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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 23



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 23 – ending August 31, 2008

WEEK 23 OVERVIEW

Week 23 was a strong week for referees and assistant referees. Solid performances were the standard as referee teams conducted the games according to the spirit of the Laws and with the authority needed to keep competitive contests under control yet entertaining. Due to the battle for playoff positions, many teams are now pressing for victories when, in the past, ties would have sufficed. The two point differential between one point for a tie and the three points for a victory is more crucial than ever.

Assistant referees (ARs) are being called upon to make many more offside decisions. As pointed out in several of the recent "Week In Reviews," these decisions carry more meaning given the importance of late season wins. Week 23 had one MLS match-up that featured 12 offside decisions that were recognized by the referee team. A number that does not include the other "no-calls" the ARs were required to make in a split second.

It is important to note that 16 of the 25 cautions (64 percent) issued during the week occurred in the second half of the game, once again pointing to the fact that officiating crews cannot let their guard down regardless of the score, the time of the game, and the overall tone/environment/temperament of the game to that point. Officials must "expect the unexpected" and not get too comfortable. As one coach said last week to the fourth official: "our [playoff] lives are at stake." This statement alone carries a big message that must resonate in referee team performances for the balance of the season and the playoffs.

- *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 23 COMMENTARY

Game Management: A Proactive Approach

Prevention, anticipation, influence: critical words that should guide game officials in their management approach to games at all levels. The overview in last week's "Week In Review 22" ([click on the link to access](#)) provided officials with food-for-thought relative to player management philosophy and establishing presence during the game. This week, two examples of preventative, anticipatory and proactive refereeing will be provided.

Video Clip 1: Columbus at Dallas (38:46)

Clip 1 provides a good example of a referee who takes preventative action with the hopes of being able to influence positive action on the part of the players during the taking of a corner kick. Corner kicks are rife with holding (shirt and body), shoving, and aggressive body contact due to the congested posturing of defending and attacking players. Elbows can result from players jockeying for position. Referees and ARs must pay particular attention to these moments and assume a proactive role to prevent any holding which can escalate to elbowing (striking) thereby preventing the need to award a penalty kick and the need to send a player off. Hence, "presence" on the part of the referee is a necessity to prevent escalation.

In this clip, watch the positive action taken by the referee and the AR. As the clip is viewed, note the following:

- **The referee whistles prior to the corner kick being taken**

Once the referee senses too much body contact is occurring and anticipates that such contact could lead to a game control issue, the referee whistles to stop the taking of the corner kick.

- **AR steps in front of the ball**

When the corner kick is taken in front of the AR, upon the referee's signal to hold play, the AR should immediately step in front of the ball to prevent it from being taken as the referee is dealing with the players in the penalty area. Once the referee signals for the corner kick to be taken, the AR can return to his standard position.

- **The referee moves to address the players**

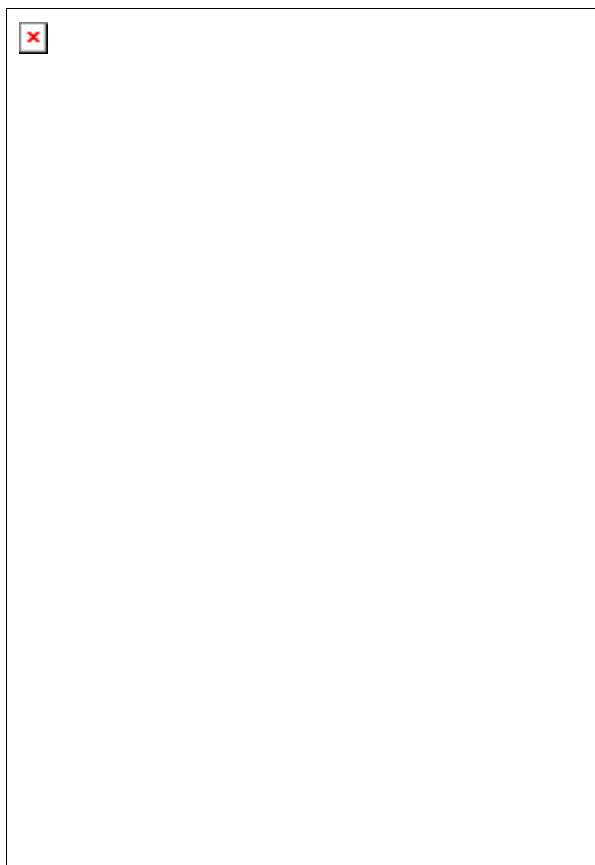
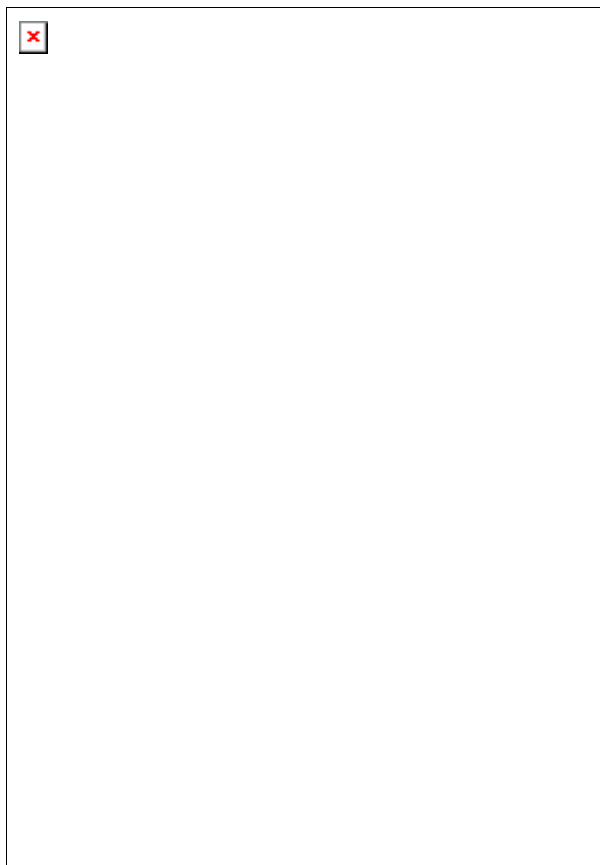
Once play has been held up, the referee moves into the penalty area and addresses the players. He has now made his presence known and sends a preventative message: "I am aware and I am watching. I will deal with it."

- **The referee takes a strategic position for the restart**

Once the referee has conveyed his message in a manner that will influence the players' future actions, he should take an optimum position that permits him to best observe whether the message has been received appropriately. Note: it may be beneficial to continue to talk to the players (from the restart position) as a preventive measure. Talking will extend the referee's presence and reinforce the message that the referee has just delivered visually.

Remember, the referee must be flexible in his position so as to ensure he has view of all players, including those making runs from wide positions. Once the corner kick is serviced, the referee should not stand flat footed. The referee should move with the play and the players so that he always maintains the best possible view of the "drop zone" or the "hot spot."

Refer to the two diagrams below for recommended positioning on corner kicks based upon the side the kick is being taken. Notice that the referee has flexibility to decide the "optimum position" but the referee should ensure that all players, including those making runs into position, are in clear view and do not start their runs outside of the referee's clear purview. Refer to U.S. Soccer's 2008/2009 publication entitled, "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" for a more detailed examination of positioning. ([***click on this link to access the "Guide"***](#))



Video Clip 2: Columbus at Dallas (33:38)

The work of the referee in this clip provides another example of the referee anticipating a potential conflict and taking preventive action by

exerting his presence through urgency in action/movement. This is a seemingly harmless foul – a foul that arises in most games. However, the foul has several warning signs that it may invoke further action on the part of the players if not handled appropriately by the referee. What are the signs?

- Vicinity to the touchline and sign board area
- One or more of the players are on the ground
- Players are entangled, intertwined which may lead to additional contact

Upon recognizing the warning signs, the referee sprints to the spot of the foul in anticipation of potential further action on the part of the players. Once he proactively arrives at the spot, the referee is able to react positively to the friendly nature of the exchange between the players (notice the smile on the referee's and player's faces). However, if the player reaction was negative/confrontational, the referee's anticipatory actions would have acted as the first step in diffusing the conflict.

By sprinting to the spot of the foul, the referee did a good job of being prepared for the worst outcome (player confrontation). The referee's actions are a visible signal that he was "prepared for the unexpected" and that he felt that his presence would be able to positively "influence the outcome."

Managing the Technical Area: Positive Referee Intervention

Too often referees leave the burden of managing the technical area solely on the fourth official. This puts the fourth official in a difficult position because they do not want to "ruin the referee's game" by having a person in the technical area removed. Plus, the referee's word carries more weight with players, coaches, and technical area personnel. It is important to note, ultimately, **therefore owns the behavior/conduct in the technical area not the fourth official.**

Consequently, referees need to take more ownership of (including the recognition of) conduct in the technical area. Referees cannot ignore comments and leave the "dirty work" to the fourth official. In this clip, the referee takes ownership and assumes responsibility for actions off the field. The strongest preventative message that can be conveyed using the "Ask, Tell, Remove" strategy that was first outlined in "Week In Review 11" comes from the referee – the person who ultimately enacts any official action including dismissal.

Video Clip 3: Colorado at Real Salt Lake (32:52)

This clip illustrates a referee who takes action when he hears dissension from a team bench and sees several of the personnel within the technical area get up to express their dissatisfaction. The referee shows **ownership** by holding up play to positively address the head coach relative to the behavior of the coach's bench personnel. Notice the referee's demeanor as he approaches and communicates with the coach: controlled, calm, professional, and confident. All in all, the referee has created a non-threatening environment to communicate his message.

The referee approaches the head coach in order to "ask" him to "tell his staff to stop complaining." As you can see in the clip, the coach responds and agreement is reached. **A professional approach on the part of the referee precipitates a like professional response from the coach.** The presence of the fourth official is also worth noting as it adds reinforcement and shows that the fourth official was also aware of the behavior. The fourth official should feel empowered to also use preventative measures in dealing with the coach and the rest of the technical area staff.

Mass Confrontation Towards Opponents

At this point in the season, certain aspects of the game should be handled uniformly based upon the direction provided by U.S. Soccer. A recurring theme is the mismanagement of "mass confrontation" despite it being addressed in seven prior "Week In Reviews." In "Week In Review 10" the idea of forming a "triangle of patrol" to manage situations involving mass confrontation was introduced. The "triangle of patrol" was further examined in "Week In Review 15."

Remember, "mass confrontation towards opponents by multiple opposing players" is defined in "Week In Review 10" as:

- Involving a swarm of opposing players exhibiting aggressive behavior toward each other. Physical contact is often a by-product of the acts. Intimidation and a source of strength are trademarks.

Often times, "game disrepute" (two opposing players going at each other in an aggressive manner) if not handled immediately will translate into "mass confrontation." Hence, referees must act quickly to intervene and prevent "game disrepute" from escalating to a situation of mass confrontation which is much more volatile and difficult to manage.

This raises an important question:

When should the referee team form the "Triangle Of Patrol" introduced in Week 10?

Referee teams must recognize the flash points and if the quick and direct intervention of one of the officials does not diffuse the situation, then intervention of additional officials is required as is the forming of the "triangle of patrol." Prior to intervention, officials must evaluate whether the initial efforts of the single official are succeeding or whether the situation is deteriorating. Some of the warning signs or flash points that the "triangle of control" should be formed are:

- An increase in aggressive behavior. Look for excessive body contact and situations involving violent conduct. The temperament of the players is a key signal here.
- Continued escalation in terms of the number of players involved in the situation.
- The situation has escalated in a manner that it is no longer manageable by a single official. The initial effort by the single official was not effective in diffusing and the conflict continues to escalate.
- The safety of an official is jeopardized.

Based upon these warning signs as well as how officials “feel” and “read” the situation, the referee team must make solid judgments relative to their participation and eventual forming of the “triangle of patrol.”

Video Clip 4: Charleston at Miami

Let's use the “Week In Review 10” guidelines that were provided to streamline the process utilized to manage mass confrontation to analyze this clip from a USL-1 match:

- **Caused by a trigger issue:** typically follows an issue or foul that is sensitive to players like a hard foul in front of the bench or a foul where the safety of a player is endangered.

In this case, the trigger is the deliberate kicking of the ball into the opponent who is on the ground.

- **Recognize the trigger issue:** officials must immediately recognize the flash point or trigger issue. Failure to recognize or a slow response by the referee will usually result in further escalation.

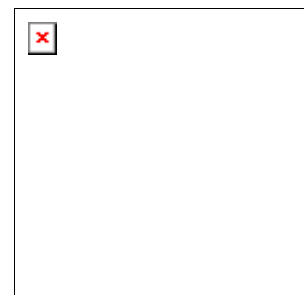
The referee fails to recognize the flash point (the action of kicking the ball into the opponent). The fact that the player kicks the ball so late (after the original foul is whistled) and the fact that the ball is hit directly at the opponent when there is so much other free space to kick the ball should alert the referee to the seriousness and deliberateness of the offense. The referee has no urgency in his reaction or his ability to recognize the potential for escalation. Whenever a player deliberately kicks a ball into or at an opponent, the referee must recognize this as a flash point due to the seriousness of the offense.

- **Get there to diffuse:** once game disrepute amongst opponents arises, a member of the referee team must get there immediately to prevent escalation. For each step the referee is late, one more player is allowed to participate.

In this case, the referee is closest to the situation and he must establish his presence. The referee fails to exhibit urgency after the first foul let alone after the player kicks the ball into the opponent on the ground. As a consequence, what may have been managed as game disrepute turns into mass confrontation. Note: after the ball is kicked into the opponent, in addition to sprinting to the situation, the displaying of a quick red card (for violent conduct to the player kicking the ball into the opponent) may aid in signaling to the players that the referee is taking action and prevent escalation.

- **Separate and disperse:** the first official on the scene should work to carefully separate the immediate players. The other officials should prepare themselves to intervene based upon their “feel” and “read” of the situation and the warning signs noted above. The two assistant referees should also take a clear vantage point to observe the actions of the players while the fourth official maintains his position and monitors the bench area. This procedure forms a triangle around the confrontation and provides a process to monitor the situation and gather information.

First and foremost, remember, once the situation escalates to mass confrontation and is unmanageable for a single official (based upon the warning signs noted above), the entire referee crew should step back and observe. At this point, do not attempt to separate players. Stay close while taking notes. In this video clip, the “triangle of patrol” around the situation was not correctly implemented by the referee team. First, AR1 (the bench side AR) gets overly involved in separating players and, in fact, can be seen turning his back to the hot spot. Second, AR2 (far side assistant) comes in too slow. Like the referee, he must show more urgency. Once the situation escalates from game disrepute to mass confrontation, AR2 should immediately sprint in to form the triangle. Additionally, AR2 separates players (resulting in his back being turned to the bigger situation) instead of standing back and observing one or more of the hot spots. Lastly, the fourth official does a good job preventing bench personnel from entering the field and joining the fracas.



- **Prevent others from joining in and observe:** all four officials should not focus on the same hot spot or become too involved in gaining control of the situation. As stated above, form a triangle around the situation, observe, and make notes (mental and otherwise). Look for positive ways to prevent other players from joining in as these players often add “fuel to the fire;” however, this must be done in a way that does not take focus off the main instigators.

A broad perspective is crucial to success. When officials are too close to the situation, they miss many of the actions for which players must be held accountable. In this clip, the ARs are too involved separating players and managing the fringe. The ARs need to step further back and create a more acute angle of vision.

- **Consult and dispense the appropriate misconduct:** once the situation is under control and players have been channeled to safe zones, the referee team must quickly dispense the appropriate misconduct. The referee should ensure he has solicited the input of the other officials prior to taking action. Violent conduct should be the first line of focus.

Because the officials were too involved in the scenario and too close, they miss critical components and miss the worst offenders. The

improper forming of the “triangle of patrol” and the improper handling of the event leads to misconduct being handled incorrectly. As you watch the clip, look for the player on the red team who slaps at the face of an opponent. The referee team must be in position to identify this and any similar action as violent conduct. Note: the player who deliberately kicks the ball into the opponent on the ground must be sent off for violent conduct.

Offside: Gaining an Advantage

One of the methods a player in an offside position can be involved in active play and penalized for being offside is by:

- **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.

Of the three elements of involvement in active play, this is the least frequent. Normally, ARs are required to base offside decisions on: interfering with play or interfering with an opponent.

Deciding offside based upon “gaining an advantage by being in an offside position” is difficult. The difficulty arises due to the fact the ball often changes directions, the AR not anticipating the rebound at the time the ball was played by the attacking team, and the fact that there are normally several attacking players (some onside and some in offside positions) crashing the goal who have the opportunity to play the ball.

Video Clip 5: Colorado at Real Salt Lake (51:55)

The AR makes a courageous and correct decision to disallow the goal as the goal scorer “gained an advantage from being in an offside position.” At the time of the original shot, the AR decided that the goal scorer was in an offside position. At this time, the AR should take a snapshot of player positions and store that picture for future reference if needed – which occurred in this case. As soon as the first shot is taken, the AR must change his focus to following the ball to the goal line but must not lose the snapshot taken at the time of the shot. Once the ball rebounds off the goalkeeper, the AR must then recall the snapshot and “wait and see” which attacker now plays the ball: the more central onside attacker or the wide attacker in the offside position?

Once the wide attacker, in the offside position, plays the ball after it rebounds off the goalkeeper (the opponent), he should be judged to have “gained an advantage.” The last freeze frame view of the clip is needed to fully appreciate the accuracy of the AR’s decision as it shows (with the aid of the football lines) that the supposed goal scorer was in an offside position at the time of the original shot. A world-class decision by the AR.

Remember, ARs must take a snap shot/picture each time an attacker plays the ball. The picture must be stored in the AR’s databank until that phase of play is over (for example, until another attacker touches or plays the ball). It is often difficult to maintain that databank given the time it takes for the next phase of play to be realized. Hence, successful ARs must fully concentrate and must possess the ability to stay focused and possess the ability to keep clear pictures over extended periods of time while under pressure.

WEEK 24 FOCUS

Getting the Most Out of a Decision

Referees should focus on using personality and presence to “sell” decisions in a manner that positively demonstrates the referee’s position. Just showing the card is not the solution for all misconduct situations. Additionally, referees need to concentrate on doing more than just blowing the whistle on hard challenges. Official’s actions and body language need to send appropriate messages by using management skills thereby ensuring the messages exceed the intensity level of the game and the situation. Remember, the referee’s use of personality, presence, and body language must be professional, controlled, and convey a definitive message without showboating.

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