



Who Invented Red And Yellow Cards?

Everyone knows when they have done something wrong. Perhaps it is a stern chat from our parents or teacher, maybe we must miss a breaktime or apologise to a friend. However, if you couldn't speak the same language as everyone else, this would be much harder!

This is what it was like playing football before yellow and red cards were invented. How did you know if you had been told off? Even worse, how did you know if you had to leave the pitch? That was until a man named Ken Aston came up with an idea.

Ken Aston

Ken Aston was born in Essex in 1915. He qualified as a schoolteacher and was used to keeping control of a class. In his spare time, Aston began refereeing football matches.

During the Second World War, Aston joined the army and fought for his country. After the war, he continued teaching and became the headteacher of a school in Essex, in 1953. Aston loved refereeing, and in 1962 he was given the chance to go to the World Cup- the highest honour for a referee.

Battle of Santiago (1962)

In June 1962, Aston travelled over to Chile for the World Cup. He was asked to take charge of a match in the capital city, Santiago. This was between the hosts, Chile, and Italy. Both sides were desperate to win but the match that took place shocked many spectators.

It took just 12 seconds for the first foul of the match to take place. Then, in the eighth minute, Aston wanted to send Italian Giorgio Ferrini off for kicking a Chilean player. However, Aston could not speak Italian and there was no way to make the player leave: red and yellow cards had not been invented yet. This meant the player's teammates, and even the stadium security, had to drag Ferrini off the pitch.

Not long before half-time, Leonel Sánchez (a Chilean player) punched Mario David, but Aston did not send Sánchez off. David was so angry that, minutes later, he kicked Sánchez right in front of the referee, and this time Aston asked him to leave the pitch. Again, Aston did not have any way of asking the Italian to leave the game, he needed some sort of signal!

The match became known as the 'Battle of Santiago' because of how violent it was. Commentator David Coleman described the match as, "...the most stupid, appalling, disgusting and disgraceful display of football, possibly in the history of the game".

Yellow and Red Cards

The game had a big impact on Aston. The behaviour he had seen was far worse than that of some of the most challenging school children he had taught. The game gave him an idea: a way to show everyone that he wanted to send a player off.

On the way home from a football match at Wembley Stadium, Aston stopped at a set of traffic lights. Aston realised that the colours of the traffic lights could be used in a football match.

He focused on yellow and red. If you used these two colours on the football pitch, they would beat any language barriers, and show players and spectators that they had either been warned or sent off.

The first time red and yellow cards were used was in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. The cards were an instant hit. Suddenly, everyone could see what decisions the referees were making.

Battle of Nuremburg (2006)

The record match for the most yellow and red cards took place in Germany in 2006. The city of Nuremburg hosted a World Cup game between Portugal and Holland.

The referee, Valentin Ivanov, had a busy night, giving out a total of 16 yellow cards and four red cards. His first yellow was given after just two minutes. It was a sign of things to come!

Portugal earned the first red card just before half-time with midfielder, Costinha, sent off after receiving two yellows. He was joined by his teammate, Deco, in the second half, as well as two players from Holland who also had an 'early bath'.

The game finished 1-0 with Portugal winning the match, but many people were disappointed with the actions of the players. The President of FIFA was frustrated with the performance of referee, Ivanov. He suggested he should have given himself a yellow card!

What would you change?

Football is constantly changing. In 2019 the Premier League introduced Video Assistant Referees (VAR). This means that an assistant can look at a video replay to decide whether the referee has made the correct decision or not. Some people love this idea, others hate it... but what rule would you change about the 'beautiful game' if you could?