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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 24



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 24 – ending September 7, 2008

WEEK 24 OVERVIEW

Week 24 was unusual in that, despite the playoff push and the associated intensity of the games, referees maintained the objective of providing the stage for game flow through calculated risk taking without permitting challenges of excessive force that might endanger the safety of the players. With an average of 22 fouls called per game, referees orchestrated games with minimal unnecessary stoppages thereby contributing to the enjoyment for players and spectators alike.

The number of yellow cards issued was also minimal. On average, 1.57 yellow cards were issued per contest. This is down significantly from the average of over 2.5 cards per game in recent weeks. For the most part, this past week's low number of cautions was accomplished following the 100 percent misconduct edict that has been outlined in virtually every "Week In Review." In other words, referee teams did not over manage games resulting in clear misconduct situations being ignored.

Over reliance on personality and presence to manage games during the playoff drive can be tempting for referees. However, referees must consistently review every challenge in the context of the 100 percent misconduct training. Despite the temptation of playoff pressures, officials cannot hide behind personality nor use personality as an excuse when situations arise that fall under the context of misconduct (reckless, use of excessive force, endangering the safety of an opponent).

- *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 24 COMMENTARY

Contact Above the Shoulder: Red Card Challenges

Ten weeks ago, in "Week In Review 14," an extensive discussion involving deliberate contact above the shoulder was provided. This discussion supplemented the guidelines provided officials in "Week In Review 8" relative to the identification of and dealing with elbows and contact initiated by a player above the shoulders of an opponent (normally in the face area).

Players continue to use their arms and elbows (often times swinging them) when making aerial challenges. In the context of **F-I-R-E**, such challenges often result in direct contact with an opponent's face/head and possible injury. Referee crews must be on constant outlook for such violent challenges as they endanger the opponent's safety and must be dealt with as violent conduct and a red card issued. In "Week In Review 8," the acronym **F-I-R-E** was provided to assist officials with the identification of elbows that should be defined as red cardable offenses (violent conduct):

- **Frustration**
- **Intimidation**
- **Retaliation (payback)**
- **Establish Territory or Space**

Video Clip 1: Chivas USA at Toronto (45:00+)

During additional time of the first half, off a long and high clearance by the goalkeeper, two opposing players jump to head the ball. As they go up, one player swings his arm out, away from his body and contacts the opponent in the face. The initial contact by this player is caused by an aggressive and deliberate swing of the arm. This deliberate arm swing is intended to “establish territory or space” as noted above in the F-I-R-E criteria above. Hence, the referee should issue a red card for violent conduct.

Upon observing the player’s action/challenge, the referee must immediately ask himself, “Why did the player have his straight arm extended so far out and why did he swing it?” In this situation, the referee determined it was to “establish territory or space” to win the header and to intimidate the opponent by preventing him from a full, fair aerial challenge.

After the initial arm swing and contact, the player on the receiving end of the elbow, retaliates by striking an opponent. The referee has no choice but to also send this player off for violent conduct (striking). This elbow and forearm swing also meets the criteria of F-I-R-E in that it is done in “frustration” and as “retaliation (payback)” for the initial player’s action.

It is interesting to note the referee’s perspective and view of the situation as it transpired:

“The first indicator to me regarding the first contact was the distance the player was from his opponent with his straight arm sticking out. The first elbowed player’s reaction and retaliation was immediate and then he grabbed his face”

Overall, the referee correctly applied the Laws of the Game and issued two red cards. Remember, retaliation is not permitted regardless of the severity of the first offence and the referee must also deal with any form of retaliation by players that is a cautionable or red cardable offence.

Handling the Ball

Handling the ball is seemingly an obvious infraction yet it invokes much debate amongst referees, players, coaches, and spectators. “Week In Review 19” ([click on this link to access](#)) examined this difficult decision and provided the following framework to assist officials with correctly and consistently applying the Laws of the Game:

- **Making yourself bigger**
- **Is the arm or hand in an “unnatural position?”**
- **Hand to ball**
- **Distance**

Review the content of “[Week In Review 19](#)” as you examine the following clip and decide how the criteria applies.

Video Clip 2: Kansas City at Houston (86:01)

This example of handling the ball is a difficult one for officials – difficult because it is not only hard to identify/see but also because it happens so quickly. The clip may need to be watched several times to clearly see the handling offense (even more reason why the call is a difficult one for the referee).

The attacker is able to use his arm/hand to control the ball (bring the ball down) and gain an advantage by doing so. By “making himself bigger,” the attacker has gained an advantage over the defender resulting in his being able to get off a shot and score. Referees must consider that the advantage gained by the attacker so close to the goal is unfair and that the position of the arm contributes to the unfair advantage. The player’s arm is extended from his body and he does not attempt to move the arm out of the way of the ball; hence, he has “made himself bigger” in order to control the ball and attempt a shot. Watch how the attacker even uses the arm to nudge the opponent away just prior to handling the ball. This was an attempt by the attacker to “make himself bigger” so that he could control the ball once it reached him. Given the Spirit of the Game, the referee is within his rights to disallow the goal and award a free kick to the defending team for handling the ball.

Offside: Benefit of Doubt to the Attack

Giving the benefit of doubt to the attack on close offside decisions continues to be a theme at all levels of instruction in the United States. In order to correctly give the benefit to attacking soccer, assistant referees (ARs) are being instructed to utilize the “wait and see principle” in deciding whether to raise the flag for offside or not.

“Giving the benefit of doubt to the attack” guides ARs on close offside decisions where uncertainty regarding offside/onside position exists. The guidance empowers ARs to keep the flag down in situations where they are not 100 percent certain a player who either interferes with play, interferes with an opponent, or gains an advantage was actually in an offside position at the time the ball was played/touched by a teammate.

ARs are encouraged to apply the concept of “giving the benefit of doubt to the attack” when there is any doubt or question as to whether a

player should be declared offside. Simply, ARs should err on the side of attacking play when they are uncertain.

Video Clip 3: New England at Columbus (66:30)

This is a very close offside decision. At question in this video clip is the position of the attacker who eventually scores the goal: was this player even with or ahead of the second to last defender at the time the ball was played by his teammate? Remember, the Laws of the Game state:

- “A player is **in** an offside position if: he is nearer to his opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent;” and
- “A player is **not** in an offside position if: he is level with the second last opponent.”

In addition, the Laws define “nearer to his opponents’ goal line” as meaning:

- “Any part of a player’s head, body or feet is nearer to his opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent. The arms are not included in this definition.”

The reason the “arms are not included” in the definition is because a player cannot score a goal with the arms and, therefore, if the arms are nearer the goal line, there is no advantage gained by the attacker.

Considering the aforementioned statements in the Laws of the Game, the AR must make a split second decision to determine if the furthest attacker is “nearer to the opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent.” In evaluating the video clip, it is not clear that the attacker is “nearer” at the moment the ball is played by his teammate. Consequently, the fact that it is not clear means that “doubt” exists and the AR – as he has done in the clip – must then give the benefit of the play to the attacking team.

Officials, particularly ARs, cannot be influenced by the defender’s actions: hands up appealing for offside, stopping their chase of the ball, and verbal appeals for offside. The offside decision must be made based upon the facts at hand. Notice the position of the AR and the referee. First, the AR is directly in line with the second to last defender and therefore is able to make the best possible decision regarding offside/onside position. Second, the referee has done a good job of staying close to play on the counter attack and positioning himself wide enough to have a good view of the attacking player positions and actions in the event he was required to make a decision on “interfering with play or with an opponent.”

Penalty Kick

Referees must be acutely aware of any challenges in and near the penalty area. Decisions of penalty kick or no penalty kick are often controversial and can influence the outcome of the match. Consequently, referees and ARs must possess heightened awareness as the ball approaches or enters the penalty area. Additionally, referees must ensure they are positioned as close to play as possible in order to make the correct decision.

This season, there have been multiple instances where the referee relaxes on long services and does not follow the projection of the ball into the area with enough urgency, speed, and acceleration. The result is often poor positioning because the referee is too far from play as well as possible incorrect decisions due to poor vision.

Referees **MUST NOT** relax on balls that have the opportunity or chance to result in challenges in and around the penalty area. Long counter attack passes, long punts from the goalkeeper, long free kick services, and long goal kicks are all examples of situations in which the referee cannot “take for granted” the end result. Referees cannot assume that the ball will go unchallenged or that the ball will go directly to the opposing goalkeeper. When the referee sees that a ball is headed toward the penalty area, the referee should assume/anticipate that there will be a challenge and quickly move to a strategic position in order to judge the potential challenge. Simply, this is **NOT** a time to relax.

Concurrently, ARs must be prepared to assist the referee in these so-called long ball situations. The AR must know that it will take time for the referee to close down the play and that, for a brief moment, the AR may be better positioned to make a decision on any resulting challenge. Based upon the pregame instructions agreed to by the referee team, when the AR observes a situation that is a certain foul and that is a critical decision, the AR should provide information to the referee that they have observed a foul. This information may be communicated (based upon pregame instructions) by a wave of the flag, use of beeper flags (if available), or some other signal that is effective but simple.

“Week In Review 8” first addressed the situation of AR involvement in critical game decisions where the AR is 100 percent certain that a foul has occurred. This commentary was followed up in “Week In Review 11” with further discussion and examples of ARs being empowered to make critical game decisions.

Video Clip 4: Chivas USA at Toronto (39:10)

This clip illustrates where teamwork and extra urgency in the referee’s position can help ensure that the correct decision is reached on a challenge that occurs in the penalty area. Key factors to consider when evaluating this clip are:

- The long free kick traveling approximately three quarters of the field.

- The free kick goes to the head of an attacker. When officials see a lone forward going up for a header from a long pass, this is a sign that the forward will look to head or flick the ball onto a teammate running behind him to goal.
- There is a lone attacker running behind the teammate heading the ball. This player will attempt to pressure and/or win the ball. If he can't win the ball, he can pressure the opponent into giving the ball up in the defensive third.

When these or similar circumstances exist, officials should consider the following:

- Referee

Move with speed to the next phase of play. Read the situation described above and move as quickly as possible to judge the next phase of play. The referee cannot stand and observe. The referee must anticipate and move out of the center circle and into the attacking third at a wider angle that enables him to have a better view of play.

- Assistant Referee

Be prepared to assist. Visually determine the referee's position relative to play. Based upon the referee's distance from play and angle of vision, the AR must assume responsibility for deciding whether a foul has occurred as well as the location of the foul.

In this clip, a foul exists: the defender holds the attacker and prevents him from having a clear challenge for the ball that has entered the penalty area. The defender is beat as the attacker has run past him and the attacker has a positional advantage. This positional advantage is the reason the defender holds the attacker preventing him from advancing to the ball. Not only does a foul exist but the foul has been committed in the penalty area and should result in a penalty kick being awarded.

Denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity does not exist as the attacker does not have possession of the ball and, even without the holding, the goalkeeper has the opportunity to arrive at the ball before or at the same time as the fouled attacker. The referee may, however, decide that the defender's action is tactical in nature and decide that the defender should be cautioned for unsporting behavior.

If the referee were to have made the foul call, the AR should provide the referee with assistance regarding the location of the foul as the foul occurs just slightly inside the penalty area. As soon as the referee whistles the foul, the AR should drape the flag across his waist (mimicking the substitution signal but across the waist) as an indication to the referee that the foul was inside the penalty area and should result in a penalty kick.

WEEK 25 FOCUS

Assistant Referee Participation: The Critical Call

ARs should review the parameters that empower them to participate in making critical decisions. In the pregame preparation meetings, ARs and referees should review, discuss, and agree upon the: methods for participation and the situations that require AR participation. Discussions like this help to create visual pictures and points of reference for officials especially regarding situations that do not commonly occur in the game.

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