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## Factors affecting the performance of Greek soccer referees of super league and football league

**Dimitrios Vyzirgiannakis, Konstantinos Siokos, Panagiotis Kagkarakis, Vitor Pereira and Zisis Papanikolaou**

### Abstract

The research was carried out for the purpose of evaluating the factors affecting performances of the Greek referees in Super League and Football League. The research group was composed of 128 referees who actively officiated in the Hellenic Football Federation. All subjects were speakers of Greek and English. They completed a closed-ended questionnaire which was a composite of 14 items. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were used and as a result of the research important facts have been obtained: not only physical but psychological factors do hold a key role on referees' performance towards excellence; contrary to the common beliefs of everyone (media, spectators, and sports commentators) referees work quite professionally; and educational programs should be evaluated in content for future improvement.

**Keywords:** Soccer referee, super league, performance, training, sports psychology

### 1. Introduction

Soccer is a particularly popular sport worldwide and especially in Greece. An integral part of soccer is that of officiating. The referees have the responsibility of the management of the games, a process quite difficult for them.

It has been observed that the referees make an average of 137 decisions during a match, which means that in the 51 minutes of net game time they make an average of three to four decisions per minute<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time, analyzing the movements of the referees within a match, research has shown that covering 9 to 14 kilometers during the match while they run about 5.1 km of that distance<sup>[2,3]</sup>. Analyzing the distances of the referees, it is observed that 30% of the run is of low intensity and only 7% is of high intensity<sup>[4]</sup>.

The main reason of wrong decisions in cases of offside by the assistant referees is the tiredness. Furthermore, researchers found a decrease in the speed of the assistant referees near the end of the game, a fact that could reduce their ability to follow the flow of the game<sup>[5]</sup>.

Slack, Butt, Maynard and Olusoga<sup>[6]</sup> interviewed 15 referees of the first football category of England (Premier League). In this interview the referees were questioned among other things about the factors that help to officiate good. They answered that, from their point of view, they consider as important factors to good officiating: a) the mental resilience, b) the support from the media, c) the ability to manage the games, d) the multifaceted preparation of the referees, e) the improvement of their performance f) their personal characteristics, g) the maximum level of fitness and h) personal expectations for enhancing their role. According to them, the mental qualities of a referee should be: controlling the pressure, resilience, self-confidence, tough attitude, the striving for success, high work ethic and athletic intelligence. Finally, the game management capabilities include: establishing the respect of players and coaches, effective communication skills with the players, proper positioning on the field, determination in decision making and coherence among the group of referees who officiate the game.

Also, in the same interview, the referees claimed that the establishment of respect from the players and coaches is an important asset in the effort of the referees for proper performance of their duties. More specifically, many of these referees indicated that their sympathy to the players and the respect of the players towards them, were two highly important factors. They also argued that good communication between referees, players and coaches builds relations of

sympathy between them, a fact that helps their professional relationship. Moreover, the officials revealed that carefully listening to players and coaches during the match was an important element in the strengthening of their relationships.

In a similar survey Mascarenhas, Collins and Mortiner argue that there are five factors that can lead to excellent officiating: a) personality and game management ability, b) the ability to judge a phase contextually, c) knowledge and application of the rules, d) psychological characteristics and e) physical fitness along with the correct positioning [7].

Referees believe that good confidence is the most important psychological skill [8]. At the same time, family members and friends have been recognized as providers of emotional and psychological support to the referees. The long experience at top level games has been recognized as a critical factor to achieve optimal officiating. For a referee, the years of officiating, the many training hours on the subject and the number of the matches he has conducted, play an important role in obtaining special officiating skills [9].

**3. Materials and Methods**

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors affecting the performance of Greek referees of the Super League and Football League. Through the responses of the referees, the objective was to discover which factors help them to cope with the demands of the match, what issues constitute obstacles to their good performance and what solutions they suggest for the improvement of officiating in Greece.

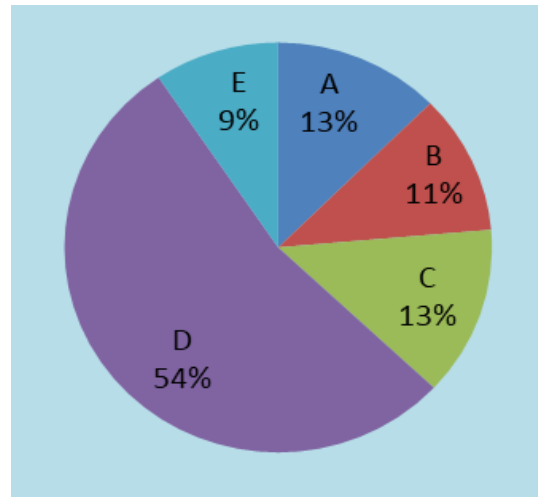
In order to carry out the research a representative sample of the referees was selected from the Super League and Football League. Thus, the survey involved a total of 128 referees, of whom the 69 (n = 69) were Super League aged about 35 years (Mean = 34.97) and the 59 (n = 59) were Football League aged about 33 years (Mean = 32.81). To explore the factors affecting the performance of referees, a questionnaire of 14 closed-ended questions was created and filled by the referees. All participants took part voluntarily in the anonymous survey.

After collecting the questionnaires a statistical analysis took place using the statistical package SPSS. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to analyze the percentage collected by each of the selected responses.

**3. Results and Discussion**

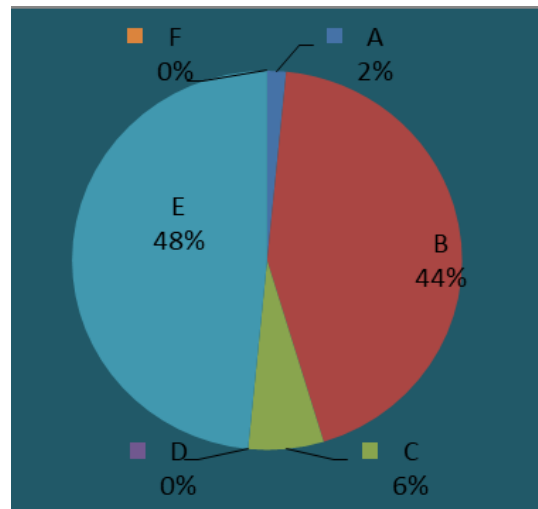
The analysis of the frequencies shows that the referees share common views on the factors that affect their performance.

Question	Answers
1. As a soccer referee, which of the following factors bother you personally?	A. The problematic behavior of the coaches
	B. The injury of a player
	C. The bad behavior of spectators
	D. The players' conflicts with the referee
	E. The problematic behavior of the bench not from the coach



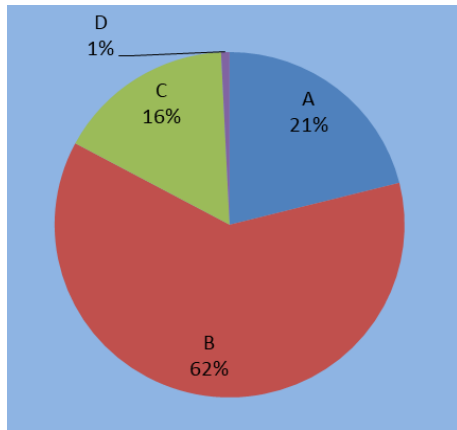
**Fig 1:** Specifically, the disagreements the referees have with the players (54%) in cases of disputed moments during the games (question 1) annoy them more than the problematic behavior of coaches (13%) or spectators (Figure 1).

Question	Answers
2. In your opinion, which are the most significant factors to affect your performance?	A. The spectators' demands
	B. Good behavior among the players
	C. The behavior of the coach and the administrators
	D. The influence of the parents
	E. The good physical condition of the referees
	F. The expectations of the owners and sponsors



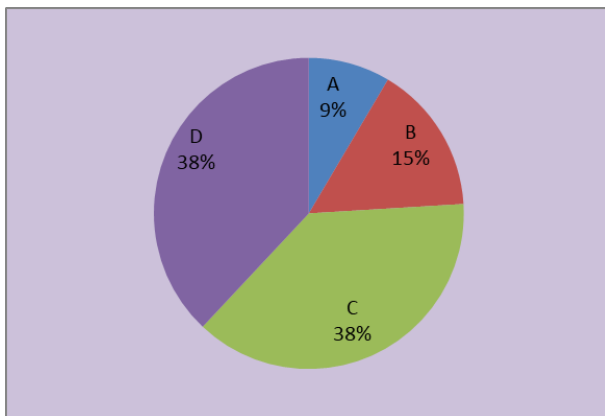
**Fig 2:** The referees acknowledge having a good physical condition (48%) as an important factor for their good performance (question 2), but also consider important the good behavior between the teams (Figure 2).

Question	Answers
3. According to your experience, how much are the referees affected by the spectators?	A. Not at all
	B. A little
	C. Quite a lot
	D. Very much



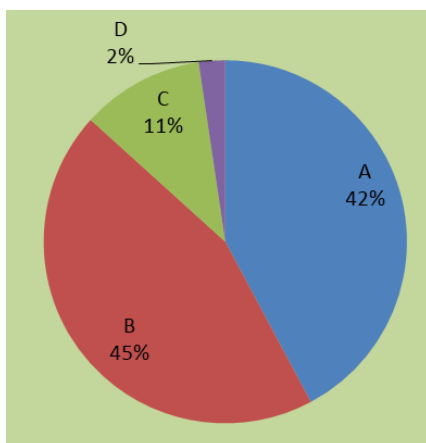
**Fig 3:** A large percentage of the referees believe that the judgment of Greek referees is affected (question 3), in larger or smaller part, by the spectators' behavior (Figure 3).

Question	Answers
4. Do you think that if you become a professional referee your performance will improve?	A. No, not at all
	B. Maybe, a little
	C. Probably, a lot
	D. Yes, significantly



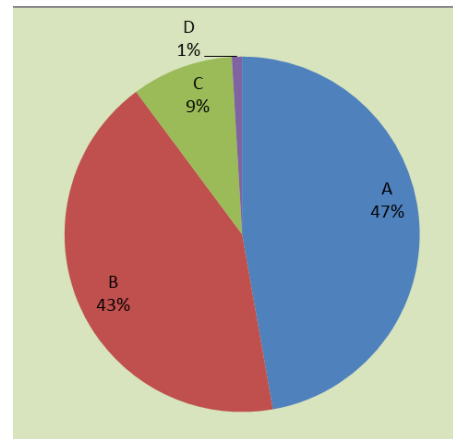
**Fig 4:** A percentage of 38% of the referees is of the opinion that if officiating became their profession (question 4), their performance would probably improve. Another 38% believes that the improvement would be quite significant (Figure 4).

Question	Answers
5. How well do you think most spectators understand the role of the referee and the assistants?	A. Not well at all
	B. Not so well
	C. Well
	D. Very well



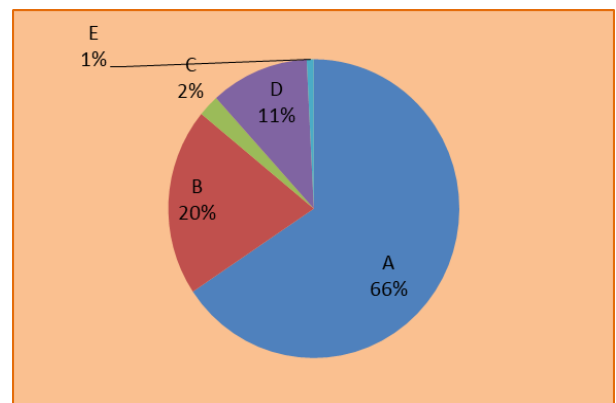
**Fig 5:** The referees believe (question 5) that the spectators don't understand the difficulties of the role of the referee during a match (Figure 5).

Question	Answers
6. According to your experience, are the referees jointly responsible for the violence in Greek stadiums?	A. No, not at all
	B. Maybe, a little
	C. Probably, a lot
	D. Yes, significantly



**Fig 6:** More than half of the referees (53%) believe that they share responsibility for the violence in stadiums (question 6), contrary to a significant percentage (47%) which does not consider the referees responsible (Figure 6).

Question	Answers
7. What improvements do you think can increase the appreciation of the referees' role in the fairness of sports games?	A. Specific instructions to young athletes - players when they begin their careers
	B. media support for the respect and appreciation of referees
	C. I do not believe that any improvement can be achieved
	D. Permission to the referees to respond publicly to the criticism of the media
	E. Establishment of a Panhellenic Award titled «Referee of the Year»
	F. Make your own suggestion*



**Fig 7:** Finally, to increase the appreciation of what the referees offer regarding the fairness of the game (question 7), they suggest that specific instructions should be given to the young athletes at the beginning of their careers and also the work of the referees should be supported by the media (Figure 7).

Apart from the given by the questionnaire responses, the referees proposed some of their own. The most prevalent and feasible were: a) the improvement of education, b) organizing information seminars for players and coaches by the Central Committee of referees and the Greek Football Federation, regarding changes and modifications of the regulations, and c)

on the part of the referees the improvement of their call making.

After the analysis of the results, we are in a position to interpret most of the messages we received from the referees' answers, regarding the factors that play a significant role in their effort to properly run a game.

Therefore, for Greek referees the misconduct of the coach and the administrators in cases of questionable moments combined with the intense reactions of the players in their decisions, functions as a limiting factor in terms of their performance. On the other hand, the referees believe that good physical condition constitutes their main advantage. Furthermore, the appropriate behavior of the two teams' players and the lack of conflict during the game, are considered as crucial factors for their performance.

The admission of the referees that they are influenced by the spectators' reactions is quite appraising. The great role the spectators play in the referees' performance is also confirmed by both studies of Nevill<sup>[9]</sup> and Balmer and Williams<sup>[10]</sup>, who split a sample of referees in two groups and showed them a video of a game, asking them to rule about the charges. The difference was that the one group could hear the spectators' reactions, while the other one couldn't. The results of the experiment showed that the group of referees that took the spectators' reactions into account ruled more favorably for the home team than the group that didn't.

Garicano, Palacios-Huerta and Prendergast<sup>[11]</sup> recognise the fact that referees tend to favor home teams because of the fans. As evidence of this favoritism they offered the case of the added time given at the end of a game proving that it increases whenever the home team is behind in the score. Also, the referees admit that when realizing they made a bad call, they try to correct the previous mistake by ruling favorably for the team they wronged.

A noteworthy fact is that referees consider that the professionalization of officiating could help increase their performance, something that is supported by similar previous studies.

The amateurish character of football officiating constitutes a negative factor, a claim that is supported by a considerable number of referees. Belgian referees, for instance, have other jobs as main occupation, so the time left for training is limited. To this day, only the top English, Spanish and Italian referees are professionals<sup>[12]</sup>.

Regarding the resonance of soccer referees in mass media and sports fans, the participants of the study argue that their work is not appreciated by either the media, or the fans. They go as far as voicing some complains about the criticism that the morality of Greek referees is subjected to. One of the solutions they suggest, in order for the referees' contribution towards a fair and impartial game to be appreciated, is the education of young football players before they begin their professional career in the difficult task of refereeing. Additionally, they suggest that the media try and raise the appreciation and respect of football fans towards the referees.

#### 4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors affecting the performance of Greek referees of Super League and Football League. It was discovered that these factors are diverse and are due to, either purely in-game issues that concern themselves or the participants of the game, or issues outside the game, such as the reactions of the fans and the criticism of the media.

Finally, the results of this paper agree with the referees'

opinion that if going forward officiating becomes professional their performance will be noticeably improved, a view that is also supported by Webb<sup>[13]</sup>, who emphasizes that despite the fact that the training of referees didn't start until a long while after the professionalization of football, the rapid changes that take place in the world of football should correspond to the adjustment of the referees to those changes, in order for the sport and the officiating to evolve simultaneously and equally.

#### 5. Recommendations

In our opinion, a need for focusing in the psychological preparation of Greek referees arises. The modern, leading referees must not be limited to physical training in order to keep up with the always increasing demands of the game, but they should also review the games they managed and remain in contact with sports psychologists to help them deal with the emotional pressure deriving from the decision making during the game<sup>[14, 15]</sup>.

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