

BEN FINDON is
talking to referee
SETH PERKIN...

OFFICIAL LINE



Birthdate/place:

September 12, 1991. Tooting, London.

Family:

Single.

How and when did you first get interested in speedway?

I used to watch regularly at Eastbourne. My family lived in south-west London, and still do, but my dad, Ian, used to take me there pretty much every week. We were Eagles fans during that time, before Wimbledon reopened in 2002. Dad then became chairman of the club part-way through that season until the Dons closed in October, 2005, so Wimbledon Speedway became a big part of our family life.

Where did you see your first meeting and what do you remember about it?

It was the Division Two Fours Final at Peterborough in 1993 (won by Edinburgh). I don't actually remember it myself but, apparently, I cried through most of it because it was so loud. I was only two!

As a fan, who was your favourite team and riders?

It has to be Wimbledon and Mark 'Buzz' Burrows was my favourite rider from that time. It was the way he rode the track, which was like no other rider and truly amazing. In one meeting he went into bend three in third place, disappeared from view behind the flower beds, then came out of the fourth turn in front, and no-one could work out how he had done it. He never knew when he was beaten. A great person and he remains a family friend.

I always enjoyed watching Martin Dugard at Eastbourne, too. A very talented rider, I don't think there was anyone better at Arlington than him. I saw him win the British Grand Prix at Coventry in 2000, which was a great night, but it was more that he was an amazing rider for Eastbourne. I don't think he was too interested in riding abroad. The way he got around Arlington was something quite special.

Why did you become an SCB referee?

I'd been refereeing rugby union for a few years and really enjoyed it. I did school matches and worked for a while with Harlequins but speedway has always been my favourite sport.

I was involved on the track staff at Leicester but wanted a new challenge and to give something back to a sport that I love, and refereeing felt like the right way to do that.

My experiences in rugby union helped me when I moved into speedway. There are big differences between the sports, of course, but it did help me learn about dealing with people and situations in competitive environments.

Who did you learn from? Who was your mentor during training?

In my first year, I was mentored by Mick Bates, then the late Graham Reeve in my second. I also spent a lot of time with the late Tony Steele. All the referees were helpful – you take bits of knowledge from everyone you work with.

What do you remember about the first meeting you took charge of?

It was Sheffield v Scunthorpe on March 31, 2019. Pretty straightforward, Sheffield won 49-41. It was the season new rules around warnings at the starts were introduced.

Ty Proctor went through the tapes and got disqualified and warned. In his next ride, he anticipated the start and was disqualified again. Some confusion followed, as not everyone was familiar with the rule change. I was explaining the decision to Ty when the walkie-talkie went silent. Turned out it had been thrown halfway down the straight!

How do you prepare for a speedway meeting?

The night before the meeting, I'll check line-ups, averages, permits and read the previous week's meeting report. On the day, I aim to stay calm and focused. Traffic can be a nightmare, so I rely on music, podcasts or audiobooks to arrive in the right headspace to referee properly.

What was the biggest or most memorable meeting you have refereed?

In 2020 I refereed the British Under-19 Championship at Scunthorpe (won by Drew Kemp) and the Peter Craven Memorial at Belle Vue (winner: Jason Doyle), where a six-rider final and the behind-closed-doors setting made it a unique experience.

Do you think refs should be 'miked-up', as they are in rugby? If not, why?

Possibly, if it helps fan engagement. But speedway, like football, would need a big culture shift before live referee conversations could be broadcast. The nature of the discussions is different.

Which ex-rider was the most difficult to deal with?

No-one stands out. Sometimes riders are difficult one week and fine the next – it varies.

What advice would you give a new referee?

Go to as many meetings as possible and never be afraid to ask questions. It's important during that training phase to get as much experience as you can, being on the buttons, observing, dealing with riders, officials, promoters, etc. It can be an isolating experience as a referee turning up to a track, especially if you don't go there often. The experiences that you build up as a trainee can help you navigate difficult experiences when you qualify.

What one single thing can speedway do to make itself more attractive to new fans?

There needs to be better use of the time during track grading. We're trying to engage a generation used to short-form content and fast-paced entertainment, so long pauses can feel like the meeting has stalled. While track maintenance is essential, there's an opportunity to add something, whether it's rider interviews, behind-the-scenes footage or fan interaction, to keep the energy and engagement levels up throughout the night.

What is your day job?

I am a lecturer in sociology and sport policy at Manchester Metropolitan University. I've been there since 2018. I graduated with a BSc at St Mary's University, Twickenham, and then a MSc and PhD at Loughborough University.

How do you relax away from speedway?

I enjoy cycling and support Fulham FC. Home match tickets are very expensive but I get to see them away when I can.

