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## Referee Programs

### U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 21



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 21 – ending August 17, 2008**

#### WEEK 21 OVERVIEW

This past week there were many exceptional performances by MLS officials. Not only top-class performances by referees but superb decisions by assistant referees (ARs). Referees contributed to many outstanding and entertaining games while AR decisions led to several goals and opportunities to score.

Referees managed intense games with common sense while exhibiting the ability to differentiate between the minor/soft challenges and the fouls required to maintain game control and ensure the safety of the players. Over the past two weeks of MLS competition, there has been an average of 3.45 goals scored per game. In the two weeks prior (weeks 18 and 19), an average of 2.3 goals were scored. By applying flow and providing a stage for attacking soccer, referees have positively influenced the increase in goals scored. Additionally, ARs have also had a hand in the 1.15 goal per game increase. This past week, three of the goals were a direct result of ARs applying the principle of “wait and see” and giving the benefit of doubt to the attack. Two of these exceptional offside decisions will be highlighted below.

With 10 weeks remaining in the MLS season, it is critical that officiating teams continue to maintain high levels of concentration and alertness. Preparation will be a key success factor as teams battle for playoff positions and there are fewer games to make up for lost points and make an upward move in the standings.

U.S. Soccer has been represented very well by five officials during the Olympic soccer tournament. On the women’s side, Kari Seitz, Marlene Duffy, and Veronica Perez have excelled and just completed officiating the quarterfinal match between Brazil and Norway. This was Seitz’s second Olympic tournament and the first for Duffy and Perez. Seitz has been selected to be the fourth official on the Olympic Bronze Medal match. On the men’s side, U.S. Soccer has been represented by the duo of Jair Marrufo and assistant referee Kermit Quisenberry. Despite this being the first Olympics for Marrufo and Quisenberry, they were selected to officiate the quarterfinal matchup between Holland and Argentina. This assignment came after two other strong performances in the preliminary round. Congratulations to both officiating teams!

- [\*Listen to this week's podcast\*](#)

#### WEEK 21 COMMENTARY

##### Offside Decisions: Positively Contributing to Goals

“Wait and See.” Give the benefit of doubt to the attack. Both of these principles are the hallmark of excellent ARs. Because goals are generally not easy to come by in soccer, anything that officials can do to provide opportunities to score can significantly contribute to the entertainment value and beauty of the game. Week 21 saw two exceptional decisions by ARs who resisted the temptation to raise the flag.

##### Video Clip 1: Real Salt Lake at Houston (15:42)

This correct decision on the part of the AR requires total concentration, excellent positioning, and the patience to see the play develop. This is a complicated decision due to many factors:

- **The flat defense**

The fact that four defenders are flat (in a virtual single line) and are spread out across the field creates depth perception issues. This is complicated by their attempt to stop their runs to “place” the attackers in an offside position just as the attacker makes the through pass (offside trap).

- **The three attackers running forward**

The attacking team has three simultaneous players running to goal. The players are separated by distance thereby creating gaps between themselves and the defenders. These gaps make it more difficult for the AR to assess the positions of the players at the time the ball is played by a teammate.

- **The distance the ball and the passer are from the AR**

The attacker who makes the through pass is close to the far touchline (approximately 60 yards from the AR) and 20 yards behind the last line of defense. The AR must be able to concurrently see the touch of the ball and immediately judge the position of the defenders and attackers.

In order to successfully make the correct call, the AR must be able to assess these three factors as well as take a snapshot of the position of the attackers and defenders at the moment the ball is played/passed by the attacker. The AR must then store that snapshot by utilizing the “wait and see” principle and then assess which attacker actually interferes with play. Finally, once the AR observes who interferes with play, he must immediately refer to his snapshot to decide if the player who interferes was in an offside position at the time the ball was played by his teammate.

As this clip plays out, the difficulty of the decision can be appreciated. Look at the clip in full speed and try to make the decision. Then, utilize the freeze frame perspective to make the final decision. The player who scores the tying goal is in an onside position at the time his teammate passes the ball. A second attacker, closest to the passer, is in an offside position; however, he does not interfere with play or with an opponent. The third attacker also runs through but he too does not interfere with play or an opponent even though he starts his run toward the ball. Remember, “interfering with play” is defined as: “playing or touching the ball passed or touched by a teammate.”

### **Video Clip 2: Galaxy at Chivas USA (61:56)**

With the score tied 1-1, a goal by either team can be a significant advantage going into the last 18 minutes of the match. An attack is initiated from approximately 90 yards from goal. The attack consists of only three players touching the ball over the 90 yards. This style is indicative of play in MLS and requires ARs to be focused at all times and ready for quick transitions over long distances.

***The ability to simultaneously view the offside line and the passed ball when there is considerable distance separating the two is vital for AR success.***

Despite appeals by the defense, the goal is correctly awarded as the benefit of doubt is given to the attacking team. The AR starts slightly behind the fast moving second to last defender as evidenced by the “offside line” graphic. However, he quickly closes the gap and is closer to the offside line as the final pass is made.

As the final pass is executed in the penalty area, the ball is delivered to an attacker who is even with the second to last defender. According to the Laws of the Game, “A player is not in an offside position if he is level with the second to last opponent.” In this clip, a well timed run and pass ensure that the attacker is in an onside position. In close offside situations like this, ARs are instructed to give the benefit of doubt to the attacking team. In other words, should the AR have any doubt or question regarding the onside or offside position of the goal scorer, the AR should keep the flag down.

### **Getting the Most Out of a Yellow Card**

The referee’s response to a foul or act of misconduct must match or exceed the severity of the player’s action. In other words, the more severe the act of the player, the greater importance the referee should place on ensuring his actions/response send a message that the behavior displayed by the player will not be tolerated. The message the referee sends must not only be received by the player for whom it is intended but also to the other players, coaches, and spectators. An effective message that matches or exceeds the situation is the most effective tool in the referee’s ability to “draw his line in the sand.” By “drawing the line in the sand,” the referee provides the players, coaches, and spectators with measurable and visual evidence of what is acceptable behavior in that game.

The referee who merely relies on the issuance of a card (yellow or red) to send messages is a reactive official – an official who does not use his personality to prevent the next foul. Referees need to manage the game with their personality by picking the appropriate method of managing or dealing with a player.

***Remember, the best referee is the referee who is seen and heard when the game requires the referee to be seen and heard.***

Generally speaking, there is a continuum of referee actions needed to ensure that the referee’s response matches the severity of the offence. Top level referees find ways to send messages aside from using the whistle. They also utilize down time (when the ball is out of play) to connect with players. Often times the connection can be positive communication and encouragement. The following is brief overview of three important referee responses on the continuum:

- **Quiet word**

During the run of play, referees can have a quiet word with players. This allows players to feel the referee's presence prior to the referee blowing the whistle. Additionally, there are some fouls for which a quiet word is an appropriate response by the referee. The referee can run with the player as the player moves to position and during the movement convey the selected message.

- **Isolating the player**

Once the referee has whistled the foul, the referee can opt to move the player aside and have a one-on-one conversation. The isolation of the player sends a broader message that will resonate with all game participants and is a visual message to spectators and the media that the player's actions were not acceptable. By looking the player in the eye, the referee sends a stronger message and can use his personality to convey his displeasure. The "look" (body language) and tone of voice chosen by the referee is important as it must also match the severity of the offense. This tactic also slows the game down and gives the referee and the players time to think about their actions.

Remember, the referee must always be under control and calm when demonstrating his displeasure and communicating with the players and coaches.

- **Issuing of a card**

If talking with the player(s) has not worked, the referee should then consider a stronger message which would be the issuance of a yellow or red card. This does not restrict the referee from going directly to a card should the severity of the offence mandate it. Once again, however, the referee must make sure that the appropriate communication accompanies the displaying of the card. In many instances, the quick isolation of the player while the card is displayed is critical in getting the right message across.

In "Week in Review 20," the following recommendation regarding the issuance of a card was provided: 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). ([click on this link to be taken to "Week In Review 20"](#))

#### **Video Clip 3: Dallas at Columbus (49:08)**

The tackle committed in the clip is a certain yellow card for unsporting behavior. It is reckless, late, from behind with no opportunity to play the ball, and takes out the opposition's leg. As a result, the decision by the referee to caution the player is correct.

However, the referee must get more out of the caution other than the simple act of displaying it. It is not sufficient to merely issue the yellow card as the player walks away with their back to you. This situation requires a face-to-face conversation. The action of the referee must match or exceed the action of the player.

As the referee whistles for the foul, his actions starting with the tone of the whistle should signal his displeasure. Along with a strong whistle, the manner in which the referee runs to the spot of the infraction should also communicate a sense of his displeasure. Once at the area of the foul, the referee may get the fouler's attention and motion for him to meet the referee halfway, in a neutral spot. At this point, the referee can issue the yellow card while looking the player in the eye and having a stern but effective word with him. This puts the referee in charge of the situation as opposed to the player who would otherwise be walking away from the referee as the card is displayed.

#### **100% Misconduct Regardless of Time or Score**

The time of the game and the score of the game should not be considerations when deciding whether to caution or send a player off when the player's actions clearly meet the conditions of a yellow card (reckless) or red card (excessive force and in danger of injuring the opponent). If a foul or act by a player borders between a foul or a caution or if the act borders between a caution or red card, the referee can then consider the "big picture" surrounding the match. The "big picture" includes items like the temperature of the game, the score, the time, and the overall conduct of the player to that point. In the few instances that borderline cases arise, referees should consider asking themselves:

- **Does the player need the card?**

Consideration is given to the player's prior behavior in the game and the intent of the player's act.

- **Does the game need the card?**

Consideration is given to the temperature of the game (the overall atmosphere of the match) to that point. The referee should quickly analyze where the game has been and where it is heading based upon player conduct to that point.

#### **Video Clip 4: Galaxy at Chivas USA (92:40)**

This clip shows a player intent on taking down an opponent who is traveling at a high speed without the ball. The fouler tries to disguise his act so that it would not be recognized by the referee. As one player attempts to chase and track down the opponent with the ball, he is tripped in such a way that he does not know the challenge is coming; hence, he is at risk for a more serious result. The subtle but dangerous trip is done with complete disregard to the danger presented the opponent. It is therefore reckless and must be cautioned.

The fact that the game is in additional time (92:40) should not be a consideration. The fact that the score is tied at 2-2 should not be a consideration.

### Caution Not Needed

Whereas the prior clip provided an example of when a yellow card is required, video clip 5 will provide an example of a foul that does **not** need a caution. The foul in clip 5 below does not warrant a caution as it is not reckless in nature. It is a simple foul that can be characterized as “careless.” “Careless” means that the player committing the foul has shown a lack of attention or consideration when making a challenge and he has acted without precaution.

#### Video Clip 5: Galaxy at Chivas USA (60:00)

The act of holding the opponent is not cautionable by itself. The Laws of the Game require that a player be cautioned for unsporting behavior if they “commit a foul for the tactical purpose of interfering with or breaking up a promising attack.” This foul is not a tactical foul as defined in multiple prior “Weeks In Review.” Start by examining the criteria established in “Week In Review 7” ([click on this link to go to “Week In Review 7”](#)) as it relates to the identification of a tactical foul.

The defender knows he is beat and is fouling to slow the attacker down but it lacks the following tactical elements outlined in “Week In Review 7:”

- **Usually in attacking middle to third of field**

The location of the foul does not make it a strong candidate for a tactical foul. It is in the defensive third of the field only 12 yards or so from the goal line. There is no credible go-to-goal opportunity.

- **Numerical advantage**

Because the foul is committed deep in the defensive third of the field, there is no possible numeric advantage for the attack. There is plenty of time for defending players to get goal side of the ball and the opponent.

- **Prevent the ball and/or player from advancing**

The defender’s foul does not prevent the attack from getting behind the defense or from carrying the ball with speed into open space.

The referee decided that this challenge was cautionable when, in fact, it was a careless foul committed in the defensive third of the field. Consequently, a yellow card was not necessary and a simple foul would suffice for this type of action in this part (defensive third) of the field.

#### **Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO): Misapplication**

Standards have been established and communicated throughout the “Week In Review” publications outlining the requirements for DOGSO. ([click on this link to be taken to “Week In Review 14” for a detailed explanation of DOGSO criteria](#)) The four “D’s” are the standard for which DOGSO should be judged: defenders, direction, distance to goal, and distance to ball. When a situation that may have some of the criteria listed occurs, the referee should not rush to a decision. Instead, the referee should quickly consider the situation and scan the field to determine if the criteria are met. Taking time will ensure better decisions are reached.

#### Video Clip 6: Crystal Palace Baltimore at Charlotte Eagles

In this USL-2 video clip, the goalkeeper is red carded for DOGSO – not the foul. When evaluating the decision, consider the four “D’s.” The most important factors which contribute to this being an incorrect application of DOGSO are defenders and direction. As the challenge is made by the goalkeeper, there are two defenders who have the opportunity to interfere with the attacker’s ability to score. The defender on the left of the attacker is very close and would have the chance to make a challenge for the ball while the defender on the inside will have time to retreat to goal to deny the attacker’s attempt to score. Also consider the direction of the attacker. The attacker sees the goalkeeper coming out to make a challenge and the attacker pushes the ball to his left. This touch by the attacker puts the ball at a poor angle and he is not headed directly to goal. Hence, DOGSO does not exist. Simply, the attacker does not have an **OBVIOUS** goal scoring opportunity.”

The referee may decide that the goalkeeper’s actions are careless and, therefore, cautionable but to send the goalkeeper off for DOGSO or serious foul play would be a misapplication of the Law.

Also notice the manner in which the referee manages the misconduct and the issuance of the card. The time it takes the referee to show the card to the goalkeeper is excessive and, as a result, it looks as though it is being influenced by the team that was fouled. Although it is recommended that officials scan the field to make certain their DOGSO decision contains the four “D’s,” referees should show more decisiveness and timeliness in displaying the appropriate card.

### Substitutes Warming Up

In games where there is a limit on the number of substitutes, players who are warming up must return to their bench once the last substitute is utilized by their team. Since no more changes to the composition of the players on the field are permitted, there is no need for these players to continue warming up. Officials (especially the fourth official) should ensure that once the last substitution is completed, the remaining subs return to the technical area.

Remember, substitutes who are warming up or who are on the team bench must wear a different colored shirt or bib to distinguish them from the players on the field of play. This preventative effort ensures that an AR or the referee does not mistake them for a player on the field. Additionally, subs may not use balls to warm up because these balls could enter the field of play and/or be confused by the officials as a ball on the field. A player who has been substituted out of the game may "cool down" in the area designated for players to warm up.

Subs are not permitted to approach the field or the AR to express their opinions, dissent, or become involved in any interaction with any active player. Substitute players are held to the same standard as players regarding conduct despite being off the field. Refer to "Week In Review 17" for further commentary on substitute players. (***click on this link to access "Week In Review 17"***)

## WEEK 22 FOCUS

### Promote Attacking Play

Referee teams should focus on promoting attacking soccer without endangering the safety of players and without jeopardizing game control. ARs can assist this cause by ensuring the "wait and see" principle is applied as well as ensuring the benefit of doubt is given to the attacking team.

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