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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 20

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.

WEEK 20 COMMENTARY**100% Misconduct: Red Card Challenges**

It is important that referees measure the severity of challenges throughout the match. Flow and risk taking cannot be exercised on challenges that endanger the safety of the opponent and resonate as actions that are either serious foul play or violent conduct. Referees must set the standard in each game from the first minute of the match to the last minute. For guideline and application of serious foul play or violent conduct decisions, please refer to the direction provided by our office and previous "Weeks in Review."

Good positioning, a good feel for the "big picture" of the match (what has occurred previously), and a solid understanding of the application of the Laws of the Game will assist all officials in deciding upon the correct action as they unfold in the game.

Video Clip 1: Seattle at Portland (32:40)

The first two clips are from a nationally televised USL-1 game played this past week. The two clips will show the inconsistency in the application of serious foul play by the referee and, as a result, the negative impact it has on the players' frustration level. Referees must be able to clearly identify the challenges that meet the criteria for a red card and must have the courage to address them with action that matches the seriousness of the offense.

Identifying and dealing with tackles that can injure and harm players is a key component of a successful referee. These type of tackles are "moments of truth" in a game. Failure to correctly disseminate the proper punishment will cause frustration levels of players to increase (leading to dissent), retaliation, and overall loss of game control. There may be multiple "moments of truth" in a game.

In this first clip, the referee applies the criteria that has been presented in prior "Week In Reviews" relating to the correct interpretation of red card tackles and, consequently, makes the correct decision to send the player off for serious foul play. Below is the criteria:

- Speed of play and the tackle
- Intent
- Aggressive nature
- Position of the tackler – in particular, his legs
- Opportunity to play the ball
- Atmosphere (the referee's feeling of what has occurred thus far on the field in the match) of the game

The tackle, although not done with the force or speed of many others, does meet a number of the aforementioned red card criteria. Remember, all the criteria do not have to be present in each red card situation. The referee is well positioned to judge the defender's action and evaluate the criteria.

The following evaluates the four most obvious of the aforementioned criteria. Remember, the referee must make the same analysis but in a split second. Using a quick but thoughtful pause prior to making a decision can assist officials in ensuring all the factors are evaluated.

- **Intent**

The defender/tackler comes from behind in a manner that is intended to send a message and "endangers the safety of the opponent." There

is no need for a challenge of this type.

Watch how the defender starts his run from 10 yards away and has the opportunity to control his challenge (stop his run) and merely contain the attacker. Instead, the defender decides to continue his run and goes through the opponent's legs. The defender's intent is clear: take the opponent out and send a message.

- **Aggressive nature**

Although the tackler does not leave his feet, he does aggressively make contact near the knee and the Achilles of the attacker. In addition, the defender continues the motion or swipe of his leg through his opponent thereby taking both his legs out from under him.

- **Position of the tackler**

The tackler runs through the opponent, from the side, and the tackler uses his legs then to insure the contact is more severe than just with upper body contact.

- **Opportunity to play the ball**

No opportunity to play the ball exists. The defender starts his run 10 yards from the attacker and is two or more yards from him when the attacker passes the ball. By the time the defender gets to the attacker, the ball is approximately five yards gone.

Video Clip 2: Seattle at Portland (84:37)

Approximately 52 minutes after the red card issued in clip 1 above, another challenge occurs that meets the criteria for a red card. Unfortunately, the referee fails to correctly apply the aforementioned requirements and decides to caution the tackler for a challenge that endangers the opponent's safety and thereby is serious foul play.

Pay particular attention to the following and decide, for yourself, under which criteria the actions fall.

- Tackle is directly from behind.
- Tackle is initiated from close distance which leads to more hard body contact than just contact with the feet/legs.
- As the defender follows through with the force of his tackle, he uses his legs to "scissor" the attacker and cut his legs out from under him.

The referee should look for ways to enhance his view and positioning. In the clip, the referee is standing flat footed (not moving as the ball is moving) and would be better served to move from behind the player that may be obstructing a portion of his view. Assistant referees (ARs) should be empowered by the referee to assist with identifying the tackle as a red card. This is a critical game situation. If the AR is certain the tackle is serious foul play, the AR should provide the information to the referee by either using a pre-arranged "silent signal" (pointing to the back pocket) or by calling the referee over and providing verbal confirmation.

Failure by a referee to correctly identify this tackle as a red card, is viewed as an injustice by the players in the clip (examine their reactions). The result is frustration. Frustration often times leads to retaliation as players feel the referee is not protecting them.

Video Clip 3: Chicago at New England (63:43)

Tackles and certain fouls can be disguised by players; hence, it takes a critical and sharp eye to identify the actual result of the player's challenge. As this clip is viewed, look at how the first challenge (which goes unpunished) is disguised by the tackler as an attempt to play the ball. Remember, the Laws of the Game specify the following when evaluating whether a player's action constitutes serious foul play (use these definitions along with the criteria provided in the two prior clips):

- The use of excessive force or brutality against an opponent when challenging for the ball.
- The tackle endangers the safety of the opponent.
- A tackler lunges at an opponent in challenging for the ball from the front, from the side or from behind using one or both legs, with excessive force and endangers the safety of an opponent.

The referee does not identify the first challenge as a foul and send off and allows play to continue. The missed first call leads to a second retaliatory foul that the referee is forced to caution as unsporting behavior.

The first foul is a red card challenge. Unnecessary excessive force is used, the defender comes in late, with a straight leg that lunges at the opponent's leg/shin, makes contact with exposed cleats and endangers the safety of the opponent.

The referee needs to identify the first challenge and issue the appropriate punishment which would be a red card for violent conduct. This would eliminate the second taking-matters-into-your-own-hands-tackle and resulting yellow card.

The Second Yellow Card

In addition to punishing certain actions, when yellow cards are issued, referees are also looking to “get something in return.” For example, modification of player/team behavior (not just the behavior of the player being cautioned). In addition, referees must have the courage to send a player off for a second cautionable offense when the offense merits it (100% misconduct) despite the time, score and other outside factors.

Video Clip 4: TFC at Colorado (69:32)

The player who commits the foul does so having already been cautioned. The player commits a reckless upper body challenge. The force of the challenge is unnecessary and places the attacker/opponent in a dangerous position. The fact that the players are near the sign boards and the fact that the challenge is done in such a manner that it propels the attacker toward the boards, should heighten the referee’s sensitivity and should be taken into consideration when evaluating the severity and the level of the contact. Notice the location of the ball and play when the challenge is initiated: the ball is clearly going out if it has not done so already. So, the referee must ask himself as he evaluates the severity of the punishment, “why is the opponent making such a challenge given the ball is not playable and is out of play?”

Observe how the referee first shows the yellow card as he judged the offense as unsporting behavior. After displaying the yellow card, the referee immediately raises the red card signifying the player is being sent off for “receiving a second caution in the same match.” The urgency shown by the referee in issuing the cards keeps the situation from escalating to game misconduct (actions by multiple opponents).

Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO)

U.S. Soccer has provided standards for referees to utilize when determining whether a foul that has been committed by the defending team denies an opponent who is moving toward a goal scoring opportunity. “Week In Review 14” defined the standards for DOGSO. (***click on this link to access “Week In Review 14” for a more detailed description of DOGSO standards***) Once the referee decides that DOGSO exists, a red card must be issued to the offender for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity.

DOGSO consists of the following four “D’s:”

- **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: Chicago at New England (15:33)

This clip shows a long ball that goes approximately 40 yards in the air and results in an attacker isolated on goal, in the middle of the field being chased (from behind) by the last field defender/opponent. As you view the clip, ask yourself: “If the foul does not occur, does the attacker have an opportunity to shoot on goal or score?” In this case, the answer is yes. Therefore, DOGSO exists and a red card as well as a penalty kick should be given as the foul occurs in the penalty box. The early time of the match is inconsequential.

As situations like this develop, officials should take note of the following:

- **Referee anticipation**

Referees must anticipate the long pass and start their movement up field before the 40 yard pass is executed. Secondly, once the pass is made, the referee must sprint to follow the pass and close the gap between himself and the ball. Referees cannot relax nor assume that the defender or goalkeeper will win the ball. Misreading play by not sprinting will cause the referee to be too far from the challenge in the penalty area. Failure to anticipate by sprinting to get a good side view of the contact and failure to close the gap between the referee’s initial position and the drop zone of the ball will lead to poor positioning and may lead to poor judgment.

- **Location of the ball**

The ball comes down on the attacker’s left foot/left side. The defender is approaching from behind but from the right shoulder of the attacker.

- **The challenge**

The defender's challenge is from behind and from the attacker's right side. The attacker's body shields the defender from the ball which is on the left foot of the attacker. Consequently, it would be very difficult for the defender to cleanly play the ball without contacting the opponent. The defender's left foot makes contact with the right leg of the attacker at high speed causing the attacker to go down.

- **Assistant referee (AR) involvement**

An AR who clearly sees the incident/contact can participate in making the call as the foul is critical in nature. Parameters of such involvement should be discussed and established in the referee team's pre-game conference.

By quickly assessing the items above and being strategically positioned, the referee can aid in his ability to clearly identify the contact as DOGSO.

WEEK 21 FOCUS

Getting the First Foul to Avoid the Retaliation Challenge

Focus should be on referees and ARs recognizing the first foul and being in position to be able to clearly identify the challenge and take appropriate action. Such recognition will diffuse potential retaliation and ensure that player frustration levels do not elevate to unmanageable levels.

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