

Respect the ref: Barnet make a quiet point

Ivan Speck on the side who are taking FA supremo Brian Barwick's initiative to heart and already reaping the rewards

Not so far away from the madding Wembley crowd, an exercise in restraint earned Barnet a point on Saturday and shone a beacon forward for English football.

If their play was littered with so many errors that even hoofing the ball upfield with any measure of accuracy was mostly beyond them, it was their ability to keep minds clear when Mansfield brains were becoming scrambled which secured a 1-1 draw.



Two faces of football: Mansfield players confront referee Karl Evans (above) while Barnet's on-field captain Sagi Burton (below) has a quiet word with a smiling Evans



This is because, while FA chief executive Brian Barwick last week imposed his decree on grass roots football that only captains can contest decisions with a referee, Barnet adopted the policy voluntarily back in August.

Having two men sent off for dissent in the opening three games after poor disciplinary records in the past two seasons can do that to a side.

Manager Paul Fairclough told club captain and goalkeeper Lee Harrison that something had to be done.

Harrison asked team-mates for suggestions and striker Adam Birchall suggested that Barnet ought to adopt rugby union's code of conduct, by which the captain is the conduit for all complaints.

Harrison said: "We decided we would have a go. We tried it at the Brentford game, which was ironic because we had two penalties given against us that day and a sending-off. Not for dissent, though. Nobody complained about the decisions or the sending-off. From that day it has stood the test.

"The other thing that helped us was the fact that we won the next game and we are unbeaten since. You say to yourself 'It might not be the reason, but, hey, this is working, let's keep doing it'. We know pretty much how to manage it out there now. If one person gets involved, the other 10 players know to get in there and push him out to make the situation easier.

"You are never going to cut out the bookings for tackles because that's part of the game. But if we cut out the ones for dissent, we'll have two or three people available come January or February because they haven't picked up two cautions for kicking the ball away. It's a selfish thing.

"If other teams do it, then fine. But it works for us."

Barnet have picked up only eight bookings in eight League games since the Brentford game and none for dissent.

On Saturday, there was no chirping at referee Karl Evans and only once did on-field captain Sagi Burton feel the need to engage the official in conversation.

When the ball appeared to strike a Mansfield hand in the dying minutes, there was no surrounding of the referee in the manner that so disfigures the game.

The visitors displayed the other approach. On two separate occasions, five Mansfield players ran to the official to hurl protests in his face. On the second, midfielder Stephen Dawson emerged with a yellow card for his trouble.

Point proven.

Because of the coolness of their heads and a refusal to dwell on anything except their own performance, Barnet stole a point when Liam Hatch cancelled out Simon Brown's opener for the Football League's bottom side.

Had Jason Puncheon not had his 77th-minute penalty brilliantly saved by Mansfield goalkeeper Carl Muggleton, they would have won.

Fairclough said: "The result today is not what we wanted. We played dreadfully and Mansfield were unquestionably the better team. But had we got involved with issues today we may have lost the game.

"We don't want to contest issues. If the referee is wrong, he's right as far as we're concerned. It is helping us to get results."