



**Become a referee  
and take charge**



Apart from playing the game, being a referee is one of the most satisfying contributions you can make to rugby. Are you interested in being a ref? If so, read on. In the following pages, we'll answer some frequently asked questions.

### Why should I become a referee?

Refereeing a game of rugby is exceptionally exhilarating; and the pressure of making the correct decision in an instant is a huge adrenaline rush for most referees.

Some of the reasons why people take up refereeing include:

- To remain active in the game
- To give something back to the sport
- Having an injury that stops the person from being a player
- Realising that they may reach higher honours as a match official than a player
- The enjoyment of being involved in one of the greatest team sports

### Is there an age limit?

Generally the earlier you start refereeing, the better, but a lower age limit of 16 years is most common. The upper limit is often governed only by the person's fitness and desire to continue.

It's increasingly common for players at high-school level to take up the whistle as they realise they perhaps don't have the physical attributes to make it to the top as a player.

### How much time does it take?

In any sport, success requires commitment, and it's no different in refereeing. In addition to fitness training, there's the law book that needs to be studied and society meetings that must be attended. Many provinces also hold weekly meetings where the previous week's games are discussed and refereeing techniques investigated in more detail. Games are frequently on Friday nights and Saturdays.



## What previous experience do I need?

People with previous playing experience have an advantage over someone who's never played, but this is not a limiting factor. If you're prepared to put in the effort, watch school and club games, and matches on TV, and diligently follow the training programme, there's no doubt you can become a competent referee.

## What is the training programme?

There are a number of core courses that need to be successfully completed before you can take up the whistle.

### **International Rugby Board (IRB) Level One – Introducing Officiating\***

This is an eight-hour programme designed to enable budding referees to acquire the basic skills to officiate safely and enjoyably. It includes the playing charter, individual core skills, communication, positional play and the role of the touch judge.

### **IRB Level Two – Developing Officiating Skills\***

This is a 16-hour, more comprehensive course covering refereeing principles, risk management, advantage, and open and set phases.

### **IRB Assistant Referee\***

Where there are suitably trained touch judges in place, their function has been upgraded to that of Assistant Referee. This upgrade entitles them to play a more meaningful role in the administration of the game and provide an additional set of eyes and ears for the referee to rely on.

\* More details on the content of these courses is available on the IRB website, [www.irb.com](http://www.irb.com)

### **BokSmart**

All referees and coaches in South Africa must undergo a BokSmart safety course. The objective of this programme is to ensure coaches and referees encourage and enforce high levels of player safety in order to minimise player injuries. This certification is valid for two years and must be renewed as required.

### **National Exam**

Every year referees must write the National Laws Examination. This is done on a provincial basis at a date and time coordinated by the provincial referee society.

### **Fitness Tests**

All referees must undergo regular fitness tests as the ability to keep up with play and be in a suitable state to make clear and rational decisions is what the role is all about. These typically occur at the beginning of and midway through the season. The standard measurement tool is a multi-stage fitness test commonly known as the Bleep Test. It's a widely acknowledged tool to measure an athlete's VO<sub>2</sub> max state.

Results from the Bleep Test are one of the criteria used to promote or relegate referees. A referee on any of the SA Rugby-controlled panels will need to meet or exceed a Bleep Test of 12.5.



## Do I get paid?

Refereeing at school or club level in South Africa is largely amateur with the referee receiving match fees to cover travel and incidental expenses. However, at this level you should not be refereeing for the money! If you make it onto one of the referee panels you will receive a game fee for each match refereed. South Africa has four full-time professional referees and, in addition to being well paid, they enjoy frequent international travel, often staying in some of the best hotels and exotic locations. At the top it is a well paid and extremely rewarding occupation.

## What is the BokSmart story?

Any sport participant runs the risk of injury and rugby is no different. However, the BokSmart programme is one of the most comprehensive yet introduced into rugby across the world, designed solely to reduce the risk of serious injury – particularly to the neck and spine. All coaches and referees need to undergo the five-hour programme and re-certify themselves every two years.

## Can I become a Test referee?

The reality is that there are far fewer international referees than rugby players, so to make it to the very top is a long and uncompromising road to travel. But it can be done and South Africa has produced some of the best referees in the world. André Watson is the only person to referee two IRB Rugby World Cup finals and Jonathan Kaplan remains the world's most-capped Test referee. It all starts with small steps and once you have been accepted as a member of a provincial society, your success is largely in your own hands. You'll be expected to start at the bottom and work your way through the ranks. With hard work and some good fortune, it's possible to end up as a Test referee.

## How is the referee set-up structured?

Rugby is governed through 14 provincial unions that come together to form the South African Rugby Union (SARU). Clubs and schools in each province are affiliates of the local union, together with the provincial referee society.

The 14 provincial referee societies are, in turn, affiliates of the SA Rugby Referees' Association (SARRA) and this is affiliated to SARU.

All organised rugby in South Africa is administered through the provincial unions and ultimately SARU. All registered referees are members of their provincial society and, again, ultimately members of and subject to the disciplinary code of SARRA.

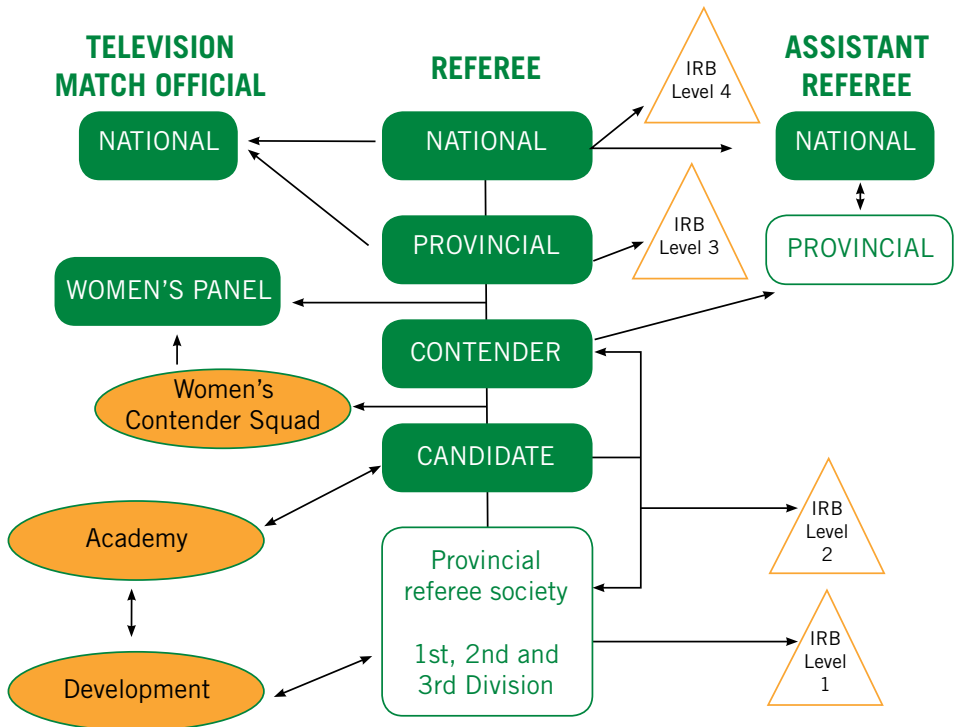
## What about player/spectator abuse?

Player and spectator abuse is part and parcel of modern-day sport. However, rugby is one of the codes that's determined to reduce the frequency and severity of this phenomenon, and the provincial unions as well as SA Rugby have taken significant steps in this regard.

The National Referee Recruitment and Awareness Campaign, along with initiatives like the 3 CHEERS FOR THE REF campaign, are designed to educate the public about the laws and change attitudes towards referees. Rugby is a tough and physical game but the Laws of the Game make specific provision to outlaw referee abuse.

## SARRA referee career path

Once you belong to a provincial referees' society and participate in their training programmes, you're on track to progression through the refereeing ranks. Everyone starts out as a beginner referee but as you become more competent, you may be upgraded within your society's ranking system. The South African Rugby Referees' Association is always scouting for emerging talent for higher honours. The flowchart below illustrates the various panels that are in place to groom referees with potential.





## Code of conduct

All referees in South Africa – whether on any of the SARRA Panels or not – are subject to the South African Rugby Union's Code of Conduct. Here are some of the highlights of that Code for you to familiarise yourself with before becoming a referee.

- Referees should not publicly criticise fellow referees, match officials, players or administrators
- While on official duty, a referee should always conduct him/herself in a manner fitting of the position
- If a referee has a grievance, it should be directed through the appropriate channels for resolution – in most cases, through the provincial referees' society
- Unless a referee is specifically contracted to SARRA, he/she is providing his/her services on a voluntary basis, in spite of any game fees that may be paid
- Referees' performance, rating and placement on a panel are subject to SARRA's evaluation process and may be reviewed at any time during the season
- The referee is the sole judge of fact and Law during a match. This is an extremely onerous and responsible position, so it's vitally important that the referee conduct him/herself in a manner that is beyond reproach at all times.

## Provincial contact details

**Blue Bulls Rugby Union**  
012 420 0700

**Boland Rugby Union**  
021 873 2317

**Border Rugby Union**  
043 743 5998

**Eastern Province Rugby Union**  
041 508 7700

**Valke Rugby Union**  
011 975 2822

**Free State Rugby Union**  
051 407 1700

**Golden Lions Rugby Union**  
011 402 2960

**Griffons Rugby Union**  
057 352 6482

**Griqualand West Rugby Union**  
053 832 8773

**Kwazulu-Natal Rugby Union**  
031 308 8400

**Leopards Rugby Union**  
018 297 5304

**Mpumalanga Rugby Union**  
013 656 2647

**South Western Districts Rugby Union**  
044 873 0137

**Western Province Rugby Union**  
021 659 4500

**South African Rugby Referees' Association**  
011 402 2960 ext 216



# BLOW THE WHISTLE



## BECOME A REFEREE



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