

BEN FINDON is talking to SCB referee **MICHAEL BRECKON**...

OFFICIAL LINE



Birthdate/place

February 1, 1962. Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire.

Family

Wife Judi and daughter Grace.

How and when did you first get interested in speedway?

My parents, Stan and Elsie, took me to the old Middlesbrough track at Cleveland Park. It was one of my first memories as a child. I remember being sat with all the other kids on the concrete wall that surrounded the outside of the dog track. The sound, speed and the smell of speedway, I was hooked.

My dad was into all sorts of motorsports. We went to stock car racing, rallycross at Croft and the motorbike races at Oliver's Mount, Scarborough. But speedway was always the main thing.

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

My local track was Middlesbrough, and I also followed Belle Vue, a bit like kids today supporting Manchester United or Liverpool even though you never got to see them live. I only saw the likes of Ivan Mauger and Peter Collins at the big grasstrack meetings that I went to with Dad, which were held more locally.

Summer holidays to Bournemouth always included a couple of trips to Poole, where the Blue Riband individual meeting invariably would be on. I always remember Ivan Mauger being perpetually booed. Too young to know the reason why!

The Middlesbrough legend that is Steve Wilcock was always one of my favourite riders, together with Bruce Forrester who always did a victory lap, even when he finished third!

A little more up to date, Gary Havelock and Joe Screen were among my favourites. I saw Gary's first race as a 16-year-old and was there in Wroclaw, Poland to see him win the World Final in 1992. I followed him throughout his career. Joe was just a fantastic rider. Also, we both had basset hounds, so that was a common point of interest.

Why did you become an SCB referee?

The resurrection of speedway local to me at Redcar rekindled my interest in the sport. I won an eBay competition to accompany the meeting referee at Kevin Little's Testimonial. The meeting unintentionally ended up being my interview to become a trainee, as SCB coordinator Graham Reeve was the referee that night.

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

My mentor was Paul Ackroyd. He retired from refereeing while I was training and I often wonder if looking after me drove him to putting his ticket in! Only kidding, he was very supportive and helpful post-retirement, as was the late Dave Dowling.

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

My first meeting flying solo was at Peterborough on August 13, 2009. Darcy Ward was making his first appearance in the top league as a guest for Peterborough (who beat Belle Vue 58-38). He broke the track record in his first ride – what a talent. Tony Steele had been down to referee that night, with me under his guidance, but when I got there, I was told I was doing it by myself. No time to get nervous, and it was a straightforward meeting with no incidents.

How do you prepare for a speedway meeting?

I'm quite fastidious in my preparation for meetings. I like to have everything sorted on my laptop before I get to the stadium, having familiarised myself with previous meeting reports and the homologation certificate. I also seem to spend more time on Google Maps planning my route to avoid roadworks.

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

My most memorable recent meeting, for all the wrong reasons, was last year's Ben Fund at Workington. I didn't feel at all well when I got there. There were no other referees present, so I soldiered on and managed to complete the meeting. The following day I woke to find my skin had turned yellow and I was admitted to hospital for a week with acute pancreatitis. I'm back at Workington in a couple of weeks for the first time since it happened – I hope I don't have any flashbacks!

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

Not for me personally. Perhaps they could broadcast the angry rants from team managers when they ring the referee.

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

I can't recall having any real difficulties with any former riders. There are a couple of present riders I have crossed swords with, but it's all usually in the heat of the moment. I do remember Carl Wilkinson ringing the ref's box after an exclusion and accusing me of having cost him money, with him backing it up by saying he had an electricity bill to pay.

What advice would you give a new referee?

Remember the good days, when you're happy with all the decisions you have made, you've made a positive contribution to the running of the meeting, there haven't been any long delays, no riders injured, and no road closures or diversions on the way home. Because there will be times, despite your best efforts, when none of that will be true.

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

Slicker presentation, speed up the tractor breaks if possible. I aim to get the first 10 heats done in the first hour and the main meeting finished between 9 pm and 9.15 pm. If it's later than that, I'm working out where we have lost the time.

We are not a rich sport and most tracks don't own their stadiums, but many could do with an upgrade. These days when people go out, they expect to find presentable venues.

What is your day job?

I'm a retired police officer.

How do you relax away from speedway?

I go to a lot of concerts and the theatre all over the north of England, recent highlights being Stevie Wonder, ELO and Kylie. I also enjoy my cars and my three motorbikes.

