

## Refereeing and the perspectives of a career in football

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### Rezumat

Scopul acestei lucrări este de a identifica profilul arbitrilor de la Asociația Județeană de Fotbal din județul Timiș. Cu ajutorul anchetei sociologice, s-a aplicat un chestionar alcătuit din 32 de itemi pe un grup de 63 arbitri (57 de sex masculin și 6 de sex feminin). S-a constatat că majoritatea arbitrilor au practicat fotbalul până la un anumit nivel, iar nerealizarea unei cariere sportive pe plan fotbalistic a determinat alegerea unei cariere în arbitraj. În concluzie, arbitrajul reprezintă o opțiune de carieră viitoare care poate fi practică la cel mai înalt nivel (Liga I sau arbitru UEFA) până la vârsta de 45 de ani, ulterior aceștia putând rămâne observatori (FRF sau UEFA).

**Cuvinte cheie:** fotbal, pasiune, arbitru, carieră.

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the profile of the referee from the Football County Association from the Timis county. With the help of the sociological investigation, a questionnaire with 32 items was applied on a group of 63 referees (57 male and 6 female). It has been noticed that the majority of referees have practiced football up to a certain level and failing to make a sportive career in football has determined the choice of a career in refereeing. In conclusion, refereeing is an option for a future career that can be practiced at the highest level (1<sup>st</sup> League of UEFA referee) until the age of 45. After reaching this age, these people can become observers (for the Romanian Football Federation or UEFA).

**Key words:** football, passion, referee, career.

### Funding Acknowledgement

*This communication is made and published under aegis of Iași "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University and West University of Timișoara as a part of a research programme which is funded by the European Union within Operational Sector Programme for Human Resources Development through the project Trans-national network of integrated management for post-doctoral research in the field of Science Communication. Institutional construction (postdoctoral school) and fellowship Programme (CommScie). Code Project: POSDRU/89/1.5/S/63663.*

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## Introduction

Football is not “only what you see on the pitch, the fight between two teams for victory, but also it is a passion, it is a sophisticated machine which brings together energies, people, money and a huge amount of diplomacy” [1]. Football is also a social phenomenon: “...in Naples when a man has money, he first buys himself something to eat, then goes to the football field, and then sees if he has anything left in order to find a place to live. The Brazilians say that even the smallest village has a church and a football field - well, not always a church, but certainly a football field” [2], while the C.F. Barcelona museum is “the most visited placed in the city even ahead of Picasso canvases” [3].

The referee is “the person who enforces the rules of participation in sport competition and administers sanctions (penalties) in case of rule violations” [4] being overall in control of the game. He is helped by two other officials on the field of play called referee’s assistants or linesmen.” [5].

When Pierluigi Collina started refereeing at the highest level, the football public’s perception on the act of refereeing changes. He was known by all football fans and was the first official who appeared in an advertisement with football players [6]. The referee has “full authority to enforce the Laws of the Game in connection with the match to which he has been appointed” [7]. The Romanian Referee Committee is part of the Romanian FA and is formed by former top league referees. The committee is in charge of the referees on the national level (the First, Second and Third League). The district referee associations are taking care of the referees at the regional level (Fourth League and Grassroots football).

Career has been a central concept in people’s lives in the last decades. Therefore, there has been an increasing amount of literature on career and on

career development concepts. Hall [8] defines career as “the lifelong sequence of role-related experiences of individuals.” On the other hand, Sears [9] considers career as “the individual’s work and leisure that take place over his life span.” Thus, career may be defined as the lifelong sequence of jobs or leisure activities experienced by individuals during their life span.

“Career success” is the “positive psychological and work-related outcomes accumulated as a result of one’s work experience” [10]. The path to a successful career is through career planning and career development. Career planning is “a continuous process of self-assessment and goal setting” [11]. The process of planning and career development should be an integral part of someone’s ongoing professional development and it is not a one-time event, but rather it is a process that enables people to develop as professionals and achieve the settled objectives. Career planning is a dynamic process which brings changes in the working-life. The career planning concept may be applied also to the referees who are setting different goals in order to reach the top level in football.

**The purpose** of the research is to identify the reasons why young people choose refereeing as a means of career development and what are the perspectives of career development, taking into account that the highest level of the career is represented by refereeing in the national league and, on an international level, on the FIFA lists.

## Hypothesis

Refereeing is seen as a possible career perspective for former football players that did not gain results on a sportive level.

## Material and method

The questionnaire was applied at the Timis County Football Association, that has in its structures a number of 300 referees from Timisoara and the Timis county. The questionnaire was applied on a number of 63 referees, out of which 9.6% are women. The referees are between 16 and 20 years old (43%), 20-30 (43%), 30-40 (9.5%) and over 40 years old (4.9%).

57.1% of referees are presently pupils and students, the rest are employed (28.5%), chairpersons (3.2%) or workers (6.4%). 88.8% of referees are not married, they live in Timisoara (97%) and Lugoj (3%) and have practiced football (80.9%) at a junior level (48%), 4<sup>th</sup> league (32%), 3<sup>rd</sup> league (16%) and 2<sup>nd</sup> league (4%).

Their experience in the field of refereeing is 33.3% (between 2 and 5 years) and 25.4% (between 5 and 10 years). Those with experience of over 20 years are weakly represented (3.2%). The highest level at which they refereed were: county (31.7%), junior (20.7%), 4<sup>th</sup> league (19%), 3<sup>rd</sup> league (14.2%), 2<sup>nd</sup> league (1.6%) and 1<sup>st</sup> league (1.6%).

The questionnaire was applied during a meeting of the Timis County Football Association. All the participants were briefly informed regarding the study's objectives and regarding the way of filling in the questionnaire – which is completed anonymously and the data obtained is confidential.

## Results

### a. Targeted career in refereeing

Taking into account that the upper age limit for referees is 45, young referees that were questioned want to evolve for a maximum amount of time; 55.5% want a career span of over 20 years. The reasons for which FIFA changed the age limit in

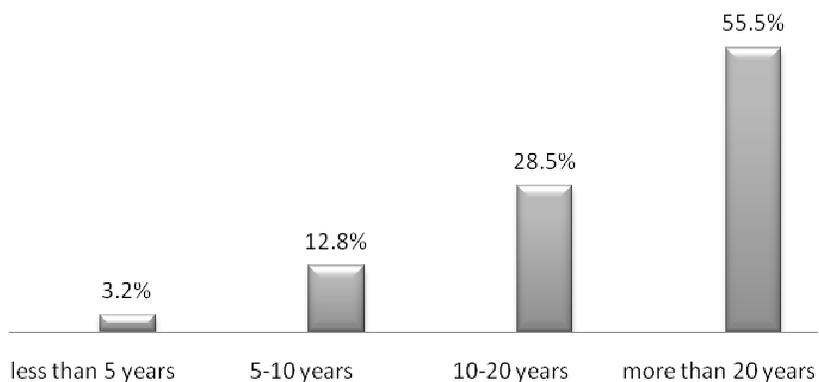
refereeing are related to: “the fitness of the referees was not optimal at that time and this was the reason why the age limit decreased firstly to forty-eight and after to forty-five. I would like to give credit to referees who are prepared mentally, physically and technically. We should also consider that football is a faster game so we need fitter referees. We need new referees as well, for the future and I am still convinced that the best performance is around forty years old. So it is important to stop when they have good performances rather to wait and to be too late, and having bad performances. The other referees should also have opportunities to be promoted, so that is called natural replacement” [12].

But also there are the referees with experience at the UEFA Champions League level that consider the age limit of 45 as unjust, so long as their physical condition is according to the requirements and are capable to pass the imposed tests and standards.

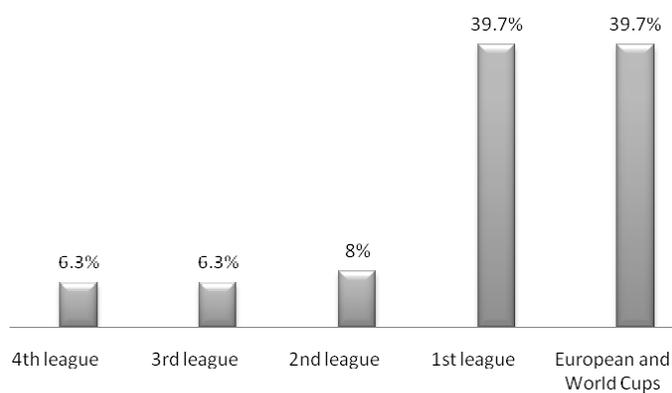
For them, there is also the possibility of maintaining them in the technical staff as observers or even as members in the referee committee after retiring from refereeing.

### b. The reasons for choosing a career as a football referee

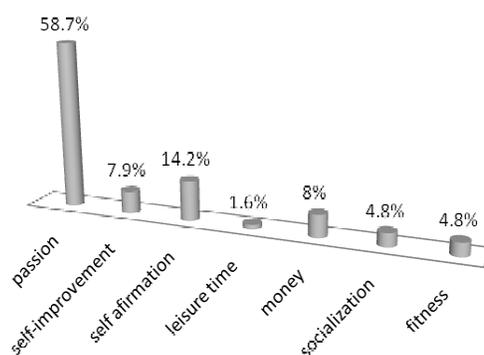
As one can see from figure no. 3, for 58.7% out of the questioned referees the main reason for choosing this career is determined by the passion for football. For 80.9% of them, this choice is determined by giving up the sportive career due to different reasons and the wish of making a name for oneself in the field of football, lived out as a passion. For 14.2% of them, a career in refereeing represents the possibility of affirmation and personal realisation and the possibility of financial gain determines 8% of them to consider refereeing as a field in which they can develop themselves financially.



**Figure 1.** Targeted career in refereeing



**Figure 2.** The targeted level by referees



**Figure 3.** The reasons for choosing a career as referee

Considering professionalization characteristics, football refereeing has witnessed tremendous changes in the last ten years. Although the pace and outcomes of those changes varied throughout the world, the goal everywhere was to transform refereeing from an free-time occupation to a profession comprising autonomous, well-educated, career-oriented workers, especially at the highest level such as in European top leagues and FIFA list. The Referee Committees and referees' trade unions, as organizations, are focusing on redesigning educational programs to meet the changing needs in

football, implementing standards of practice, and establishing refereeing as a respected and credible profession. The National Referee Committees have begun to think that refereeing is more than a free-time occupation thus could be considered a career. As a result, they have taken more control and started to look at how to create a future for referees, as individuals, and for the profession as a whole. Thus, the path towards professionalization starts from the referee courses and reaches the highest level at the top league. It follows the referee's career all the way long.

You chose the refereeing carrier because you were thinking that you can be a better referee than a football player?	No.	%
Yes	51	80.9
Not	12	19.1
Total	63	100

**Figure 4.** The connection between the sportive career and the referee career

The official age limit has been a debated issue not only concerning their retiring age but also about their starting age. In the last century, refereeing was an alternative for retired players in their thirties, while junior football is chaired by adolescent referees, nowadays. Starting refereeing at an early age does not automatically guarantee one the possibility to participate at international competitions as the World Cup. However, there are some disadvantages such as lack of team-work or social skills, which you get from participating in a team sport. There is also one weakness: the fact that the youth do not have enough time to play in order to understand football, by practicing it. Referees who have a playing history are considered more talented, by observers, than others who have not practiced, because former players are considered that they have a better knowledge of the game. As result from fig. no.4, people who are not the greatest footballers but want to be involved due to their love for the game start

refereeing. Starting refereeing appears as an alternative to playing football but allows one to still being involved in the world of football. Sir Alex Ferguson [13] wrote in the book' foreword "Seeing Red" that the referees, who are getting involved at a young age at the grassroots level, deserve credit and thanks from all the football fans. The youth involve themselves in football as players, but do not have many opportunities to become professional players and those who want to remain in football have refereeing as alternative.

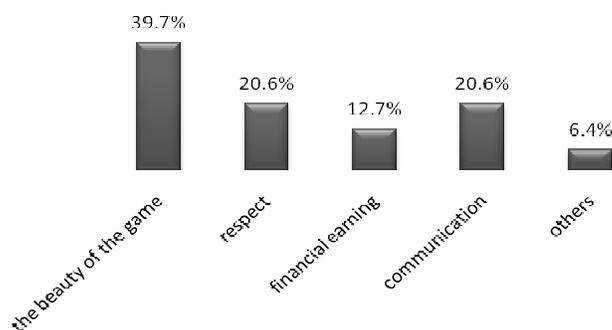
**c. What do you enjoy most when you are refereeing?**

As one can see in figure 4, for referees who are generally former football players that have not managed to develop a career with sportive performance but have managed to find in refereeing a way in which to remain connected with this sport, the most important thing is the beauty of the game (39.7%).

Moreover, communication in the referee brigade gives satisfactions for 20.6% out of those who answered. Planning means “defining goals and objectives” for the referee team, “developing strategies and setting policies and procedures.” [14]. The collaboration before the game is the planning stage in management. The referee team usually decides about the way of acting in different situations such as: mass confrontation, counter-attacks, and difficult situations in the penalty area. The referee is in charge of asking his assistants certain things. Organizing involves “responsibility and authority relationships, including tasks” inside the team [15]. Team organization is also within the

referee’s responsibility, and is discussed also before the game when some members of the official’ team may take care of the administrative issues. Controlling is not a management function used by referees for the assistants, but it is used by referees for players and coaches, taking corrective action whenever it is necessary.

Although the referees are respected persons, they are not popular ones because each of their decisions makes some people unhappy. Regardless, the social recognition does not mean only people’s appreciation, but also some advantages to be a public person, when we are talking about solving daily problems (20.6%).

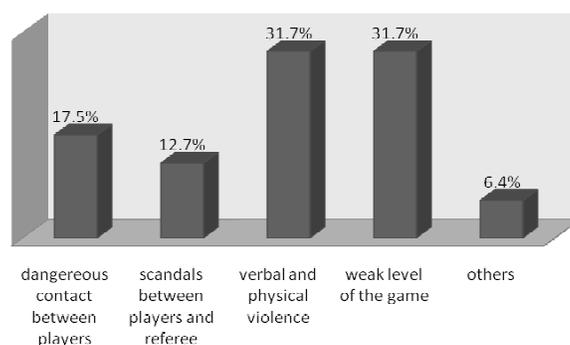


**Figure 5.** Positive aspects of refereeing

#### **d. What do you dislike when you are refereeing?**

The refereeing process is a complex activity that, depending on the level of the team and its position in the rankings and in the league, brings with it various problems. The referee is an official who supervises a game or match to ensure that the rules are adhered to. According to Anshel, Hamill, Haywood, Horvat and Plowman [4] the referee is “the person who enforces the rules of participation in sport competition and administers sanctions (penalties) in case of rule violations,” being in the overall control of the game and he is helped by two

other officials on the field of play called referee’s assistants or linesmen” [5]. Sometimes, being a referee draws onto itself verbal violence, but sometimes also physical violence, and this represents the main reason for which refereeing can become an unpleasant activity and the more the inconvenient element persists, the higher is the probability of career abandonment. Even if in Romania measures have been taken to eliminate violence from football [15] acts of violence still persist and no few times they also involve referees and not only players.



**Figure 6.** Negative aspects of refereeing

As one can notice from figure 6, verbal and physical violence represents the main reason for which refereeing is perceived as something unpleasant (31.7%), the same as the scandals between players and referees (12.7%). Another reason is the weak level of the game (31.7%) from the point of view of the technique and the tactics applied, but also from the point of view of the players' preparations and the dangerous attacks to the players can determine severe accidents, which can transform both the game and refereeing into something unpleasant (17.5%).

### Conclusions

For former football players that have practiced football during childhood and adolescence, but have not managed to overtake a certain level, the perspective of remaining in the field of football represents the possibility of choosing a career made with passion. However, access in the 1<sup>st</sup> league and on the UEFA league is limited by some aspects ranging from physical training to the possibility of refereeing and working at the same time until the level of the 3<sup>rd</sup> league (games are held on Fridays) – all these elements can slow down evolution.

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