

Guidance for Referees: Understanding and Responding to Assaults on Match Officials

Assaults on match officials remain thankfully rare, but when they do occur, they can be deeply distressing and potentially life-changing. The Referees' Association (RA) has issued comprehensive guidance to ensure that every official—regardless of age, experience, or level—knows exactly what to do if they become the victim of an assault or serious abuse. Their message is clear: **you are not alone**, and support is available immediately.

This article distils that guidance, highlighting the key steps, legal context, and support pathways available.

Why This Guidance Matters

An assault, whether physical or verbal, is a traumatic event. Even incidents that appear minor can have significant emotional and psychological impact. The RA's Representation and Welfare Teams—made up of experienced lawyers and trained support professionals—provide free, confidential, and ongoing assistance to all members.

Criminal proceedings often run alongside football disciplinary processes, and navigating both can be daunting. The RA's role is to stand beside you throughout.

Understanding Assaults: What the Law Says

The law recognises several levels of assault, defined primarily by the harm caused:

- **Common Assault** – includes threats of violence or actions that cause fear of immediate harm. Even raising a fist or verbally threatening a referee can fall into this category.
- **Actual Bodily Harm (ABH)** – applies when physical injury occurs, such as bruising, swelling, or cuts.
- **Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH)** – the most serious category, involving significant injury or long-term harm.

Examples of actions likely to constitute assault include:

- Knocking a notebook or equipment from a referee's hand
- Throwing or kicking a ball at an official
- Verbally threatening violence
- Pushing, poking, barging, or spitting
- Punching, kicking, or head-butting

Immediate Actions: What to Do If You Are Assaulted

The RA outlines a clear set of steps to follow. These are designed to protect your safety, preserve evidence, and ensure proper reporting.

1. Prioritise Safety

If you are assaulted—or fear for your safety—the match should be **abandoned immediately**, unless you are absolutely certain that continuing poses no risk to you or others.

If you feel in immediate danger call 999

2. Gather Information (If safe)

- Obtain names and contact details of witnesses
- Ask witnesses to preserve any video footage
- Request CCTV or player details from club officials

3. Leave Safely

If the match is abandoned, leave the venue promptly. Consider asking someone to accompany you.

4. Seek Medical Attention

Physical and psychological reactions can be delayed. Get checked by a medical professional as soon as possible.

5. Report to the Police

- Call **101** to report the incident or 999 depending on the severity
- Record the incident number and the name of the investigating officer

If the police suggest the matter is “football-related” and should be handled by the County FA, you are entitled to ask for a senior officer. Football jurisdiction does **not** replace criminal law and The Police services of England and Wales have a duty to record crime and offer advice and support.

Follow-Up Actions

Once safe and able:

- Write a full account of the incident
- Contact your Local Referees’ Association - **for Woking that should be David Pilling, Jayden Amlani-Reddy or Andy Bennett**
- Contact your County RA Secretary (Brian Reader), your County FA Referee Development Officer, the Competition secretary and the National RA (**David/Jayden will be able to do this on your behalf**)
- Submit your report to the County FA, clearly marked “**Referee Assault**”
- Obtain written medical evidence of any injuries
- Take photographs of visible injuries

Support from the RA

The RA’s Welfare and Representation Teams provide:

- Legal guidance
- Support through police investigations

- Assistance with County FA disciplinary processes
- Emotional and welfare support
- Help liaising with clubs, leagues, and authorities

Their services are free for all RA members, and they are available outside normal office hours.

Contact details:

Mobile: 07718 485 892 Email: welfare@the-ra.org

You Are Not Alone

While referee assaults are uncommon, they do happen—and when they do, the Society and the RA is ready to support you every step of the way. No official should ever feel isolated or unsure of what to do. This guidance ensures that every member has a clear pathway to safety, justice, and support.

If you ever experience an assault or serious abuse, reach out.