

Ryan Shephard is the latest Australian referee awarded with a FIFA badge - just three years after taking up indoor refereeing.

Shephard was presented with his badge during the Opening Ceremony of the 2009 FFA National Futsal Championships in Canberra this week, where is one of the top referees at the tournament.

It's been a meteoric rise to the top for the Futsal Official after only taking up the indoor refereeing three years ago after being convinced by a friend to "give it a go".

"I'm surprised it came around at this point," Shephard said at the nationals.

"I've only been in the game for a few years now but it's certainly an honor to get a FIFA badge at this point."

"You've always got aspirations whether it be Futsal or football but for it to come around so quickly is fortunate but I've definitely worked towards it."

"You want to push yourself as far as you can go, whether that's refereeing at a FIFA level or just trying to perform well at the nationals."

"I had a good national's last year and refereed the final of the Open Men down here which was a great opportunity."

Refereeing at only his third Futsal National Championships, Shephard admits there's a little more added pressure this year with the badge on his chest.

"I think there's more expectation that when you are officiating that you're going to get the majority [of decisions] right, you're always going to make mistakes and there's no doubt about that but I think it's just the level of expectation that comes with being a FIFA referee and the matter in which you operate."

"That's not just on the court itself but off it as well."

"Just because you've got a badge there doesn't mean you're able to cruise your way through a match, it's something you continually need to work at and build that respect."

The 31 year old joins an elite group with only two Australian currently holding a FIFA Futsal badge.

"Chris [Colley] and Scott [Kidson] have been very helpful to me in the years that I have been in Futsal and down here at the Nationals as well."

"So to be a part of the three in the country and representing Australia is certainly an honor."

"One of the good things this week [at nationals] has been getting to go to some of the other venues and work with the younger guys as well which in the past few years I've been mainly at the AIS and doing games but now having the badge gives me the chance to get around and work with a few guys and help them with their games as well."

As with many referees, Shephard hung up his playing boots at a young age to focus on his football officiating, a move which at first was difficult but has now finally paid dividends.

"I stopped at a fairly young age when I decided to concentrate on my refereeing but the last time I did play, I managed to injure myself and put myself out for about twelve months."

"That was not a great thing to happen when I managed to dislocate a knee and do all sorts of damage and didn't recover very quickly."

"At that time I lost twelve months and it was commented at the time, and fair enough to, that if I wanted to take refereeing seriously that maybe I should tuck the playing boots away for a little bit and come back at some point when an injury isn't going to cost you anything."

"To get a FIFA badge after only a couple years is a great achievement because a few years ago I was refereeing

football but good opportunities have come up and I've definitely worked at it putting in a lot of time and effort to improve and a lot of commitment, time away from family and other social events."

"It's a big commitment but to get there after the sacrifices I've made is satisfying."

With the FIFA badge now on his chest, last year Men's Open Grand Final referee, has reassessed his goals for the championships and beyond.

"I think the goal coming down here this year, knowing that I have the FIFA badge, you just want to make sure your performance in each match is up to the standard they expect."

"I certainly didn't set myself the goal to referee a certain match, even though there's three referees down here with FIFA badges, there's a number of guys that are more than capable of refereeing the tough matches, a hopefully a number looking to push for the badge themselves."

"My more immediate goals at the moment is to look at your own performance and to listen to the advice that comes from the assessors here at nation also and working on those when you go back to the state competition."

"Hopefully there will be opportunities that come up in the next twelve months to get an idea of what it's like and be able to travel internationally and experience that."

"I think that's one of the best things about [having the badge], there's the opportunity to go to another tournament with another referee from Australia would be a real honor where you build up that teamwork and skills then go off together to different tournaments along the way."