



The 31st Participant – Delivery Notes

Facilitator guide and delivery notes for the NLD Refs training resource.

Slide 1 – Title Slide



Delivery Notes:

Open calmly. Introduce the concept that referees are participants in the game experience, not separate from it.

This isn't a session about referees versus clubs, players or supporters. It's a session about the environment we create together.

“There are not just 30 players in a rugby match, there's always a 31st participant.”

Slide 2 – No 31



Delivery Notes:

Discuss the referee as the 31st participant and how environments influence performance.

Key Message: **The referee is part of the rugby experience.**

Avoid making referees sound special or above criticism.

“The referee influences the game. But the environment also influences the referee.”

Discuss:

- * emotional temperature,
- * confidence,
- * communication,
- * pressure.

Potential discussion question:

“Have you ever seen a game become harder to referee because of the environment around it?”

Slide 3 – Why It Matters



Delivery Notes:

Explain how better environments improve enjoyment, retention, confidence and game flow.

Better environments improve rugby for everybody. Keep this broad.

This is not just about referees. Use the headings as prompts for discussion.

It is about:

- * game flow,
- * player behaviour,
- * confidence,
- * enjoyment,
- * learning,
- * retention,
- * culture

“Healthy environments usually produce better rugby.”

Slide 4 – Rugby Is Different



Delivery Notes:

Explore rugby's culture of respectful disagreement without abuse.

Key Message: **Rugby's identity matters.**

This is a good point to reference rugby culture positively.

Avoid

- * superiority,
- * “football comparison” clichés,
- * or moral grandstanding.

Instead:

“Rugby has always prided itself on disagreement without disrespect.”

Important distinction:

Challenge is normal. Abuse is not.

Slide 5 – The Human Behind The Whistle



Delivery Notes:

Slow the pace here. Focus on referees being people first with unseen pressures and nerves.

Key Message: Officials are people first.

The objective is not sympathy but perspective.

“We often only meet referees at kick-off. We don't see the day they've had before arriving.”

Discuss:

- * work stress,
- * family pressure,
- * travel,
- * confidence,
- * young officials,
- * nerves.

“Wanting to do well is usually what creates nerves. We don't all manage nerves the same way” – Connect with next slide

Slide 6 – Reflection



Delivery Notes:

Allow this slide to just sit with the delegates.

We are all human

(If time allows, this is a good opportunity to ask delegates to share some negative experiences match officials have faced that they have witnessed. How did it make them feel? How would they feel if that was a family member or friend? Once again, this is not about elevating the match official, merely focusing on the human element of what makes community rugby happen.)

Slide 7 – Everyone Shapes The Environment



Delivery Notes:

The environment belongs to everybody.
Strong opportunity for reflection.
Avoid blaming any one group.

Instead discuss shared ownership:

- * players,
- * coaches,
- * spectators,
- * captains,
- * clubs,
- * volunteers,
- * officials.

“What sort of environment would a brand-new referee experience at our club?”

Slide 8 - Captains Matter



Delivery Notes:

Focus on captains as emotional tone setters who create clarity under pressure. Captains are leaders, match officials empower and manage the leaders.

“The best captains solve problems rather than escalate them.”

Good discussion point: **“What does a referee actually need from a captain?”**

Potential answers:

- * calmness,
- * clarity,
- * honesty,
- * adaptability,
- * emotional regulation.

Slide 9 – Coaches Set The Tone



Delivery Notes:

Reflect on how coaches influence player behaviour and emotional temperature.
Coaches strongly influence emotional temperature.

This slide should feel reflective rather than accusatory.

“Players usually mirror the emotional behaviour of their coaches.”

“Are we creating clarity or pressure?”

“Would a developing referee want to return to our club?”

Important nuance:

Demanding standards is healthy. Humiliation is not.

Slide 10 – Respect ≠ Silence



Delivery Notes:

Differentiate between healthy challenge and unhealthy behaviour.

Respect and challenge can coexist.

This is an important balance slide.

Make clear:

- * referees are accountable,
- * disagreement exists in rugby,
- * communication matters.

But:

- * sarcasm,
 - * abuse,
 - * intimidation,
 - * public humiliation,
- are not constructive challenge.

Sign post “bystander training”

“Healthy challenge improves games.”

“Unhealthy behaviour damages rugby.”

Slide 11 – The Spectator Effect



Delivery Notes:

Highlight the impact of touchline behaviour, especially on young match officials.

Touchline behaviour has consequences.

Let the slide do the heavy lifting.

“Young referees hear everything. And what they hear often shapes whether they stay.”

Potential discussion:

- * first experiences,
- * confidence,
- * belonging,
- * emotional safety.

Slide 12 – Development Environments



Delivery Notes:

Compare referee development to player development and discuss learning environments.

“We accept that players need time to learn, referees are no different.”

Healthy environments accelerate learning.

Discuss:

- * confidence,
- * mistakes,

- * reflection,
- * communication,
- * pressure.

Slide 13 – It’s Simple Really



Delivery Notes:

Emphasise that strong environments are built through small repeated behaviours. Culture is often built through small repeated behaviours.

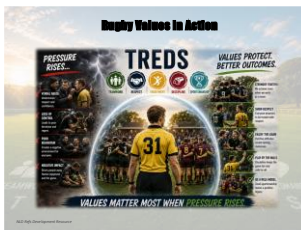
Do not overcomplicate this slide, keep it conversational.

“Most great environments are not built through massive gestures. They’re built through small consistent behaviours.”

Examples:

- * greeting officials,
- * calm captains,
- * controlled coaches,
- * respectful disagreement,
- * supportive sidelines.
- * honest and constructive feedback.

Slide 14 – Rugby Values In Action



Delivery Notes:

Explain that values matter most when pressure rises and emotions increase. Values matter most under pressure.

This is not a “poster values” slide. This is about behaviour under stress.

“Values really matter when pressure rises.”

Discuss:

- * frustration,
- * pressure,
- * losing,
- * disagreement,
- * emotional reactions.

“Who are we when the game becomes difficult?”

Slide 15 – Final Reflection



Delivery Notes:

Finish slowly and reflectively. Ask what environment the audience wants to create.

Environment is a choice. “What environment do we want to create?”

“The environment we create today shapes the people who stay in the game tomorrow.”

“Better environments create better experiences which create better rugby.”

End with ownership ; **“This is not about perfection. It’s about awareness. Because everybody in rugby contributes to the environment”**

Facilitation Tips

Things That Strengthen The Session

- ✓ Real examples.
- ✓ Honest reflection.
- ✓ Audience discussion.
- ✓ Pauses/ time to reflect
- ✓ Asking questions
- ✓ Human stories.
- ✓ Sharing positive examples

Things To Avoid :

- Turning this into referee protectionism.
- Attacking clubs.
- Moral superiority.
- Overusing data to evidence perspectives
- Overexplaining every slide.
- Filling every silence.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- “What behaviours help games thrive?”
- “What behaviours increase pressure?”
- “How do we challenge constructively?”
- “What does good captaincy actually look like?”
- “What kind of touchline would we want for our children?”
- “How can a club help change behaviours?”

Suggested Discussion Fuel

- Over 90% of match officials operate without an appointed team of three
- Only match officials operating in the national leagues and above are paid a fee for officiating
- Circa %40 of all Red cards are for MOA
- Spectator and coach behaviour can cost league points (worst case situations)
- Match officials are not giving back to the game, they are continuing their rugby journey in a different lane
- “No ref no game” should be challenged. No pitch no game. No club no game. We have our part to play, as all in rugby do.