Who would want to be a match official?

Dennis O'Mackton, 53, is an international hockey referee, and has also worked as a match official in other sports, including tennis, football and boxing.

I've been a match official of one kind or another throughout much of my life. Hockey referee, tennis umpire, rugby linesman, I've done it all. And when I tell people, the reaction varies from pity ('Oh dear, you weren't good enough to be a player?) to disbelief ('Why on earth would anyone actually want to do that?') Actually, I think both these attitudes are mistaken for a number of reasons, and I'd like to set the record straight. For a start, many people truly prefer to be a referee or umpire than a player, and I'm one of them.

Having said that, many match officials have probably at times wondered why they bother to do it. Whatever decision you make, especially where there's been foul play, there's always going to be someone who disagrees. And sometimes in the heat of the moment, emotions can get the better of people. I've had five angry footballers all yelling at me on several occasions. You have to have thick skin – I sometimes ask myself why I am giving up my Sunday to run around a pitch in the cold rain with players who don't seem to respect me or the work I do, and who think it's their right to give the ref a load of abuse.

But despite this, I've always loved it. I now referee top-level professional hockey games. Believe me, for the couple of hours when I'm out on the pitch with the players, it's the best seat in the house. The skill of some of these top players is astounding, as are their fitness levels.

Of course, in this line of work, you don't start at the top. I oversaw something like 1,000 Sunday morning hockey games before I ever did a pro game. These were junior and adult games. I think ***this*** is key to a match official's success at higher levels. There has to be enough experience for him or her to draw on, whatever the sport is. There is a concern that in some sports, young match officials are rising very quickly and officiating in a major tournament before they're ready.

I know that I've evolved in the years I've worked as a hockey referee. In the early years, I wasn't really assessed formally, not like newly qualified referees nowadays. But informally, I was being assessed by coaches, players and spectators every game. I occasionally heard criticisms in some of my matches that I was stopping play too frequently. So now I'm more reluctant to blow the whistle unless it's a more serious foul.

Unsurprisingly, I'm keen to see more young people becoming match officials. Back in the 1980's when I finished college, I was struggling to fill one page on a CV when I hadn't got any 'proper' work experience. I wasn't sure whether to include the fact that I'd been an umpire in my college tennis club, especially as one of the other umpires I knew said it wasn't relevant, and might suggest you're happy to work for a low wage (my university sports club wasn't a generous payer). Well, I put it down anyway. When I applied for a post with an ad agency, the guy who interviewed me told me later that he'd hired me because it showed that I must be 'reliable and responsible'. So for me, being a referee has had all sorts of benefits.

1) In the first paragraph, the writer says that his purpose is to

A outline the characteristics of a good match official.
B encourage more people to become match officials.
C correct misunderstandings about being a match official.
D reflect on what he has learned about being a match official.

2) According to the writer, it is impossible to

A enjoy matches in bad weather.
B control the behaviour of players.
C always know what a referee should do.
D make decisions that everyone will be happy with.

3What does the writer mean by saying he has 'the best seat in the house'?

A Lots of other people would like to do his job.
B He is very tired after matches and needs to rest.
C Being a referee is a great way to see the match.
D He tries his hardest to be a fair referee.

4) What does this refer to in line 18?

A being prepared to work at weekends
B the writer's first professional game
C wide experience of non-professional games
D the difference between a sport at junior and adult level

5) How has the writer changed as a hockey referee?

A He makes decisions less quickly than before.
B He allows play to continue for longer than before.
C He undertakes regular training more often than before.
D He listens to feedback from other referees more willingly than before.

6) The writer said that being a tennis umpire at college helped him to

A get a job.
B make useful contacts.
C earn a reasonable wage.
D negotiate with his future employer.

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