

Why is there a lack of BAME referees in the Premier League?

Written by Oscar MacDonald 04/10/2020



In the 2019-20 season, there was not a single Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) referee in the Premier League. There is an approximate 2000 BAME referees out of 28,000 in the FA. With no BAME referees in the Premier League and only one in the top four English divisions, most BAME individuals are refereeing in non-professional leagues and at grassroots level.

Oscar MacDonald is 17 years old and currently studying my A levels at school. He is a BAME referee at grassroots level that refs at the weekends.'

BAME referees may be deterred from professional refereeing because of unconscious racism, and sometimes, direct racism. Racism in football itself is prevalent and this could further impede the progression of young referees. Black referees may feel held back because of racism in football, e.g. the racism experienced by Manchester City forward, Raheem Sterling. After interviewing a referee manager, he said that for many people they have a "I can't see it, so I can't believe it" mindset. A lack of role models is another major barrier. Many children may feel the need to fit in, and if there is no idol they can relate to, it is unlikely that they will go on to explore refereeing.

In the Premier League, there has only ever been one BAME referee: Uriah Rennie. As refereeing is perceived as a low status job, BAME parents may have encouraged their children to aspire to a higher status jobs. Rennie held a Law Degree, and this could have been a factor for his parents to consent to Rennie's progress into refereeing, as he could fall back on this if it didn't provide a financial base.

After interviewing the Head of Diversity in the PFA, she said that refereeing is perceived as a 'secondary career' that people do alongside their main job. Therefore, there might be people that achieve a job of high status and do refereeing as a part-time hobby. However, if BAME individuals are experiencing racism or have cultural or religious customs that could hinder their continuation, this could put the BAME community off this path.

The issue in my opinion is that the referee assessors are mostly white, old and biased. There are no BAME individuals applying to become assessors because it is not an inclusive system. One way round this would be to identify which assessors are marking BAME referees down and give them a chance to change their minds. Also, they could employ a 'mystery shopper', where they are assessed without the referee knowing and this can be compared with the 'official' assessment. If these measures are implemented, then we can only hope to see a diver