs of the referees

The referee is frequently the forgotten participant in the match. Much is written about training and nutrition for the player, but the referee must also keep up with the game and needs similar guidance to minimise fatigue. The players may have someone watching out for them during training and competition while referees are often left to themselves to prepare for the demands of a match.

There have been several studies of the volume and intensity of running by the referee during a match. Recent data show that the referee runs about as far as the players, but in a different pattern of movement. For example, the referee covers more distance going backwards than do players.

Without an appropriate training program and good nutritional preparation, the referee may become fatigued and may not be able to exert proper control over a match. In particular, the referees should tailor their intake prior to and during a match to the demands of the game. Obviously, the referee's assistant does not have the physical demands of the referee, but each assistant needs to be prepared to carry the whistle if necessary.

It is interesting to note that there is little in the referee's training and education regarding adequate fitness preparation or nutrition for performance. Another factor that is often neglected is that the referee is often older than the players in the match.



Training issues

A team generally trains as a group under the guidance of a coach or trainer. The referee usually trains alone. The level of play that the referee is responsible for dictates the volume and intensity of training needed. International referees and referees of high level professional matches, have fitness standards that must be met in order to maintain their status and good nutrition will help them to achieve this.

There are published programs that a referee can follow that will adequately prepare for match competition. Referees of lower level matches will not likely need to train to that level and for many, refereeing multiple matches each week may be sufficient training stimulus for their level of competition.

Competition issues

Referees run a similar distance to that of the players they are watching. Thus, they should follow similar guidelines for daily nutrition, food choices for training, pre-match nutrition, and hydration. Essentially, the referees should follow the nutritional guidelines for the level of play they are arbitrating.

Special issues and eating strategies

A particular issue surrounds fluids during competition. The players may have support on the sidelines, helping them to hydrate when possible during a match. The referee has no such support. The referee is also usually in the middle of the field, far from the sidelines and access to drinks. At the higher levels of play, the 4th official might be able to assist the referee during normal play stoppages. The referee's assistants are already on the sidelines and can place fluids along their running path. In lower levels of play, referees must take care of their own fluid needs. As normal stoppages of play frequently involve the referee, those opportunities may

be few. One suggestion for the referee would be to wear a 'camelback' device worn by cyclists and carry only enough fluids for a half, refilling between halves or before overtime.

Fluid and nutrition suggestions for the referee

Follow the pre-match meal suggestions for the players.

Plan ahead for easy and quick access to fluids during matches. Water, sports drinks and carbohydrate replacement solutions are viable drink options.

At half-time, drink a sports drink to provide water to minimise dehydration and some carbohydrate to delay fatigue. You can eat solid food if you find that you can tolerate this.

After the match, follow the player suggestions for early replenishment of glycogen, especially when games are close together.

During periods of heavy and frequent travel, consider suggestions for eating on the road.

