



HEAD-TO-HEAD: Joe Kinnear and Phil Brown agree to differ

Red blitz might get Respect

ONE of the most powerful men in English football recently told me that most of the disciplinary problems in the game would be erased by a blitz of red cards. 'There'd be a hell of an uproar for three or four weeks,' he said. 'But after that we'd have a very much better game.'

So what was stopping the authorities from supporting such a sensible policy? 'They're frightened of the managers,' he said. And he was right. Managers have the power to point the game in a decent direction.

If they were to insist on civilised behaviour from their players — no cheating, no diving, no elbows, no protesting — then the results would be dramatic.

But reform would involve acknowledging that the referee is a fallible man attempting to do an honest job. And that acknowledgement would deny them their scapegoat.

Examples abound. There was Phil Scolari allegedly asking Phil Dowd at Everton: 'Were you afraid of the crowd?' There was Arsene Wenger at Villa, saying: 'I know how it works here. At half-time the referee gets stick. After that, every 50-50 decision goes the other way.'

There was the old lag, Sir Alex Ferguson, having to be restrained from confronting Mike Dean at Old Trafford and Harry Redknapp insulting Steve Tanner at West Bromwich: 'He's not good enough. He's just a poor referee.' And Joe Kinnear and Phil Brown going head-to-head in the FA Cup tie at Newcastle. 'There must be some sort of rule that says you can't have a ruck with an opposing manager,' said Kinnear, with a record beyond shame and oafishness beyond parody.

The point is that these men were using the referee as an excuse for a defeat or a poor performance. They know this, yet still they go through the weekly charade. The authorities know this, yet still they pretend that their Respect campaign is working.

Meanwhile, 7,000 referees walk away from the game every year. It is a scandalous exodus and it will accelerate. Until football discovers the courage to control its managers and confront its problems.

W sig Cit Da in

IT WAS t
took fligh
world hus
man of de
of his soar
Cook did
days ago, the
Manchester
minor conseq
parish. This r
treasure.

His quixo
Brazilian foot
smile on the f
his attempts
his failure wi
as long as buc

Consider hi
naive. It was
were enterin
sional.'

Or his conf
his negotia
questioned: 'I
say that peop
opinion based
know the fa
organisational
two parties,
should be hel

Or, fa
defian
we ma
with s
expe

