



Howard Webb: Made in England ... but he's schooled by Italian master ref

By [Graham Poll](#) Last updated at 11:52 PM on 8th July 2010



It's official — he's simply the best: Webb has clinched the final with a hands-on approach.

Howard Webb reminds me of the great Pierluigi Collina. He has a hands - on approach to officiating, just like Collina. And you can see the Italian's influence in the way Webb referees with power.

Collina was the last European to officiate in a World Cup final and now Webb joins the elite as the first Englishman since Jack Taylor in 1974 to be selected to referee the biggest game on the planet.

It has been a long journey since he ran the line for me as a fledgling Premier League assistant referee. I was immediately aware and impressed purely by his presence.

At 6ft 2in, he is a commanding figure; a tall guy but also one who has become demonstrative in his gestures. Players know where they are with Howard . . . he doesn't leave room for doubt. Collina and FIFA like that in him. When he ran the line for me, he was OK; nothing special and I had no idea just how he would develop.

But there was a memorable performance on the line for me at Anfield in a Premier League game on Saturday March 11, 2000 when Liverpool drew 1-1 with Sunderland. The home fans were unhappy with a couple of decisions and, because I was travelling home by train, Howard insisted on escorting me not just to Liverpool Lime Street but also on to the train and safely to my reserved seat.

His dual role of match official and that of police officer has been inexorably linked and is mutually beneficial. Howard loves both roles, so much so that he refused to give up his position as a sergeant in South Yorkshire Constabulary, instead preferring to take a five-year sabbatical, giving him the option to return.

It will be fascinating to see if that remains possible after an incredible summer that started with the Champions League final, a fantastic first World Cup campaign culminating in the final . What a win double for any official.

And this makes him the world's premier referee. His experiences in policing have certainly helped him to control matches.

He acknowledged that in July 2008, saying, 'If you turn up at a fight in Fargate (Sheffield), you've got to try and prioritize - who you need to lay hands on, if anyone's injured, do you check on them, all that stuff. Things are happening quickly in front of you. You have to stay calm, analyze lots of information all at once and make decisions as to what's happened, act decisively but be aware of personal safety and watch your back.'



The master: Pierluigi Collina was the last European to officiate in a World Cup final

It is that hands-on approach and physicality which have really stood him apart. Webb has a lot of Collina's qualities and not just the same hairstyle! And he needs to take on board the Italian's view on the final. When I asked what it was like to walk out for a World Cup final - he was referee in the 2002 showcase between Germany and Brazil - Collina said that apart from the startling memory of the flashbulbs going off, it was just like any other match. You must focus on keeping everything as normal as possible and not try extra hard to avoid mistakes.

Webb must now wonder if his wife Kay and father Bill can get tickets. His assistants, who have made a massive contribution, will be keen to have their supporters there, too.

Darren Cann, Howard's No 1 assistant - he runs the near touchline - is the best at his role in the world. He has been criticized for being over-involved and of even being a liar by Arsene Wenger.

Yet his calls have been outstanding: from the caution of Swiss defender Stephane Grichting for a pull on the shoulder of a Spain forward, advised via Webb's headset, to a disallowed Italian goal. Mike Mullarkey, the bald one, has also played his part, notably correctly disallowing Luis Fabiano's 'goal' for Brazil against Chile. Such decisions have made our team stand out for their courage, impartiality and quiet confidence.

Webb's ability and personality have made him the irresistible choice as the best referee in the world and it couldn't have happened to a nicer man.

At least three Englishmen can come home from this 2010 World Cup with their heads held high.