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## Referee Programs

### U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 14



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 14 – ending June 29, 2008

#### WEEK 14 OVERVIEW

Referees were faced with many critical decisions this past week. There were two penalty kick decisions that, at first glance, seem arguable but, upon review, the referees were well positioned to identify the actions of the defenders and correctly “point to the penalty spot.” The flow of MLS games continue to be a positive factor as the number of fouls per game remain lower at this time compared with all twelve prior seasons. Referees are resisting the temptation to call the trifling and minor offences and, instead, choosing to take calculated risks and let the game flow. Thus far this year, an average of 25.5 fouls per game have been whistled compared to 28.3 in 2007.

In recent weeks, scoring has been on the decline. Week 14 resulted in sixteen goals through seven games or an average of 2.29 per game. Defenses are becoming more organized and more adept at closing down the opposition thereby denying scoring opportunities. Referee and assistant referee (AR) focus on giving the benefit of doubt to the attack and encouraging attacking soccer is becoming more critical as goals are harder to come by.

Sending a player off for violent conduct (striking an opponent) and sending two players off for separate occasions of denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity were missed by officiating teams this past week. We will analyze the aforementioned critical decisions rendered by referee crews below.

U.S. Soccer just completed its final Development Academy Showcase in Greensboro, North Carolina. Over 100 referees from around the country participated over the weekend with the entire U.S. Soccer referee staff as well as National Assessors in attendance providing guidance, mentoring, and coaching to the officials. Virtually all referees were observed by at least one of the staff during the four days. Training included specific game feedback and classroom instruction focused on the requirements needed to succeed at the most competitive levels in the United States.

From this Showcase, two referees were selected to officiate in the Development Academy Finals Week in Carson, California between July 12 and July 19. They join seven other officials that were chosen from the previous Showcases. The final eight games of finals week will be televised on ESPN2 or ESPNU. All in all, over 600 referees officiated nearly 2,000 matches in the first season of the program with nearly 100 being identified for future higher level matches.

- *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 14

##### Sending an early message

Referees utilized personality early in the game to set the tone and send messages that resonated with the players. Without jeopardizing game control and without ignoring the 100 percent misconduct offenses (offenses that require a red or yellow card be issued by the referee), referees were able to impart their personality on the game early and often thereby preventing situations that could negatively impact game control and the safety of players.

#### WEEK 14 COMMENTARY

## Dissent

The clips that follow provide two examples of players dissenting (by visual action) the referee's decision. In both cases, the referee should weigh the "big picture" of the game and then make a judgment as to whether the player's actions exceeded the boundaries of acceptability. Cautions for dissent must consider the circumstances of the game (the "big picture"), the player's choice of words, how the player's visible actions will be perceived by the general public, and the public nature (the public hearing or seeing) of the dissent. However, it is generally recognized that visual dissent is more disruptive to the referee's authority than dissent by word. Given these considerations, review the following two clips and determine whether the player's actions usurp the authority of the referee and require a caution for dissent by action. Players must respect the decisions of the referee and exhibit respect for the game. If they fail to do so, the referee must take appropriate action.

When deciding whether a player's actions are cautionable for dissent (by word or action) or can be red carded for offensive or insulting or abusive language and/or gestures apply the following criteria:

- **Public**

Are the player's actions public in nature? From a visual perspective, can others see it and, if so, what message is the player sending? Verbally, who can hear the comments (other players, spectators, television) – consider the volume of the comments? Are the actions or comments meant to "show the referee up?" Consider whether the actions/comments create a negative impression/attitude towards the referee in general.

- **Personal**

Are the comments directed at the referee or just said as a reasonable emotional reaction to a poor play? Consider the tone of voice and the derogatory content of what was said. Are the actions of the player aimed at the referee or merely personal frustration?

- **Provocative**

Are the comments or actions intended to incite further misconduct or heighten the tension level? Do the comments elicit anger and potentially provoke further conflict on the field? Consider the ramifications of racial or gender based comments.

Overall, are the comments and actions disrespectful to "any referee" – not just to the referee to whom they were addressed? Officials must be aware of actions/comments that undermine the position of the referee and must take the appropriate action that matches the actions of the player.

### Video Clip 1: Toronto at New England (46:00 – added time)

In this clip, the referee has just whistled for half time. Closely watch the player with the ball as the whistle is blown. What are his actions? Are his actions visible so that other players and spectators can witness – are the actions public? Do the actions undermine or question the authority of the referee? In this particular instance, the player shows his disregard and disrespect of the referee by, first, clapping his hands in defiance of the referee and, second, by sharply rolling the ball at the referee. This is a case in which the referee must respond with a message that corresponds to the intensity of the player's actions; hence, a yellow card is an appropriate response that communicates a strong message to the player, the other players, and to the spectators that such dissent will not be tolerated. Recommendation: In cases where the referee anticipates potential dissent at half time, the referee would be advised to move to a neutral position on the field away from the players and coaches so as not to invite dissent and create extra space between himself and potential problem players.

### Video Clip 2: Houston at Dallas (73:10)

The attacking player, in this clip, shows his disdain toward the referee's decision to award a foul against him by kicking the ball away. The player's actions are magnified by the long time from the whistle to the time he takes to kick the ball away in disgust. Additionally, the force, power, and distance that he kicks the ball also displays a negative message and makes the player's actions more distinguishable. In this case, the referee must caution the player for dissent thereby sending a definitive message that such displays of dissatisfaction will not be tolerated.

## Violent Conduct

Intentional and deliberate contact to a player's face surfaced again this past week. "Week In Review 8" first addressed the issue of violent conduct as it relates to elbows ([click on this link to refer to "Week In Review 8" for further information](#)). Then, in "Week In Review 10," the definition of red cards for elbows was expanded to include "contact above the shoulder," in particular, deliberate contact in the area of the face by pushing, slapping, or grabbing hair. ([click on this link to refer to "Week In Review 10"](#))

Actions aimed at the face of an opponent must be dealt with severely REGARDLESS OF THE FORCE USED if the actions are:

- Deliberate
- Intended to intimidate
- Endangering the safety of an opponent
- Insulting and/or offensive in nature
- Potentially inciting further action on the part of opponents

The following lists some specific examples (but not all examples) of the manner in which the contact can be initiated are:

- Use of the backhand
- Open handed slap
- A push/slap to the face
- The jabbing of a finger(s) to the face
- Grabbing hair
- Use of a fist

When applying the aforementioned examples, the use of force becomes increasingly important as it relates to contact with the back of the player's head as the likelihood for injury is somewhat lessened as compared to contact with the face. Consequently, some discretion may be exercised on the part of the referee as it relates to contact with the back of the head depending upon the intent and the force used.

**Video Clip 3:** Los Angeles at DC (41:05)

When viewing this situation, apply the standards set forth above. This clip does not depict the more frequent violent conduct for the elbow (cocked and thrown) but illustrates a deliberate slap to the opponent's face that is intended to intimidate as well as endanger the player's safety. Additionally, such action, unless dealt with promptly, can lead to further misconduct/retaliation on the part of the opponents and jeopardize match control.

The offence is initiated by the defender holding, from behind, the attacker with the ball in order to prevent his advancement. When situations like this (defender holding from behind) unfold, the referee team should be prepared for the attacker to take action to "release the defender" and create space to continue their path with the ball. The "release the defender" action is frequently done with above the shoulder contact or an elbow. Anticipation and a quick whistle on the part of the referee may assist in preventing the violent conduct.

As the slap to the face unfolds, notice the position of the referee, AR, and the fourth official – all seem to have clear views of the action from different angles. If any of the officials clearly see contact with the hand to the opponent's face, they must bring the violent action to the referee's attention if the referee on his own does not identify the offense as a red card. Notice the eyes and head of the player committing the slap just prior to the hand going back: he looks over his shoulder to see the position of the opponent thereby ensuring the success of his slap. The eye and head movement of the player is a sign that the action was deliberate. Additionally, the evidence of blood from the player's nose should be another sign (most obvious) that unnecessary force and contact was made.

The correct action by the referee team in this clip would be to send off one player for violent conduct (slap to the opponent's face) and issue a yellow card to the other player for unsporting behavior (tactical holding foul).

**Video Clip 4:** New York at Chivas USA (25:33)

This situation involves incidental contact albeit with the arm/elbow. In "Week In Review 8," the acronym F-I-R-E was introduced to assist officials with identifying elbows that should be dealt with as violent conduct (red card):

- **Frustration**
- **Intimidation**
- **Retaliation (payback)**
- **Establish Territory or Space**

When evaluating this clip, it is evident that the defender did not intend to intimidate, retaliate, or unfairly establish territory or space. Notice the defender's focus – on the ball. He does not look back to "size up" the attacker. Contact is initiated by the attacker who jumps up and into the defender. Also take note of the fact that the attacker does not leap as high as the defender. In fact, his jump takes him only as high as the defender's elbow and forearm. Given these factors and the fact that the defender does not cock and throw his elbow, the actions should not be considered as misconduct.

**Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity**

In one game, two situations involving the denying of an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO) arose. As the play unfolds in each video clip, employ the following standards in determining if the tackle committed by the defender falls under the definition of DOGSO:

- **Defenders**

Are there any defenders between the attacker and the goal that could dispossess the attacker of the ball and prevent a scoring opportunity?

- **Direction**

Is the attacker's position on the field such that he is headed/moving directly to goal? Consider the attacker's touch on the ball, is it headed toward the goal area or at an angle away from the goal?

- **Distance to goal**

As the attacker plays the ball, is his proximity to goal such that he is close enough that he would have a reasonable opportunity to advance the ball without opponents tracking him down. The further the distance to goal, the less opportunity for a scoring chance.

- **Distance to ball**

Is the attacker close enough to the ball to be considered to have “possession” or a clear chance to play the ball or will the goalkeeper or another player get to the ball before the attacker?

**Video Clip 5:** FC Dallas at Houston (75:27)

An attacking player makes a penetrating run through the center of the defense. At this time, a pass is made that precedes the runner behind the defense. Just as the runner is prepared to gather the ball and take off for goal, he is taken down, desperately, by a defender. Now, apply the four principles outlined above to determine if this is a case of DOGSO. It is clear that there are no defenders between the attacker and the goal that have the ability to track down the ball or the attacker. Second, the direction of the ball and the attacker’s run is clearly headed up the middle of the field, to goal. Third, the foul occurs approximately 25 yards from the goal which provides a reasonable chance to score. Finally, the attacker is only a few feet away from the ball as the ill-timed challenge is made. Given these factors, a red card should be issued for “denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player’s goal by an offence punishable by a free kick or penalty kick.”

**Video Clip 6:** FC Dallas at Houston (89:31)

In the same game as clip 5, another instance of DOGSO arises. This case is a bit more subtle but still holds up to the principles of analysis set forth. Again, apply the four principles of defenders, direction, distance to goal, and distance to ball. The defender’s challenge meets all four of the standards that are required for a DOGSO to exist. The uncertain factor is whether the defender’s challenge is fair or not: Did the defender commit a free kick offense? In other words, did the defender cleanly play the ball or did the defender go through the opponent and thus make contact with him to play the ball? In making this determination, the referee must take notice of the position of the ball relative to the attacker in possession of it as well as the direction of the tackle.

Notice that the attacker’s body and legs are between the ball and the chasing defender. The ball is on the attacker’s right foot and the defender is initiating his tackle from the left side of the attacker. Additionally, the tackle is committed from behind the attacker. Watch as contact is made just as the attacker begins his shooting motion. Close review of the last replay shows that contact may be made with the ball but only after the defender has made contact with the attacker by going through the attacker’s legs. Each of these positions point to the fact that the defender must first make contact with the attacker in order to play the ball. If this is the case, then the referee must award a direct free kick (tripping) and red card the defender for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity.

**Penalty Kick Decision**

Almost 52 minutes into a 0-0 game, the referee awards a penalty kick for tripping that leads to the game’s first goal. The referee decided to give the penalty kick and was not influenced by the score and the time of the game. Watch as the attacker cuts the ball to the left as the second defender closes him down. The defender sticks out his right foot and makes contact with the opponent by clipping the right foot of the attacker causing him to go down. Despite the fact that there was not much force behind the tackle, the referee judged that the defender made contact with the attacker and the contact prevented the attacker from keeping possession of the ball.

**Video Clip 7:** Colorado at Columbus (51:44)

Watch for the defender’s contact. The referee must have a clear line of vision to identify the defender’s actions and the impact of the defender’s actions.

Another positive lesson learned from the clip is the positioning of the referee after awarding the penalty kick. Sensing potential dissent from the defending team, the referee runs to the goal line, slightly off the field of play. This puts distance between him and the dissenters. It also provides an invisible barrier that players should not cross: the goal line. By moving off the field, the referee creates space and cannot be surrounded by players. Players may only approach him from the front, face on. This position provides good vision of the players’ actions, better management of the dissent, and allows the referee to put his hand out to signal “stop” as he is approached.

**WEEK 15 FOCUS**

**Dissent by Word or Action**

Early in the match, officials should send strong messages that dissent will not be tolerated. Referees should not allow themselves to be surrounded by players who are arguing a decision or who are attempting to influence the referee. Remember, referees should not rely solely on the yellow card to send early messages. Referees should look to slow the game down and make a visible effort to communicate to everyone that dissent will not be tolerated. If players continue, then the referee is justified in issuing a card for misconduct. Remember, do not let players follow you around or chase you around the field. Draw the line in the sand and hold the players accountable.

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