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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 22



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 22 – ending August 24, 2008

WEEK 22 OVERVIEW

Nine MLS games were on the slate this past week. Referees continued to have solid performances. For the most part, games were well managed and referees took proactive steps to orchestrate them in a manner that provided a solid stage for players to ply their trade. One of the nine games was played with only seven fouls and no misconduct while another match featured nine cautions, 32 fouls, and a send-off as a result of a player receiving a second yellow card. The seven foul game was a milestone game as it featured the fewest fouls called all season. The nine caution and one send off game was near the top of the misconduct table this season.

Many MLS teams are involved in multiple concurrent competitions that require midweek matches. Additionally, standard team line-ups may have a different look as players get called up for national team duty. Hence, referees need to be aware that certain players and teams may be fatigued and will be required to change their standard game tactics to compensate for the grueling game schedule.

Referees must challenge themselves to increase their influence on the game through solid people management skills by using personality/presence to:

- Prevent the next foul by:
 - Slowing down the tempo of the game
 - Talking to players at appropriate opportunities
 - Using strong but controlled body language
- Influence the future with actions in the present
- Referee for the future not just the moment
- Match and exceed the intensity of the game situation and the moment
- “Draw the line in the sand”
- Send appropriate messages

All of these phrases have meaning for every referee as well as within every game. Think about their meaning and what they mean to you and how they can positively influence your approach to the game. There is not one formula to make these phrases come alive in your game but the successful referee will be able to analyze the phrases and determine the best process for implementing them as part of their game management arsenal.

As the number of games remaining decreases with each passing week, pressures on the players, coaches, and officials will increase. Consequently, personality/presence will become increasingly critical in the context of ensuring player safety and promoting the entertainment value of the games. Prevention should be a driving factor in referee performances over the eight remaining weeks of the regular season; however, referees must not shy away from dealing with 100 percent misconduct situations that may develop.

- *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 22 COMMENTARY

Cautions: Are They Needed?

This topic is a carry over from last week's summary. ([click on this link to access “Week In Review 21”](#)) Referees need to continue to use

discretion in judging whether a foul merits a caution or not. Misconduct recognition and discrimination should be a continuous area of focus. A referee's ability to differentiate the careless challenge from the reckless and/or tactical challenge that requires the issuance of a caution is a critical component for continued success. In response to every misconduct situation, referees do not need to reach for and display a card immediately. At certain times, a calculated and diligent approach to the issuance of a card is best.

By slightly delaying the "card" or "no card" decision, referees give themselves valuable seconds to assess the situation and to consider the action in context of the game and in context of the player who has committed the infraction. During this brief pause, the referee can make eye contact with the ARs and/or fourth official if needed to get their perspective. This almost inconspicuous pause can lead to more thought out decisions versus reactive decisions based upon emotion.

Video Clip 1: New England at Toronto (48:22)

Clip 1 shows good judgment on the part of the referee. The referee correctly decides that the foul is not tactical or reckless. The referee is able to recognize the foul takes place in the defensive half of the field and the dribbler has a defender on each side of him as well as a defender ready to dispossess him of the dribble approximately four yards in advance of him. Consequently, given these factors, a simple free kick is sufficient punishment for the hold.

Risk, Flow, and Game Control

The concept of referees encouraging game flow by not whistling for minor, soft or trifling challenges when the safety of the player is not endangered and when a situation of 100 percent misconduct does not exist should be continually reviewed by officials to ensure they are taking appropriate risks. Appropriate risks are ones that make sense given the location on the field, the type of challenge committed, the opportunity for a successful result from the application of flow, and the eventual impact on game control given the "big picture" of the match. This review must occur not only between games as part of an official's self-analysis but also during the game (in real time or at halftime as part of a referee team review) so that the referee can adjust his approach to the needs/requirements of the match at the time.

Video Clip 2: Houston at New York (32:25)

This clip provides an example of a challenge that is not a good candidate for flow or risk taking. Consider the following:

- **Defender's position**

The defender is pinned deep into his penalty area less than five yards from the goal line. It is very high risk given the proximity to the goal mouth.

- **The direction the defender is facing**

The defender is not facing up field where the space to play the ball is located. Hence, the defender cannot see his options.

- **The position of teammates**

Teammates are not positioned such that they could receive a pass from the marked defender. In other words, there are no outlets or passing options for the player with the ball.

Overall, the referee should make the call on the first challenge/foul as soon as possible thereby eliminating frustration on the part of the player with the ball and the potential for the second challenge leading to escalation. Consideration of the above factors must be made swiftly by the referee. In other cases where the defender has clear and effective options to play the ball to a teammate away from goal, the referee is permitted by the Laws of the Game to hold the whistle for a few seconds to see if an advantage materializes. If it does not, the referee may whistle for the foul and award a free kick.

Assistant Referee Involvement

Assistant referees (ARs) must possess the ability to "feel" the game as the referee is directing it yet they must also be able to sense when the referee needs a bit more help and modify their approach to involvement based upon the needs of the game. Simply, the AR should "fall into the rhythm of the game" as it is being conducted by the referee. This is a fine line but a line that often times defines the qualities of an exceptional AR. "[Week In Review 8](#)" ([Click on the link to access](#)) as well as "[Week In Review 11](#)" ([Click on the link to access](#)) provided ARs with guidelines and questions that should be considered when making a determination on whether to be involved in a decision or not. Review those documents for more information. However, in summary the questions to be asked are:

- **Does the referee have a clear view of the incident and was he positioned correctly?**
- **Did I clearly see the infraction?**

Simply put, ARs should ask themselves: "If I raise the flag, do I interfere with the referee and if I don't raise the flag, do I fail the game?"

The following clips will provide situations in which AR involvement is required due to answers to one or both of the aforementioned questions.

Video Clip 3: Dallas at Kansas City (21:13)

First, this play patterns those found frequently in other MLS games: a long, quick counter attack which often leads to long distances between the referee and the ball or the next phase of play. This is the first sign to the AR that his intervention may be required and his realm of control may be extended. The AR must recognize the referee's position relative to the play as contact is made. Hence, the answer to the first question:

- **Does the referee have a clear view of the incident and was he positioned correctly?**

No. The play is closer to the AR than the referee. Given the long pass out of the defensive end, the referee's sightline, most likely, would be to the backs of the players involved.

The AR must then ask the second question:

- **Did I clearly see the infraction?**

The AR in this clip has an excellent view of the incident. He has the side view which that gives the AR the best possible angle to see the contact and the resulting foul.

So, as the play builds, the AR must anticipate that his participation may be needed (given the long ball and the referee's position) and prepare his position to observe and assist. In this clip, the AR calls the foul **after** the referee whistles the infraction from a long distance. The AR cannot let the referee make this call on his own. Referees should not have to make a decision of this caliber based upon "gut" feel. ARs must take ownership of this and similar critical situations.

In addition to making the correct foul call, the referee also appropriately cautions the defender for unsporting behavior. Not only should the AR have signaled the foul but the AR should feel empowered to signal to the referee that the foul was cautionable. The next clip provides an example of an AR who does just that: assists the referee with the misconduct decision.

Video Clip 4: D.C. United at New England (63:04)

Once again, the two questions governing involvement are relevant. Watch the quick transition and movement of the ball and the players toward the AR – a signal to the AR that he should identify the referee's position as well as heighten his awareness that involvement may be necessary. Additionally, notice how close the foul is to the AR (five to six feet away) as opposed to the referee (approximately 25 yards away).

The AR enhances his support of the referee by also indicating the need for the referee to caution the player for unsporting behavior (reckless challenge in a dangerous area near the signboards). Focus on the AR after he signals the foul. Focus within the highlighted circles and watch as the AR pats his breast pocket with his free hand – the prearranged signal to the referee that offers the AR's silent opinion that the foul requires the player to be cautioned. Notice also how the AR moves toward the two players as they go to the turf. The AR's presence should discourage the players from retaliating.

Overall, a good display of teamwork and involvement starting with the flagging of the foul to the AR's signaling for misconduct.

Offside: Promoting Attacking Play?

The two offside clips and associated AR decisions, from the same game, are critical to the correct application of offside decisions by ARs. The focus for this week as specified in "**Week In Review 21**" was: **Promote Attacking Play.**

In particular, ARs were asked to assist this cause by ensuring the "wait and see" principle was applied before raising the flag as well as ensuring the benefit of doubt was given to the attacking team. This area of focus came on the heels of two fantastic AR decisions that allowed critical goals to stand thereby increasing the entertainment value of the matches in question.

Unfortunately, this week features an incorrect offside decision that disallows a critical goal in a 1-0 match. Albeit a difficult decision, it is a decision that must be made at the professional levels.

In both cases, utilization of the "wait and see" principle and patience will provide the AR with the appropriate framework to make the correct decision.

Remember, the Laws of the Game provide the framework of "involvement in active play" as the determining factor when a player is in an offside position at the time the ball is passed or touched by a teammate. The elements that determine "involvement in active play" are:

- **Interfering with play**

Playing or touching the ball.

- **Interfering with an opponent**

Preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent's line of vision or movements or making a gesture or movement which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts an opponent.

- **Gaining an advantage by being in an offside position**

Playing a ball that rebounds to him off a post or the crossbar having been in an offside position or playing a ball that rebounds to him off an opponent having been in an offside position.

Remember, players are allowed to be in offside positions. But, they are not to be penalized for being offside until one of the above elements occur.

Video Clip 5: New England at Toronto (22:21)

The AR makes a good offside decision because he is able to exercise patience until the play fully unfolds and it becomes clear which player is involved in "active play." Despite the ball seemingly being directed to the player in the offside position awaiting the service at the penalty spot, this player should not be declared offside because he has NOT:

- **Interfered with play:** he has not touched or played the ball. The ball goes over his head and he makes no contact with it.
- **Interfered with an opponent:** he does not prevent an opponent (by obstructing their path) from getting to the ball or from playing the ball nor does he prevent the goalkeeper's line of vision.
- **Gained an advantage from being in an offside position:** the ball does not rebound off the post, crossbar or opponent.

Since none of the three elements have occurred, the AR is correct in allowing play to continue. It is not offside. Notice how a second runner comes through and plays the ball. This is permitted as this runner was in an onside position at the time the ball was played/serviced by his teammate. It is easy for an AR to be tempted to raise the flag as the ball looks like it is headed to the player in the offside position. Restraint and patience are required to get this call correct.

Video Clip 6: New England at Toronto (52:59)

The team with possession of the ball leads the match 1-0. They win possession of the ball on their attacking half and start to goal. Now, put your AR hat on. Before the clip commences, think "wait and see" and think "interfering with play." Play the clip. When it is seen in full motion, what was your impression: offside or not? Goal or no goal?

This is a difficult decision that requires the AR to possess attributes of patience and assessment. Patience to see the end result of all of the attacking players' actions before making a decision. Assessment in order to observe the potential options (whether they play out or not) of the looping touch behind the defense by the rushing attacker.

As with clip 5 above, applying the three elements of "involvement in active play" make the decision easier to understand:

- **Interfered with play:** the player in the offside position does NOT interfere with play as he NEVER touches or plays the ball. An offside player may make a run/movement toward a passed/touched ball but until he touches/plays the ball, he cannot be declared offside **unless** the referee/AR determines that there is a potential collision or injury situation that may result from allowing play to continue too long.
- **Interfered with an opponent:** an opponent is **not** hampered or prevented from playing the ball by the offside positioned player. There is no contact or obstructing of the path of the defenders. The fact that the defenders stop their run to the ball, awaiting the offside decision, should not be a consideration as they have not been "interfered with" by an opponent.
- **Gained an advantage from being in an offside position:** the ball does not rebound off the post, crossbar or opponent.

Ultimately, the original attacker should be considered to have **played the ball to himself**. It was a long touch followed by a long run, resulting in a shot and a goal. Therefore, given the analysis above, offside did NOT exist and play should have been allowed to go uninterrupted.

This decision is complicated by the movement of the offside player toward the ball, the time it takes for the original attacker to regain possession of the ball, and the fact that the defenders stop their runs and raise their hands begging for offside. ARs are **not permitted** to consider these actions in their decision as they are not factors in the three elements of "involvement in active play."

Lastly, the referee and AR can consider the possibility of a collision with the goalkeeper but it is clear, in this case, that the distance between the ball/play and the keeper are great enough to eliminate such a possibility and the need for a quick flag.

This example is the embodiment of the "wait and see" principle. With so many factors transpiring at once, the successful AR will show restraint and will wait to observe the results of the players' actions prior to making a decision.

Managing the Technical Area: A Positive Approach

As the season enters the final nine or ten games per team, emotions will rise not only for the players but for the coaching staffs as well. Teams are fighting for one of the eight playoff positions. Hence, every decision will be scrutinized much further. At times it will seem that every whistle is questioned.

Much has been said about managing the technical areas throughout the season. The "Ask, Tell, Remove" strategy was introduced in "Week In Review 11." Additionally, on June 12, 2008, U.S. Soccer issued a position paper, "**2008 Fourth Official Guidelines**" providing further details of the processes associated with managing individuals within the technical areas.

In dealing with bench personnel, it has always been recommended that officials take a positive, professional, and calm approach to interaction and for moving along the "Ask, Tell, Remove" continuum. Below is an excerpt from a fourth official's self-evaluation after working a difficult match. The process utilized by the fourth official is a model for every official. It contains all the elements of professionalism – a calm, positive, and humorous solution to a confrontation. In other words, the fourth official was able to turn a potentially explosive situation into one in which there was mutual respect and a mutual understanding. Think about how you can use your personality and experience to create a similar environment. The fourth official's response uses eye contact, body language, humor, and indirectly incorporates the "Ask" technique.

"With respect to the team's bench, my moment of truth as fourth official came approximately 15 minutes into the game. The head coach was upset with a decision not to caution an opponent and then for a decision to caution his player for a foul on the same opponent who was not cautioned. In expressing his displeasure, the head coach directed some inappropriate language at the referee in a loud voice. I immediately turned to the coach with a raised hand and established eye contact. As I explained that the language would not be tolerated, he vented that 'our [playoff] lives are at stake.' I have a established a good relationship with him since he joined the league, so I told him that I understood what was at stake and made a few self-deprecating remarks about me not making the playoffs either. A few minutes later, he approached me, patted me on the shoulder, apologized for his outburst and indicated that he would control himself the rest of the match, which he did."

WEEK 23 FOCUS

Continuing to Challenge Ourselves

Referees, assistant referees, and fourth officials should take this week to re-challenge themselves. Take the time to refocus and work on the things that have been laid out in your assessments. Ask yourself, "Am I making the adjustments needed?" and "What positive changes can I make to my performance as I head in to the last nine weeks of the regular season?"

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