Examining the Effect of Experience and Qualification Pathway When Forming Initial Expectancies of Refereeing Competence

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Abstract

Within sporting environments, it is inevitable that sports personnel (e.g., athletes, coaches, officials) will continually find themselves developing expectations of others with whom they interact. With this in mind, the current study aimed to investigate how the informational cues of experience and qualification pathway may affect both athletes and coaches' judgements of perceived refereeing competence. A cross-sectional between-subjects experimental design was employed using 112 soccer coaches and players. Participants were required to read one of four refereeing vignettes which manipulated the two independent variables of experience and qualification pathway; Experienced/Longitudinal, Experienced/Fast-Track, Limited/Longitudinal, Limited/Fast-track. Following familiarization with the vignettes, participants completed the Assessment of Referee Competence Scale (ARCS) to rate their perceived competence of the referee. Competence was categorized through six characteristics; Communication, Confidence, Fitness, Impartiality, Consistency and

Respectfulness. MANOVA revealed the Experienced referee was significantly more competent for all characteristics of refereeing competence compared to the Limited condition. Although qualification pathway yielded no significant differences between the Longitudinal and Fast-track condition, follow-up ANOVA revealed that referees associated with the Longitudinal qualification pathway (i.e., had progressed through every level) were rated significantly more competent for the characteristic of Communication than referees reported to be on the Fast-Track scheme. These results suggest that referees can manipulate the information they present to players and coaches prior to interaction to help induce a positive first impression. By developing knowledge and skills in impression management, referees are likely to optimise their control of future interactions and reduce the likelihood of interpersonal conflict.

Key words: interpersonal perception, first impressions, expectancy effects, sports officials, communication.

Examining the effect of experience and qualification pathway when forming initial expectancies of refereeing competence.

Expectancies, defined as "beliefs about a future state of affairs" (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996, p. 211), signify the process of utilizing visible cues, knowledge, and past experience to interpret and make sense of the world around us. Within sporting environments, social interactions are inevitable, and sports personnel (e.g., athletes, coaches, officials) are continually developing expectations of others with whom they interact. Specifically, individuals seek out informational cues to aid their understanding of how an interaction may develop and conclude (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske & Taylor, 1991), thus, allowing individuals to manage how a social interaction will unfold (Greenlees, 2007). From a sport

performance perspective, individuals can use expectancies to influence decisions regarding team selection (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008), optimise their chances of defeating an opponent (e.g., Buscombe, Greenlees, Holder, Thelwell, & Rimmer, 2006), or to ensure that the nature of the interaction is positive (e.g., Horn, Lox, & Labrador, 2010). For example, in soccer, defenders may use informational cues (e.g., whether the attacker is on their strongest foot) to generate an expectation about how the play will progress to increase their chances of winning back possession. Similarly, goalkeepers might pick up on similar cues to enhance their chances of saving a penalty kick (Dicks, Pocock, Thelwell, & van der Kamp, 2016; Furley, Dicks, & Memmert, 2012). Whilst the previous examples are applicable to competitive sporting encounters, expectancies may also impact how sporting relationships are formed (McArthur & Baron, 1983). For instance, expectancies can induce beliefs about the perceived competence, goals, and psychological state of a range of sports personnel (Buscombe et al., 2006; Manley, Greenlees, & Thelwell, 2016; Solomon & Rhea, 2008), which in turn, can induce an array of affective, behavioural, and cognitive responses to influence how an interaction might progress (Olson et al., 1996).

Due to the vast number of informational cues available when forming expectancies of others, there has been considerable difficulty classifying such cues into more simple and accessible dimensions. Cook (1971) perhaps provides the simplest explanation by categorizing cues as static or dynamic. Cook defined a static cue as a construct that is stable throughout an interaction (e.g., gender, ethnicity), whereas a dynamic cue was described as interchangeable, depending on the characteristics of the interaction (e.g., body language, facial expressions, eye contact). Although this classification system is dated, it shares similar characteristics to more recent expectancy frameworks, developed within the context of the coach-athlete relationship, including the two-factor (Horn et al., 2010) and three-factor models (Manley, Greenlees, Thelwell, Filby, & Smith, 2008). Despite being explorative in

nature, Manley et al. (2008) proposed that static and dynamic cues alone are not sufficient in classifying informational cues. Their three-factor model proposed the inclusion of Third-Party Reports (TPRs) as an additional category. TPRs were defined as sources of information that arise from the written or verbal opinions of significant others, and could include cues such as reputation, qualifications, and success rate. This conclusion fits with the findings of previous research investigating the potential impact of TPRs, regarding the athlete, in influencing the decision making of sports officials, such as judges, officials and referees (Findlay & Ste-Marie, 2004; Jones, Paull, & Erskine, 2002; Souchon, Coulomb-Cabagno, Traclet, & Rascle, 2004).

To appreciate and explain more fully the consequences and implications of expectancies within the context of sports officiating, the four-stage expectancy cycle (e.g., Becker & Solomon, 2005; Horn et al., 2010; Solomon, 2001) represents a useful conceptual framework. Although this expectancy cycle was developed to create an understanding of how coaches might form expectations of their athletes, the four stages are highly transferable to the actions and situational demands of other personnel such as officials and parents (Horn et al., 2010). The four key components of the expectancy cycle are as follows: (1) the perceiver develops a set of beliefs and expectancies regarding the target, (2) the perceiver adapts their behaviour to appear as though their expectations about the target are true, (3) the target interprets, and therefore adapts, their behaviour to align with the behaviour of the perceiver, (4) the perceiver uses the target's behaviour as confirmation that their initial expectancies and beliefs were true. A hypothetical interaction between a soccer player and a referee will serve as an illustrative example. Stage one of the cycle may involve the player drawing on their knowledge and previous experience to make an initial judgement or expectancy regarding the referee's competence. In stage two, this initial expectation is proposed to influence how the player behaves towards that referee. For example, players are more

accepting of a refereeing decision if their initial perception of the referee is that he/she is confident and "firm" with the players (see Simmons, 2010). In the third stage, the referee interprets the player's behaviour towards the decision, and will either adapt his or her behaviour to match the player's initial expectancy (i.e., behavioural confirmation), or will challenge the behaviour of the player by consciously striving to justify the initial decision more robustly through subsequent behaviour (i.e., behavioural disconfirmation). In the fourth stage, the role of the perceiver swings back to the player, who interprets the referee's behaviour to conclude whether it has reinforced or brought into question the initial expectation (Becker & Solomon, 2005). As this cycle is triggered from pre-existing beliefs, it is possible that players will focus on specific sources of information exhibited by a referee to confirm or contest their initial expectation.

Despite the above illustration, few studies have investigated interpersonal expectancy effects within the context of athlete-referee interactions. In one such study, Dosseville, Laborde, and Bernier (2014) recruited 473 athlete participants studying a sports-related degree, and asked them to rate the extent to which each of 32 specific sources of information influenced their expectancies of refereeing competence. Data reduction techniques helped to categorize the 32 individual items into four distinct classifications: static, communicational, performance, and psychological cues. Notably, alongside communicational cues, all six psychological cues - honesty, self-confidence, integrity, self-control, politeness, and respect - were rated by athletes to be amongst the ten most influential sources of information when forming initial impressions and expectancies of referees, a finding which supports previous suggestions that psychological cues are vital in expectancy formation (e.g., Becker & Solomon, 2005; Dosseville, Laborde, & Raab, 2011). In addition, although static cues were rated as least influential in expectancy formation, as was reported in the study conducted by Manley et al. (2008), Dosseville et al.'s findings showed that team sport athletes perceived

static cues to be more influential in forming competence judgements of officials compared to fighting and racquetball sports. Since this study by Dosseville et al. represents the first attempt to categorize the sources of information used by athletes to form expectancies of referees, further research is warranted to validate, and elaborate on, the reported findings. A complementary approach could be to educate referees so they can harness specific sources of information to positively influence interactions with other sports personnel such as players, coaches, and fans.

Further to the theoretical arguments regarding expectations, the current study seeks to better understand the expectations held by players and coaches of soccer officials who progress through a 'Fast-track' route as opposed to the more traditional 'full' or 'Longitudinal' referee training programmes. To provide a context, through its constituent county organisations, the English Football Association (FA) designed a process to identify and nurture talented referees from an early age, to then enter into the Fast-track programme, intended to elevate eligible referees to the top of the game through an accelerated promotion scheme. The route was initially designed to ease pressure on the referees at the highest level and increase the number of the select group referees (19 in the 2015–2016 season, compared to 24 in 2001). The intention of the Fast-track programme was partially to address the decline in numbers, but also to provide a platform for promoting officials at a faster pace as opposed to having to methodically work their way through a system over a period of many years. As would be expected, there have been many questions regarding the Fast-track programme, not least to the quality of the officials that it produces and the experience that these officials are given before they are promoted (for a full review see Webb, 2017).

With the above in mind, the primary aim of the present study was to examine the extent to which two specific sources of information – refereeing experience and qualification pathway – influence soccer players' and coaches' perceived competence ratings of a referee.

Previous findings by Manley, Greenlees, Smith, Batten, and Birch (2014) have highlighted the effects of reputational information on the subsequent behavioural responses of athletes. Specifically, Manley et al. displayed that coaches perceived as experienced are said to be given significantly more attention, and elicit greater effort and persistence from their players, than those perceived as less experienced. Further support reported by Dosseville et al. (2014), demonstrated that officiating experience, bracketed under performance cues, was one of the more highly rated informational cues used by players when formulating judgements regarding officiating competence. Similarly, Simmons (2011) was able to display that experience is a cue when evaluating a referee's (mental) competence. Based on this body of literature, it was hypothesized that soccer players and coaches will perceive experienced referees to be more competent than referees with a limited amount of experience.

Whilst the effects of pathways have been discussed within educational environments (e.g., Buchmann & Park, 2009; Mavromaras & McGuinness, 2012), this is the first study to investigate the effects of qualification pathway within a sporting context. Taking into consideration the stages of the FTEM (Foundation, Talent, Elite, Mastery) framework for the development of officials (Macmahon et al., 2014), it was hypothesized that referees who had undertaken every level of a qualification pathway (Longitudinal) would be perceived to be more experienced and, therefore, rated as more competent than referees who had progressed through a Fast-track scheme or pathway. However, given the novelty and exploratory nature of the investigation, no hypothesis was made regarding the interaction between experience and qualification pathway.

Method

Participants

A power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to identify the minimum total sample size required within the present study.

Four relevant publications were identified (Dosseville et al., 2014; Manley et al., 2008; Manley et al., 2014; Thelwell, Page, Lush, Greenlees, & Manley, 2013) where similar population samples and experimental designs had been implemented. From a total of 16 reported effect sizes (range = 0.003 to 0.430) reported across the four publications, a mean partial Eta squared (partial η^2) effect size of 0.118 was calculated. Using this as the basis for the subsequent power analysis, a minimum sample size of 109 participants was identified.

Ninety-one soccer players (M_{age} = 21.9±3.6; *n* female = 14) and 21 soccer coaches (M_{age} = 36.1±12.5; *n* female = 1) from several regions across England volunteered to take part in the study. A total of 28 participants were randomly allocated to each experimental condition. The soccer players had a mean playing experience of 11.0±5.6 years, with the majority participating at an amateur level (81.3%). The remaining participants competed at the semi-professional (16.5%) and professional levels (2.2%). Coaches had a mean coaching experience of 12.0±6.8 years and again, the majority had coached at amateur level (76.2%); the remainder were coaching at the semi-professional level (23.8%). The majority of the coaches had obtained their experience working in England (85.7%), while some had experience of coaching in the United States of America (14.3%). Participants were predominantly White British (92%), with the remainder being of American Caucasian (5.4%), Hispanic-Latino (1.8%) and African American (0.8%) ethnicity. In line with the adopted inclusion criteria, all participants were 18-years-old or over, all players had a minimum of one year playing experience, and all coaches held a minimum of a level one Football Association (FA) coaching qualification.

Measures and Materials

Participant Demographic Questionnaire. This questionnaire was used to obtain information regarding the general and sporting background of each participant. Specifically, information was gathered regarding age, gender, race/ethnicity, primary sport, number of

years' experience competing in that sport, and highest level of participation. Information regarding whether the participant was a coach or a player was gathered verbally.

Assessment of Referee Competence Scale (ARCS). The ARCS was developed for the purposes of the present study using a combination of items from the Adapted Referee Self-Efficacy Scale (Myers, Feltz, Gullen, & Dithurbide, 2012) and characteristics defined within the "Match Officials" section of the FA Respect Code of Conduct (The FA, 2016). The resultant ARCS comprised a total of 18 situation-specific questions designed to capture participants' perceptions of refereeing competence. The 18 questions related to the six characteristics outlined in the FA Respect Code of Conduct (fitness, impartiality, consistency, respectfulness, confidence, communication) and were reinforced by a sample of coaches, players and referees who took part in the initial stages of measurement development. Each characteristic within the ARCS comprises of three questions with scores for questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and overall characteristic scores ranging from 3 (low) to 21 (high). Example questions presented in the scale include: (1) fitness - the referee keeps in good physical condition, (2) impartiality -the referee will not favour one team over the other, (3) consistency - the referee will be consistent with his decision-making, (4) respectfulness - the referee will respect all the player equally, (5) confidence - the referee will stick by his own decisions, and (6) communication - the referee will be a good communicator with players. Using the recommendation from Kline (1999) the Cronbach's alpha (>.89) indicated high internal consistency for the ARCS that suggested the scale to be appropriate for use within the study.

Referee Vignettes. Referee vignettes consisted of a written profile of a hypothetical referee, and were developed based on the existing literature concerning the types of cues used to make judgements about perceived refereeing competence (Dosseville et al., 2014). As vignettes have been employed effectively within previous experimental studies, particularly

in the context of football officiating (e.g., Faccenda, Pantelon, & Reynes, 2009; Simmons, 2010), the use of vignettes within the present study were deemed to be an appropriate method of manipulation in regards to the two independent variables (Experience and Qualification Pathway).

Each vignette was consistent in reporting information such as name, gender, year the referee started officiating, height, and activities outside of their officiating duties. However, specific information relating to the referee's "Experience" and "Qualification Pathway" was manipulated to create four experimental vignettes; Experienced/Longitudinal, Experienced/Fast-track, Limited/Longitudinal, and Limited/Fast-track. The vignette representing the Experienced referee who had undertaken all the necessary levels of the Qualification Pathway (i.e., Experienced/Longitudinal) was presented as follows:

"Rob is a football referee who has a wealth of experience as an FA qualified referee. He holds a Level 1 National List qualification (the highest level of referee certification), meaning that he can officiate in the English Football League and English Premier League. He achieved his current position having progressed through all of the necessary levels within the refereeing training process. At the age of 18 (Level 9), he started officiating in the Amateur leagues before being promoted in turn to officiate in the County, Supply, Contributory, and Conference leagues before finally being promoted (as a result of consistent good performances and experience) to the Level 1 National List. Rob is of average height and weight for his age, and is active in terms of his sport and exercise away from his officiating duties".

The referee with Limited experience yet had completed the Longitudinal qualification pathway (i.e., Limited/Longitudinal vignette) was presented with the exact same description as above, but with the two introductory sentences adapted to read as follows:

"Rob is a football referee who has a developing profile of experience as an FA qualified referee. He holds a Level 3 qualification which means that he can officiate in the Contributory Leagues (below the North and South Conference Leagues)"

Within vignettes describing referees who progressed through the Fast-track scheme, the following sentences were incorporated: *"He achieved his current position having progressed via the fast-tracking refereeing scheme"…"Rob has now been identified as a referee of huge potential and has been selected onto the referee fast-tracking scheme where a referee mentor will assist his progression to Level 1 National List status (enabling him to officiate in the English Football League and English Premier League)".*

Procedure

Following approval from the research ethics committee, participants were recruited over a period of approximately three months. Initially, participants were recruited using the existing knowledge and contacts of the lead researcher, with each consenting participant signposting the lead researcher towards further potential participants. Prospective participants were contacted via an email which provided brief information about the purpose of the study, what would be expected of participants, the potential benefits of the study, and the previously-mentioned inclusion criteria. To express their interest, prospective participants could contact the lead researcher using the details provided within the recruitment email. Through further email correspondence, the lead researcher arranged appropriate times, dates, and venues to meet with the participants so that they could complete the study.

Upon meeting with the researcher, participants were provided with a participant pack containing an information sheet, consent form, Participant Demographic Questionnaire, Referee Vignette (randomly allocated by experimental condition), and the ARCS. Participants read the information sheet and confirmed their participation by signing the consent form before completing the participant demographic questionnaire. Each participant was then given two minutes to read their referee vignette before completing the ARCS. The standardised vignette reading time ensured that all participants had a consistent, equitable opportunity to study the details of the vignette before indicating their initial impressions of the referee's competence. All documents were completed in the presence of the lead researcher to ensure participants' questions could be answered during completion of the study. Once participants had provided their responses to the vignette via the ARCS, all participants were thanked for taking part and provided with a full debrief of the aims and objectives of the study, including details of the information that had been manipulated to create the four experimental conditions. The study took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete, inclusive of the two-minute reading time, and was carried out in line with the ethics procedures of the University of the first author.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses were tested using a 2x2 factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). MANOVA compared the effects of the two independent variables (Experience and Qualification Pathway) on competency ratings obtained from the ARCS. In detail, MANOVA and follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on the subscale scores for fitness, impartiality, consistency, respectfulness, confidence, and communication. Interaction effects were investigated to ensure that the scores from one independent variable did not significantly differ across different levels of the other independent variable. In line with the recommendations of Clark-Carter (2010), partial Eta

squared (partial η^2) effect sizes were reported whereby values of between .001 and .058 were classed as small effect sizes, values of between .059 and .137 were considered medium, and effect sizes of .138 and greater were classed as large.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

A 2x2 factorial MANOVA was conducted on the independent variables of Experience (Experienced/Limited) and Qualification Pathway (Longitudinal/Fast-Track) based on perceived competency scores generated from the ARCS. Box's M test indicated a significant difference between the covariance matrices of the dependent variable ($p < .05$). Due to the sensitive nature of the Box's M test, Field (2013) recommends that significant results can be disregarded where sample sizes across each condition are equal, as was the case within the present study. Based on this recommendation, Pillai's trace was the criterion used in the subsequent analyses.

Main Analyses

Interaction. No significant interaction effect was found between Experience and Qualification Pathway (Pillai's $\text{Trace}_{6, 103} = 0.029$, $F = 0.514$, $p = .796$, partial $\eta^2 = .029$, observed power = .200). This indicates that the two independent variables did not combine to influence participants' ratings of perceived referee competence, and were analysed separately as a result of this finding.

Experience. MANOVA revealed a significant main effect, thus indicating a difference between the two levels of the variable - Experienced and Limited (Pillai's $\text{Trace}_{6, 103} = 0.251$, $F = 5.756$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .251$, observed power = .997). Follow-up ANOVA revealed significant effects for all six characteristics: fitness ($F_{1, 108} = 12.708$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .105$, observed power = .942), impartiality ($F_{1, 108} = 15.601$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .126$, observed power = .975), consistency ($F_{1, 108} = 25.339$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .190$, observed

power = .999), respectfulness ($F_{1, 108} = 13.591$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .112$, observed power = .955), communication ($F_{1, 108} = 19.790$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .155$, observed power = .993), and confidence ($F_{1, 108} = 25.714$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .192$, power = .999). Large effect sizes were displayed for the characteristics of consistency, communication, and confidence, with medium effect sizes reported for fitness, impartiality, and respectfulness. As can be seen from the data displayed in Table 1, the experienced referee was perceived as more competent than the referee with limited experience on all six characteristics.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Qualification Pathway. No significant main effect was found, indicating no difference between the two levels of the variable - Longitudinal and Fast-track (Pillai's $\text{Trace}_{6, 103} = 0.091$, $F = 1.713$, $p = .125$, partial $\eta^2 = .091$, observed power = .627). Nevertheless, further analyses were deemed appropriate given the medium effect size reported (Clark-Carter, 2010). Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a significant effect for the characteristic of communication ($F_{1, 108} = 8.639$, $p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .074$, observed power = .830). As depicted by the data in Table 2, participants perceived the referee who had qualified through the Longitudinal pathway to be more competent in terms of his communication skills compared with the referee who had completed the Fast-track route to qualification. No other significant effects were reported for Qualification Pathway: fitness ($F_{1, 108} = 1.654$, $p = .201$, partial $\eta^2 = .015$, observed power = .247), impartiality ($F_{1, 108} = 3.344$, $p = .70$, partial $\eta^2 = .030$, observed power = .441), consistency ($F_{1, 108} = 2.637$, $p = .107$, partial $\eta^2 = .024$, observed power = .363), respectfulness ($F_{1, 108} = 2.978$, $p = .087$, partial $\eta^2 = .027$, observed power = .402) and confidence ($F_{1, 108} = 3.030$, $p = .085$, partial $\eta^2 = .027$, observed power = .407).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Discussion

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of two specific sources of information – Experience and Qualification Pathway – on perceptions of refereeing competence from the perspective of soccer players and coaches. The research generated two hypotheses. Hypothesis one stated that the experienced referees would be rated as significantly more competent than those who were described as having obtained limited experience. The first hypothesis was supported for all six competency characteristics of fitness, impartiality, consistency, respectfulness, communication, and confidence. In congruence with previous research (e.g., Findlay & Ste-Marie, 2004; Manley et al., 2008; 2014; Manley, Greenlees, Thelwell, & Smith, 2010; Thelwell et al., 2013), the results strongly support the notion that third-party reports such as experience are highly influential cues when formulating initial impressions and expectations of a person's competence.

Although the findings support conclusions that have been drawn within previously published literature (e.g., Manley et al., 2008; 2010; 2014; Thelwell et al., 2013), they provide an innovative and unique contribution to the expectancy literature by investigating qualification pathway, a variable which, to date, has not been considered in the context of players' and coaches' impressions and expectancies of soccer referees. Specifically, hypothesis two predicted that referees who had gained their qualification by progressing through the Longitudinal pathway (i.e., progressing through every level of the qualification) would be perceived as significantly more competent than referees who had completed the Fast-track route to qualification. Following initial analysis, the second hypothesis was not supported as five of the six competency categories displayed no significant differences as a function of Qualification Pathway. However, further examination of the sub-components of competence revealed that referees who had qualified via the Longitudinal method were perceived as significantly more competent communicators than the referees who were portrayed as products of the Fast-track scheme. Moreover, it appears that schemes promoting

faster qualifications, particularly in education, do not always prepare individuals adequately for the real life demands of their profession following their qualification, compared to traditional methods (McConney, Price, & Woods-McConney, 2012). In the context of sport, research has investigated the interpersonal actions of elite referees demonstrating "best practice" with regards to communicating decisions within football (Mellick, Fleming, Bull, & Laugharne, 2005). In addition, Simmons (2006) have highlighted that experienced football referees are able to employ a range of verbal and non-verbal techniques to effectively communicate their decisions in a way that enhances player acceptance of that decision, consequently reducing the chances of player dissent and aggression. It is, therefore, not surprising that 13 (86.6%) of 15 English Premier League referees highlighted effective communication as key within their management of the game, an overarching factor underpinning officiating excellence (Slack, Maynard, Butt, & Olusoga, 2013).

There is abundant evidence from a wide range of professional contexts to demonstrate that optimal interpersonal relationships are often established through the effective use of communication skills (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012; Lang, 2012). Just like the process of forging good working relations, the processes involved in the development of effective communication skills are complex, time-intensive, and considered an essential element of skills training for many established professions (Health and Care Professions Council, 2016; Lasater, 2016). Ergo, it is not surprising that within the present study, the Longitudinal pathway (i.e., more time in training) was associated with greater perceived communication competence of referees. This finding is particularly pertinent to the principal role and duties of a soccer referee, where success is often determined by the referee's ability to build effective working relationships with significant others, inclusive of the players and their coaching staff. If establishing rapport and mutual trust with players and coaches represents an important performance demand for soccer referees, then it should come as no surprise that

communication skills have been identified as a distinguishing characteristic between referees who have qualified through different pathways.

What is surprising, however, is that until very recently, referees have been provided with very little guidance and support when it comes to the training and development of communication skills for interpersonal impact. For example, within the previous version of the *Laws of the Game* document (International Football Association Board; IFAB, 2015), intended as a resource to support referees in their professional roles, there was an overwhelming emphasis on game rules as opposed to game management. Specifically, within this 144-page document, a mere 10 lines of text were included which alluded to the importance of the referee's body language (p. 84) and management of "mass confrontation" scenarios (p. 104). Given the title of the document, this focus on rules and laws was to be expected. Yet, there was no sign-posting to further guidance or training that referees can use to inform their professional development in related competency areas. The IFAB have recently published an updated version of this document (IFAB, 2018), which includes an additional section entitled *Practical Guidelines for Match Officials* (pp. 180-210). Although this update provides a welcome step in the right direction, the content is still limited in terms of specific, actionable guidance for soccer referees to follow. The FA's National Referee Strategy (2018) represents a similar advancement, with seven core values - Respect, Empathy, Fitness, Evaluation, Reliability, Education, and Excellence - outlined as a behavioural framework to which referees should adhere in their professional role. However, at the time of writing this manuscript, the authors were unable to locate any specific details about how these core principles were established, defined, or developed through the strategy. Consequently, a recommendation for relevant organisations and professional bodies is to establish more explicit and robust resources to support the development of core knowledge, values, and skills at all levels of referee training. Whilst it is identified that the methods of

developing communication in officials are often misunderstood and therefore, put aside in relation to officiating training and research (Simmons & Cunningham, 2013), practical recommendations have been made emphasising the importance of considering a 'holistic approach' of conceptualizing officiating communication (Salmon & Young, 2011; Simmons & Cunningham, 2013). Moreover, Cunningham, Simmons, Mascarenhas and Redhead (2014) highlighted the potential mismatch between what is perceived as effective communication and the methods used within training. Specifically, Cunningham et al. identify that, in association with impression management, sport bodies are able to appreciate the official's ability to assess situations and the skills involved within effective interactions, yet often rely heavily on communicative skills exhibited in one-way communication within their communication training (e.g., the use of whistles and appropriate signals). There is a scarcity of appropriate and tailored communication training that is informed by academic research. This reflects a need for the development of more supportive resources that could help facilitate the acquisition and application of effective communication skills by referees.

No interaction effects were reported between the two independent variables of Experience and Qualification Pathway. Based on the reported findings, a referee's experience appears to be a more powerful source of information than a referee's qualification pathway in terms of the influence it has over soccer coaches' and players' perceptions of refereeing competence. It is possible that this finding is an artefact of the way in which experimental stimuli were presented to participants. For instance, within all experimental vignettes, information regarding the experience of the referee was presented first, followed by details of the referee's qualification pathway. As proposed by previous researchers (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2013), it is possible that by presenting the experiential information first, participants disregarded any subsequent information presented on the vignette when forming their impressions and expectancies. Alternatively, it is possible that participants may have formed

their expectancy using the experiential information and used subsequent information to reinforce their initial expectancy (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). If accepted, either of these suggested explanations would infer that the TPR of experience was strong enough in isolation to form a concluding expectancy of the referee (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Such a conclusion carries much weight when considered in conjunction with published evidence to support the influential power of experiential information (e.g., Findlay & Ste-Marie, 2004; Manley et al., 2008; 2010; 2014; Thelwell et al., 2013).

It is possible that participants provided judgements about referees using information stored in memory as opposed to only using the informational cues that were presented through the vignette. This explanation is in line with that of cognitive researchers (e.g., Bryne, Pecker, & Burgess, 2007; Schacter & Addis, 2007), who suggest that imagining the future (e.g., how competent a referee *might* be) involves similar psychological processes to remembering the past (e.g., how competent a referee *appeared* to be). Thus, the extent to which participants were basing their competency judgements on past experience or the vignette alone is unclear. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation which they would urge researchers to account for and address in future studies of this nature. Further limitations may arise from the way the vignettes were constructed. While efforts were made to ensure that potential confounding factors (e.g., age, gender, height, weight, and activities away from officiating duties) stayed consistent throughout, some text was adapted to account for the inclusion of the manipulated variables. As an example, the referee was forwarded onto the Fast-track scheme due to him displaying “huge potential”; therefore, the extent to which the use of emotive language may have influenced the perceived competency ratings of participants is unclear. Further manipulations regarding the content or presentation of information within vignettes may be a potential avenue for future research, potentially in the form of more qualitative inquiry (e.g., focus groups).

Whilst it is clear that these findings have direct implications for supporting officials in their training, particularly in relation to the development of effective communication, it is possible that referees themselves can utilize these findings to their own benefit. Specifically, referees should be encouraged to emphasize the amount of positive information they share with players and coaches prior to any physical interaction. For example, by sharing information regarding their extensive experience and methods of achieving their qualification (i.e., progressing through every level of the more traditional longitudinal pathway), referees will be in a better position to induce more positive judgements surrounding their perceived officiating competence. Simmons (2011) suggested that players, depending on familiarity and novelty of the player-referee interaction, are not aware of the refereeing experience a referee actually has and, therefore, may perceive experience through different referee behaviours. For example, calmness, resilience to pressure and, most notably, the ability to explain decisions (Simmons, 2011). In relation to the present study, specific methods may be adopted by referees to ensure players formulate positive expectations regarding the referee's perceived competence prior to an interaction. As an example, this reputational advantage could include the development of a profile that provides a brief outline of their refereeing background, including experience and qualification pathway. This profile could then be shared with players and coaches prior to or in the early phases of initial interactions. Building on these suggestions, future research may wish to consider examining the differing impact of particular sources of information when formulating judgements of officiating competence (i.e., are TPRs a more powerful source of information when forming competency judgements than those displayed within a match?). Similarly, the extent to which these in-match cues lead to confirming/disconfirming beliefs, as explained by the four-stage expectancy cycle (e.g., Becker & Solomon, 2005; Horn et al., 2010; Solomon, 2001), is a worthy avenue of further investigation.

As it is the role of the referee to promote the highest standards of the game for both players and coaches (Weinberg & Richardson, 1990), it is vital that working relationships are not adversely affected by perceptions of competence (Simmons, 2010). As an example, it is clear that referees frequently make difficult decisions that are often perceived as unfair by opposing players and coaches. However, Simmons (2010) states that it is not only the perceptions of the decision which may be deemed unfair, but also how the athlete perceives the decision-making process. Moreover, if a referee is perceived to lack competence, players and coaches may form negative judgements regarding the referee's ability to make consistent and fair decisions. In turn, these negative judgments may increase the likelihood of psychological stress, interpersonal conflict, and heightened levels of frustration (Bar-Eli, Levy-Kolker, Pie, & Tenenbaum, 1995), all of which can negatively affect sporting performance (e.g., Lazarus, 2000; Woodman & Hardy, 2003). Future research should consider the coach's influence on the potential impact of such expectancies, as this may facilitate or hinder the player-referee interaction. Conclusively, it appears that these findings have significant implications for not only the referee themselves but also the overall conditions of "the beautiful game".

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Tables

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Subcategories of Referee Competence Between the Experienced and Limited Experience Conditions

Subcategories of referee competence	Experience	
	Experienced	Limited
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Fitness	18.27 (2.20)	16.54 (2.89)
Impartiality	18.41 (2.60)	16.48 (2.61)
Consistency	18.14 (2.24)	15.93 (2.46)
Respectfulness	18.41 (2.42)	16.73 (2.44)
Communication	17.45 (2.46)	15.45 (2.48)
Confidence	18.55 (2.13)	16.16 (2.87)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Subcategories of Referee Competence Between the Experienced and Limited Experience Conditions

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the Subcategories of Referee Competence Between the Longitudinal and Fast-Track Qualification Pathway Conditions

Subcategories of referee competence	Qualification pathway	
	Longitudinal	Fast-track
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Fitness	17.71 (2.59)	17.09 (2.80)
Impartiality	17.89 (2.79)	17.00 (2.69)
Consistency	17.39 (2.76)	16.68 (2.38)
Respectfulness	17.96 (2.65)	17.18 (2.43)
Communication	17.11 (2.53)	15.79 (2.64)
Confidence	17.77 (2.71)	16.95 (2.83)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Subcategories of Referee Competence Between the Longitudinal and Fast-Track Qualification Pathway Conditions