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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 10



The ussoccer.com Referee Week in Review is designed to address the issues facing referees at all levels by using video highlights from professional games as well as the U.S. National Teams. Written by U.S. Soccer Director of Referee Development Paul Tamberino and U.S. Soccer Manager of Assessment and Training Brian Hall, the Referee Week in Review will highlight specific areas of focus and current U.S. Soccer initiatives designed to improve performance and aid in the development of officials across the country.

Referee Week In Review Week 10 – ending June 1, 2008 WEEK 10 OVERVIEW

In week 10, two referees received their first MLS assignments. Their debut is an indicator of the progress that continues to be made in the development of professional referees. Both referees began their trek to the top at the youth level and they have paid their dues as they have climbed through the amateur ranks to PDL and USL games. Both officials performed well and are focused on continuing to refine their skills to continue their progression at the professional level.

Unfortunately, there were several instances of violent conduct this past week as well as instances of other forms of misconduct that ruin the entertainment value of the game and deny spectators the beauty of attacking and creative soccer. As a consequence, this week will focus on the negative aspects of play and provide officials with ways to identify and deal with tactics that destroy the enjoyment of the game.

Additionally, last week the issue of persistent infringement of the Laws was broached and referees were asked to take a more focused view of the practice of one player exerting too much negative influence on the game and players being the target of persistent fouling by opponents. Work in this area needs continued focus to ensure attractive soccer is promoted.

- *On the ussoccer.com web page, you can listen to weekly podcasts highlighting the main issues from the "Referee Week in Review" document. On the ussoccer.com homepage, look mid page for the tab that says "Podcasts."*

A LOOK BACK – ISSUES AND RESULTS – WEEK 10

Surpassing the Intensity of the Game

Referees were asked to ensure the intensity of their performances exceeded that of the game and the teams while ensuring that they did not get complacent and relaxed as the game progressed. Week 10 resulted in varying degrees of success. Some officiating teams were able to "feel" the intensity level of the game and the players and modify their game plans accordingly thereby ensuring they were one step ahead of the players and prepared for the unexpected.

On the other hand, some performances lacked a proactive approach and the consequence was a game(s) marred by violence and destructive soccer. In order to avoid destructive soccer, referees must work to identify the real-time warning signs associated with changes in the temperature of the game and then make changes to their personal strategy/tactics as the game plays out. This is a proactive approach vs. a reactive approach to game management.

Some of the warning signs that the intensity level of the game is changing are:

- **Score of the game**

When one team is down a goal, the intensity will pick up to as a team pushes to equalized.

- **Numerical advantage**

If a team has the man advantage, they will see the opportunity as a way to break down the opposition and go forward at a faster pace.

- **The team playing a man down**

The team playing short handed, may choose to “pack it in” with the hopes of playing a quick counter to the lone striker up top.

- **Equalizing goal**

A team has just scored the equalizing goal and they have the momentum to win the game. Normally, this is after the goal has been scored late in the match and little time is left. The defending team, on the other hand, may decide to play defensive and therefore the team that just equalized will have more assertive play in their attacking third.

WEEK 10 COMMENTARY

Mass Confrontation

Unfortunately, mass confrontation is on the rise at all levels of the game. But, what is it? As defined in U.S. Soccer’s March 14, 2003 position paper, “*Mass Confrontation*,” ([click here to review in more detail](#)) it is:

“The concerted actions of three or more players from the same team who are disputing a decision while surrounding the referee or hindering or forcing movement by the referee.”

Mass confrontation is shown in two ways:

1. Several players confronting the referee, assistant referee (AR), or fourth official, and
2. Multiple players confronting each other.

The focus of mass confrontation in the past has involved dissent and negative actions towards the referee by several players simultaneously. Picture the referee being surrounded and being intimidated by aggressive players who hope to influence a referee – the referee has become a target for the players’ aggressive attitudes/actions. The result is never positive as it invokes a negative public image, slows the game down, ignites further aggressive behavior, and ruins the entertainment value of the game.

Recently, another form of “mass confrontation” has been on the upswing: aggressive actions exhibited between several opposing players. In prior “Week In Reviews,” we have addressed similar acts between two opponents as game disrepute. The escalation of aggressive actions/attitudes between more than one several opponent can be labeled as a second form of mass confrontation.

Let’s review each form of “mass confrontation” in detail:

1. **Toward the referee by multiple players of the same team**

Involves aggressiveness toward the referee, AR, or fourth official. Players are trying to intimidate one or more of the officials to influence a current outcome/decision or a future outcome/decision.

2. **Toward opponents by multiple opposing players**

Involves a swarm of opposing players exhibiting aggressive behavior toward each other. Physical contact is often a by-product of the acts. Intimidation and a source of strength are trademarks.

As you can see, in both instances, multiple players participate and the actions are aggressive in nature and intended to intimate the referee or an opponent. Referees must deal with and stamp out this behavior as it brings the game into disrepute and ruins the experience for fans both in the stadium and on television.

There is clear benefit in going quickly to the point of conflict and taking immediate disciplinary action. The referee team must identify the main culprits and address their actions as misconduct (issue a caution – yellow card, or send off – red card).

Since the concept of mass confrontation amongst opposing players is new, we will address the associated characteristics and actions required by officials to prevent escalation:

- **Caused by a trigger issue**

Typically follows an issue or foul that is sensitive to players like a hard foul in front of the bench or a foul where the safety of a player is endangered. Consider the foul to a goalkeeper or key player. The player who runs into the goal to retrieve the ball after they have scored a goal can also ignite a confrontation.

- **Recognize the trigger issue**

Officials must immediately recognize the flash point or trigger issue. Failure to recognize or a slow response by the referee will result in further escalation. Before the game, discuss trigger issues with the referee team based upon the characteristics of the teams/players involved and store that information in your databank as teams have certain players who are often the trigger points for mass confrontation between opponents.

- **Get there to diffuse**

Once mass confrontation amongst opponents arises, a member of the referee team must get there immediately to prevent escalation. For each step you are late, it allows one more player to participate.

- **Separate and disperse**

The first official on the scene should work to carefully separate the immediate players. Once three or more players enter the scene, the referee should step back and observe the situation.

The two assistant referees should also take a clear vantage point to observe the actions of the players while the fourth official maintains his position and monitors the bench area. This procedure forms a triangle around the confrontation and provides a process to monitor the situation and gather information. As the situation settles, in a positive, non-threatening manner, officials should attempt to channel opposing players into safe zones away from the hot spot.

- **Prevent others from joining in and observe**

All four officials should not focus on the same hot spot or become too involved in gaining control of the situation. As stated above, form a triangle around the situation, observe, and make notes (mental and otherwise). Look for positive ways to prevent other players from joining in as these players often add "fuel to the fire."

- **Consult and dispense the appropriate misconduct**

Once the situation is under control and players have been channeled to safe zones, the referee team must quickly dispense the appropriate misconduct. The referee should ensure he has solicited the input of the other officials prior to taking action. Violent conduct should be the first line of focus.

Below are clips that compare and contrast referee actions in mass confrontation amongst opponent situations.

Video clip 1 shows a proactive approach and a quick response on the part of the referee that prevents a potentially dangerous situation from exploding.

Video Clip 1: San Jose at Real Salt Lake (80:25)

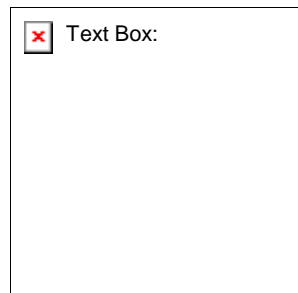
A trigger issue occurs: a player is fouled and his safety is jeopardized. The referee's actions show he has identified the potential for mass confrontation by opponents – without hesitation, he sprints to the scene. Watch as he channels players away from the hot spot and into safe zones. Finally, he dispenses the appropriate misconduct in a timely fashion (30 seconds) that quickly sends a message to everyone that he is taking the action and players do not have to take action into their own hands. In this case, at 80:37, the assistant referee (AR) can be seen at some distance in the background. It would have been preferred for the AR to also move quickly to the scene and either assist with dispersing the players or move to be better positioned to witness any further actions on the parts of the players. In this clip, the referee exhibits urgency, preventative skills, and his actions exceed the intensity level of the game.

Video Clip 2: Houston at Dallas (76:58)

Clip 2 shows a referee who is reactive and does not anticipate the actions of the players. The player who commits the first foul is wearing a cast. This should be the first sign as contact is made with the cast and an opponent. The action is cautionable. The referee must feel this situation. Adding to the negative reaction of the players is the fact that the referee delays his whistle as he decides there is a potential advantage as the ball proceeds to the goalkeeper. This is a poor risk given the player's cast and the fact that the infraction is cautionable. Once the whistle is blown, it is too late and the referee is too late to the hot spot. Any opportunity for preventative work on the part of the referee has been wasted due to the late whistle and the lack of urgency. Once the moment of truth passes without immediate action on the part of the referee, mass confrontation amongst opponents is the by-product. Finally, the referee takes too long to disperse the punishment to the players. During the more than three minutes it takes to resolve this situation, players tempers continue to rise and the doors are opened for more potential conflict amongst the two players as well as other opposing players.

Persistent Infringement – Targeted Players

Players are often targeted by opponents. Opponents know that their success is predicated on their ability to slow or stop certain players on the opposition. These players tend to be impact players, players that manage the tempo or flow of the game or players that possess a certain attribute (speed, technical ability, skill) that is difficult to contain. Hence, teams and players look to send messages and look to eliminate the attribute.



Referees must be capable of identifying the players who may be on the receiving end of such tactics. Doing the appropriate pregame homework is one method of preparation and identification. Also, feeling the game and building a mental database of information during the game is another method. Top class officials find ways to maintain a mental count or database of the number of fouls committed, who has committed fouls, who has been on the receiving end of fouls, and the time span over which the fouls have been committed. Also, challenges that take a player off his stride or challenges that influence a player's ability to participate in that particular play or the game. ***Review the "Referee Week In Review 9" for a refresher of the discussion involving "players who are repeatedly fouled."***

Referees are encouraged to protect the players that are repeatedly fouled by taking preventative action. As referees mentally track the foul count, become more demonstrative in addressing subsequent fouls. Discuss the topic of player match ups and foul counts at halftime with your crews. If a demonstrative message does not end the tactic, a caution should be issued. Consider use of communication amongst the referee team to help monitor and identify persistent infringement as well as a strong word with the player(s) during the game or at the start of the second half.

Coach Dismissal

This week, another assistant coach was dismissed for inappropriate behavior in the technical area in accordance with the guidelines established by U.S. Soccer in several "Week In Reviews," reinforced by MLS, and detailed in the March 22, 2006 U.S. Soccer position paper entitled, "***Management of Behavior in the Technical Area.***" ([Click here to access the position paper](#))

Referee teams should continue to utilize proactive preventative techniques in dealing with bench personnel. Fourth officials should approach team personnel in the technical area in a positive, non condescending manner. Remember, the onus is on them to comply with the Laws of the Game and modify their behavior. So, work on clearly indicating to the individual(s) in question the behavior you want modified. Once you have politely yet firmly indicated the expectation, you can and must hold them accountable for their actions.

Serious Foul Play

A 22nd minute red card was correctly issued for serious foul play resulting from a poorly timed tackle that clearly endangered the safety of an opponent and is done with excessive force.

Video Clip 3: Columbus at Chivas USA (22:00)

In reviewing the clip, look at the position of the leading leg: raised off the ground, over the ball with cleats exposed to the opponent. The tackle is started five yards or further from the opponent and is done in a manner lunging at the opponent and not in an attempt to play the ball. The referee correctly identifies this action as serious foul play and without hesitation issues a red card. Note: this is the first card issued in the game and it is done only 22 minutes into the game.

Taking a Calculated Risk

One of the points of emphasis this season is flow and the associated risk taking referees take in allowing the game to proceed when minor or trifling offenses have been identified. Applying advantage and taking risks requires the ability to identify clear and effective opportunities to advance the ball. The further the attacking team is in their defensive third, the more risk a referee is taking by allowing flow as the potential for a clear and effective advantage materializing is minimized.

Video Clip 4: FC Dallas at Colorado (43:40, second half)

Watch as the referee applies two advantages in the defensive third. Both result in the attacking team being able to continue with the flow of the game and keep an effective attack progressing. After the first foul and advantage, the referee signals his application of the advantage and then exhibits the confidence to allow a second potential foul go unpunished as the player with the ball has the skill, pace, and space to continue toward the opponent's goal.

WEEK 11 FOCUS

Mass Confrontation and Persistent Infringement Against a Specific Opponent

Officials are asked to deal with situations of "mass confrontation" (in either form) in a more proactive manner ensuring situations do not escalate. Additionally, referees are asked to work hard to identify cases of persistent infringement against a specific player. Referees should protect the players who are on the receiving end of multiple fouls in a game as a result of their possessing a skill or technical asset that teams cannot contain without fouling.

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