

Norhalne Cup 2013

a useful and pleasant experience

Nørhalne Cup is a football tournament for youth and children, which takes place in Denmark, in a few locations close to the city of Aalborg. This year, more than 500 boys and girls teams, from 9 to 18 years, participated. Obviously, such a tournament needs referees, and Norhalne Cup had 160 referees from Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Netherlands, England and Bulgaria. I was one of them. I was at my first competition at this level, and it was my first experience in international football. I found it with Google. After the 2012-2013 English football season ended, I looked for international tournaments that would help me learn, see different styles of refereeing and gain some experience. I found Norhalne Cup with Google. After applying for Norhalne Cup, I became a REFEX member, as it seemed a good idea, extremely useful for a referee who tries to develop and to learn by participating in international tournaments. With less than one year refereeing experience, I was quite happy when The FA in London gave me "green light" to participate at Norhalne Cup.

On the 8th of May I flew from London to Aarhus, where I had a very warm welcome. The Danish hospitality (or should I say Danish-German hospitality, as many REFEX staff members are Germans) was impressive, and the hosts made me feel like at home.

On the first day of the tournament I refereed in Norhalne, both 11-a-side and 7-a-side games, under 15 and under 12, boys. I was also assessed when I refereed 11-a-side, there was an experienced German referee who was also an observer. After the game, he explained me what he liked about my refereeing, and also the things I should work on in order to improve. Interesting, in Danish lower league or amateur football, and in youth tournaments, the referee is on his own, with no assistant referees, and his offside decisions are accepted without many discussions. In England, when there are no qualified FA assistant referees, we use the so-called "club assistants", either team managers or subs. They always have limited responsibilities, only offside, corner kick, throw-in and goal kick. In Denmark, at this level, the referee has to do without assistants.

Obviously, being an English referee, my refereeing style was the British one, letting the play a bit more "free", and that was a bit different from the German rigour. One of the remarks made by the German assessor was that I should blow my whistle a bit more often, not allowing a very physical game and preventing more serious fouls. Which is true and I will use that in the future. After the big pitch game, I refereed another 5 games of 7-a-side football. Most of the teams were from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and I noticed the discipline and fair-play. Most of the players from Northern Europe, at least those from 10 to 18 years, which I refereed, do not make comments about referees decisions, or they do it rarely. They don't usually simulate or waste time, it was a pleasure to referee them.

On the second day, I was assigned to Norhalne Elite Cup, the elite competition, where I refereed an U-17 game of 11-a-side, between Danish and Swedish teams. I had two assistant referees, Emil from Denmark and Jesko from Germany. It was an interesting game and a pleasant experience. I was assessed again by a German observer, who helped me identify things I need to work on in order to improve as a referee. After that, I was an assistant referee in 4 games, with German and Danish referees, communicating very well with them and being able to do our job without problems. When I was beginning to trust and like the Danish weather, thinking I got away from English weather, a 30 minutes heavy rain came to remind me where I was coming from.

On the third tournament day I was at Vaadum, a small town with a nice sports centre, with 6-7 pitches. I started with a 11-a-side girls match, between Danish teams, which ended 0-0, and then I had a few U-10 7-a-side games. Good games, fair-play, pleasant atmosphere, and children delighted to be refereed by a FA referee. And also three yellow cards in 5 games, all for foul tackles. At the end, cups, medals and much joy for all the kids that worked hard during the tournament.

One thing that impressed me was the way everything was organized, the precision and punctuality, everything was almost perfect. We knew where to take the balls for our matches, every pitch was marked so it could be easily found, sandwiches and soft drinks were always on time and plenty, and the evening briefings were not boring and did not take too taking long.

I was lucky enough to share a room with pleasant people, from Belgium, Netherlands and the Czech Republic, we laughed, told stories and I can say I have new friends now. Another reason to apply for other competitions, in order to meet them again.

Another important thing was the support we had from the REFEX staff members. If a referee had any problems at all with a coach or player, he could report the incident and the discipline committee would take action immediately. It was not my case, as I only had to caution 5 players during the 13 games that I refereed.

Unfortunately, the food offered by the hosts made me eat more than I should have, as it was really tasty, so I came back in the UK with one extra kilogram, which I'll have to lose quickly by running a lot. I really hope I'll come back to Norhalne Cup 2014, because Norhalne Cup 2013 was an excellent experience.

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