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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 19



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 19 – ending August 3, 2008

WEEK 19 OVERVIEW

Five MLS games and two SuperLiga games filled this past week's agenda. The five MLS games provided many positive highlights of U.S. Soccer's theme of flow, risk taking, and game control. In last week's "Week In Review," the model for this theme was introduced.

(click on this link to refer to "Week In Review 18") Once again, referees exhibited the ability to recognize the "big picture" and provided exceptional examples illustrating the model in action. Several game time scenarios of the referee's implementation of flow, risk taking, and game control will be provided below.

The five MLS games finished with an average of 26.8 fouls called per game with the range of whistles going from a high of 40 to a low of 20. One MLS match had only 22 fouls but four yellow cards, two red cards, and a team trainer being dismissed. This dichotomy shows the need for referees to be prepared for every game and every potential situation in a game, as even games with few fouls have explosive moments.

Next week, U.S. Soccer will be conducting a referee academy for four invited referees at the "World Youth Tournament" in Lorain, Ohio. This week-long academy will provide the select referees the opportunity to referee Under 16 National Select sides from Nigeria, Venezuela, and Chile as well as top international youth club teams like Chivas (Mexico), Blackburn Rovers (England), and Club America (Mexico). These international teams are joined by American clubs PSA Academy and Rush Select XI. Throughout the tournament, feedback, instruction, training, and coaching will be provided by U.S. Soccer staff consisting of Paul Tamberino, Herb Silva, and Brian Hall.

Two additional U.S. Soccer academies kick off this week. An Assistant Referee (AR) Academy, directed by Alfred Kleinaitis, is being held in conjunction with USASA's National Cup Finals in Seattle, Washington, as well as an academy being conducted concurrently with the U.S. Soccer Under 14 Identification Camp in Concord, Massachusetts. At this camp, eight developing officials were invited for week-long training and education.

- *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."*

WEEK 19 COMMENTARY

Flow, Risk Taking, and Game Control: The Model In Action

The model proposed by U.S. Soccer regarding flow, risk taking, and game control resonated in officials' minds this past weekend. Referees identified multiple opportunities to exercise the spirit of the model and exhibit top class officiating skills. In each case, the referee contributed to the entertainment value of the game by taking a risk that the players would play through minor contact and fouls and thereby allow the flow of the game to provide creative attacks on goal without jeopardizing player safety and without avoiding disciplining challenges that are 100 percent misconduct.

The clips below show how a confident referee with a feel for the big picture can contribute to entertaining, attacking play. The referee must understand and make an immediate calculation as to how his not blowing the whistle will affect the overall atmosphere of the game and how the balance of the game will unfold by not calling the trifling, soft, or minor foul. A referee with a strong presence (close to play and using personality to earn the players' confidence through his actions in the game) will be able to take more risks and sell the so-called "no-calls" on the minor challenges.

The first two clips in this sequence are from the same game and occur in a relatively short time span. Hence, the referee must have established his presence early and felt comfortable that the game and the players did not need play to be disrupted with a whistle for a foul.

Video Clip 1: Columbus at Houston (39:28)

This flow and risk taking clip illustrates how a referee must be able to read the game and make a determination as to the next phase of play (as contact occurs, what the clear options are for the player with the ball) and make a determination as to how the players will accept the fluidity he is attempting to direct at that point in the match. Watch as there are approximately five different challenges by defenders attempting to deny the progress of the attacking team. Despite the number of challenges, the referee reads that the attacking players are willing to play through the minor/soft fouls and determined that there is a next phase of play following each challenge.

Remember, the Laws of the Game allow the referee to come back and penalize an offense (within a few seconds) if the advantage does not materialize. Note, at 39:42, the referee announces his intention to allow the play to continue, this gives the referee the flexibility to “read” the player’s reactions (taking them into consideration) to the flow and provides credibility if he decides to return to penalize.

Watch as the clip starts with upper body contact, and an attacker in possession of the ball with his back up field. This is followed by more body contact in the center circle in which the referee judges as soft or minor. Two more mis-timed tackles occur as the attacker breaks out of the center circle. Despite the defending team’s attempts, the offensive player is able to connect a pass to a teammate in the attacking third. A well positioned referee is able to sell these decisions to the players due to his presence. Notice how the flow directed by the referee contributes to the entertainment value.

Video Clip 2: Columbus at Houston (42:28)

Again, there are several bits of contact initiated by defenders. However, the referee is close to interpret each contact as minor in nature and, therefore, the game does not require it to be called. Examine the three challenges and make a determination as to why the referee judges it to be trifling:

- The first challenge involves upper body contact. The attacking player goes down with minor contact. The referee is positioned close to the contact and has the correct line of vision so he can make the judgment that the contact did not cause the attacker to fall down. Key to interpreting this is the attacker’s reaction: he immediately gets off the ground and chases the ball.
- The second hard challenge comes from the team just dispossessed of the ball (orange shirts). The player initiates a hard, solid tackle but it is from the side. The player slides in and sweeps the ball away. The challenge is hard but fair. Contact is made with the ball and not the opponent. The opponent gets beat to the ball and jumps to avoid the contact.
- The third and final challenge is, again, upper body and is committed by the defender (at 32:44) to prevent the attacker from running into space on a potential give-and-go. The referee is stationed adjacent to the foul and can clearly see the progress of the pass and he correctly allows play to proceed.

Overall, a superb job by the referee by allowing the game to flow without putting the player’s safety at risk and without bypassing 100 percent misconduct situations. The result: attacking and entertaining soccer resulting in a goal.

Video Clip 3: Kansas City at D.C. (6:37)

This is an example of a foul that minor/trifling and a good candidate for flow. The attacking player goes down with minimal upper body. In fact, the attacker’s turn with the ball causes him to lose his footing and not the contact. The referee, near the play and with clear view of the contact, decides there is no foul – this is critical to making the proper judgment. Having decided there was no initial foul, the referee correctly awards a free kick for handling.

Video Clip 4: Kansas City at D.C. (10:05)

A situation where no foul is recommended resulting in game flow. The attacker, with the ball, is being pressured by an opponent from behind. There is contact, but the contact is not the cause of the player losing the ball. The player touches the ball too far in front and loses his footing as he reaches for the ball. The contact is not the cause of the player going down nor of his losing possession; therefore, the referee should feel comfortable with taking a risk in cases similar to this.

100% Misconduct: A Tactical Foul

The referee’s ability to identify tactical fouls is tested virtually every game. This is particularly the case given the speed of the modern game and the counter attack style many teams employ. In addition, the severity of punishment for tackles from behind has forced players to find other ways (holding of the shirt, interposing the body between the attacker and the ball, etc.) of stopping the progress of an attacker. The skillful and creative player in the center of the field or the speedy winger are often targets of tactical fouls. “Week In Review 7” and subsequent versions have provided multiple perspectives on this modern game phenomenon and have attempted to provide tools to assist the referee in identifying fouls that meet the tactical criteria. ***(Click on the link to access “[Week In Review 7](#)” for a detailed list of tactical foul characteristics)***

Video Clip 5: Kansas City at D.C. (78:21)

In this clip, the skillful and creative player uses his technical ability to beat four defenders. As he beats the last player, he knows he has space in which he can attack and carry the ball. Seeing this, the defender decides he has no other option than to foul. Although the foul is not representative of the standard hard, sliding tackles common place in today's game, it does prevent the talented player from advancing and from possibly breaking down the defense further with a pass or his dribbling ability. Referees must be aware of defensive tactics and be prepared to intervene as necessary.

Handballs: Making Yourself Bigger

During the recently completed U.S. Soccer Mid-Season Professional Seminar, the topic of handballs was addressed in order to provide more clarity in decision making and to provide a common thread for the interpretation of handling decisions. The key term agreed upon as a determining factor in deciding if contact with the hand/arm is, in fact, a handling offense was: Did the player make himself bigger?

- **Making yourself bigger**

This refers to the placement of the arm(s)/hand(s) of the defending player at the time the ball is played by the opponent. Should an arm/hand be in a position that takes away space from the team with the ball and the ball contacts the arm/hand, the referee should interpret this contact as handling. Referees should interpret this action as the defender "deliberately" putting his arm/hand in a position in order to reduce the options of the opponent (like spreading your arms wide to take away the passing lane of an attacker).

There are other critical signs that referees should consider, in addition to "making yourself bigger," when evaluating whether a handling situation requires a foul to be called:

- **Is the arm or hand in an "unnatural position?"**

Is the arm or hand in a position that is not normal or natural for a player performing the task at hand.

- **Hand to ball**

Referees must be ready to judge whether the player moved his arm to the ball thereby initiating the contact.

- **Distance**

The further the distance from the defender to the location from which the opponent played the ball, the greater the likelihood of a handling offense.

- **The result of the action**

In considering all the "signs" described above, the referee should also consider the result of the player's action. Did the player's action (handling of the ball) deny a pass or shot on goal that would have otherwise been available to him?

As you examine the following two clips, consider the "making yourself bigger" criteria in determining why the decision to award a foul for handling would be correct.

Video Clip 6: Chivas USA at Chicago (89:05)

The defender is approximately four yards from the opponent at the time the ball is played. This long distance provides more time for the defender to control his actions. As the clip is replayed, look at the position of the defender's arm – extended out from his body thereby making his body bigger and taking away the passing lane or the angle for a shot on goal. Additionally, this is not a natural position for the arm as a defender is closing down on an opponent. Also, closely look at the defender's left arm. It too is raised up, away from his body. Given the "making yourself bigger" criteria, in this case, the referee should call a foul (handling) and award a penalty kick.

Video Clip 7: Atlante (Mexico) at New England (17:31 – second half)

This example is from a SuperLiga game. Once more, a defender has his arm extended out to a position that "makes himself bigger" and unfairly takes away opponent's space to pass/play the ball. The freeze frame clearly shows the extended arm makes contact with the ball. The referee would be correct in awarding a penalty kick for handling following the "making yourself bigger" criteria.

Offside: Giving the Benefit of Doubt to Attacking Soccer

"Wait and see." Exhibit patience. Give the benefit of the doubt to the attack. Each of these phrases are common themes in the training of ARs. Each phrase is geared toward providing simple terminology that can be followed by ARs at all levels of play. In addition to the terminology, prior "Week In Reviews" have provided recommendations for ARs that are intended to increase proficiency in decision making. The clip below provides an example of where an AR can improve the accuracy of his decisions by applying previous training and positional recommendations provided in prior "Week In Reviews."

Video Clip 8: Pachuca (Mexico) at Houston (13:43 – second half)

In this critical semifinal SuperLiga match, with the score 0-0, a team is denied the first goal of the game as a result of an incorrect offside decision. As you watch the clip, the initial “poorly placed” camera angle may lead one to agree with the decision to disallow the goal for offside. However, the replay (from a better positioned camera) shows the AR was incorrect and the goal should have counted. In reviewing and dissecting the call, the following factors must be applied to ensure the correct decision is made:

- **Assistant Referee (AR) positional technique**

ARs need to be square to the field as much as possible. This means that sidestepping must be the most common form of movement when the situation permits. Sidestepping gives the AR a broader perspective of the field and better positioning with the precise movements of the second-to-last defender. As the ball is played to the right winger, he takes a touch on the ball briefly slowing play. It is at this moment that the AR should transition from a forward running style to sidestepping. Notice how the AR continues running forward and does not attempt to gain a better vantage point by changing his running style from forward run to sidestepping at the critical moment of the winger’s first touch on the ball. Given how close in to the goal the play is, the AR should be able to maintain the sidestepping offside position until a clearance is attempted.

- **Use of field markings**

A smart AR will use the markings of the field (the painted lines or the lines created from the mowing of the grass) to assist with player placement. These lines aid in depth perception and give the AR a reference point. In this clip, the AR can use the top of the goal area line as the reference point in determining player positions and closeness to goal. If this were accomplished, it would have been evident that there was enough doubt to give the benefit to the attack.

- **Goal scorer’s position**

The player who scores the goal and is declared offside is NOT in an offside position because, as the freeze frame shows:

1. He is level or behind the second to last opponent; and
2. He is behind the ball at the time the ball is played by his teammate.

- **Benefit of doubt to the attack**

Finally, due to the close nature of all the factors above, if there is any doubt in the AR’s mind (and there should be) as to the position of the goal scorer at the time the ball is played by his teammate, the AR must leave the flag down.

This is a difficult decision but with better positioning and line of vision, use of the field markings, and a better understanding of the goal scorer’s position should lead the AR to the conclusion that the goal scorer was in an onside position at the time of his teammate’s pass. Given the many factors addressed above, the worse case should be doubt on the AR’s part – doubt which would lead the AR to decide to keep the flag down.

If in doubt, “keep the flag down!”

Lessons Learned #2: Development Academy Finals Week

The following is the second in a series of several items identified during U.S. Soccer’s Development Academy Finals Week that would be of benefit to all officials.

- **Bench Decorum (Behavior in the Technical Area)**

The Law (3, 5, Technical Area, Fourth Official)

- Substitutes and substituted players are always under the authority of the referee, whether they play or not
- Team officials are allowed to offer tactical instructions but:
 - They may not leave the technical area
 - They must behave responsibly
- Managing the benches is the responsibility of the fourth official (backed ultimately by the authority of the referee)
- In the absence of a fourth official, bench areas become the shared responsibility of the nearer assistant referee and the referee
- Anyone not listed on the roster as a player or substitute who is allowed in the technical area is considered a team official and must behave accordingly
- Misconduct by substitutes or substituted players requires immediate attention when it interferes with or intrudes directly onto the play on the field – otherwise, the misconduct is better handled at the next stoppage of play
- Although team officials cannot commit misconduct, their behavior should be evaluated based on guidelines applied to player misconduct (for example, dissent, abusive language, violent conduct, entering the field during play, etc.)
- In the event of misconduct, only substitutes or substituted players on the bench may be shown the appropriate card. Coaches and other non-playing personnel may only be dismissed by pointing to them and telling them they are dismissed and must leave the area around the field of play

2. Art and Science

- Refereeing is both an art and a science – a performance on the field is a combination of these
- The science of refereeing is knowledge:
 - Laws of the Game
 - Official interpretations and guidelines
 - Rules and procedures
- In a “science” experiment, combining the same ingredients or forces in the same amounts in the same way always produces the same results
- The art of refereeing is *Fingerspitzengefühl* (literally, “sensing with the fingertips”), adjusting actions and reactions based on a “feel” for what is happening at the moment
 - Level of skill
 - Degree of competitive intensity
 - Individual player personalities
 - What has gone before (team history, prior half hour, etc.)
- Art (paintings, dance, writing, sculpture) is never the same over time – there is no such thing as an individually produced piece of art work which is exactly the same as another individually produced piece of art work
- The referee is like a conductor who combines many different sounds (science) into music (art)

3. Whistle Dynamics

- The whistle is a communications tool – just like the flags, body language, hand signals
- A whistle’s tone should distinguish the referee’s signals from whistle sounds that might be heard from a nearby field
- Whistles that produce an overly penetrating or loud tone should be avoided with very young players
- There are no specific, standard guidelines regarding:
 - Tone
 - Length of signal
 - Loudness, or
 - Number of blasts
- However, in all these elements, the referee must vary whistle signals at minimum to distinguish among:
 - Simple attention getting (“look at me” – don’t start yet or the play is dead)
 - Stoppages for “ordinary” fouls – imperative attention getting
 - Serious events – indicating strong action to follow or seeking to disrupt retaliation
- Avoid overuse of the whistle so that, when the whistle is blown, it is more likely to draw the attention of players
- Carrying a back-up whistle is highly recommended

WEEK 20 FOCUS

Team Work: The Pre-Game Discussion

Referees, ARs and fourth officials are being asked to concentrate on pre-game instructions with a focus on participation in the “critical decisions” in the game. Feedback from U.S. Soccer’s Mid-Season Professional Seminar indicated that referees are not conducting thorough pre-game discussions focused on team participation at the critical moments of the match. Some of the critical areas that need to be discussed are:

- Misconduct unseen by the referee
- Management of game dispute and game misconduct
- Counter attack fouls where the referee is not able to be close to play
- The decision on whether a foul occurs inside or outside of the penalty area
- Participation on a penalty kick decision
- The silent signals for red or yellow cards
- Management of free kicks by the AR

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