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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 25



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 25 – ending September 14, 2008

WEEK 25 OVERVIEW

Exciting, attacking and competitive games challenged every referee working MLS games this past week. With seven games being contested, each MLS team had the opportunity to improve their position in the standings. As has been the case all season, there is a tight race for the eight playoff positions. Despite only six weeks of games remaining, every team can still claim to be in the playoff hunt. As the end of the season draws near, each game will increase in importance for teams at the bottom of the table.

Over the past several weeks an alarming and apparent increase in the incidence of elbows has returned to the game. There have been multiple challenges involving elbows and forearms to a player's head or face. In several instances, referee teams have failed to correctly identify the challenge as serious foul play or violent conduct. In those instances, referees failed to sanction the fact that the aerial challenges were executed with excessive force and performed in a manner that endangered the safety of the opponent (potential for player injury). In fact, several of these unsanctioned aerial challenges have led to injuries. Just this past week, there were three such aerial challenges that should have resulted in red cards but went unpunished by referees.

Referees must increase their awareness of the potential for injury resulting from unfair aerial challenges. More consistency in application and sanctioning needs to be addressed so that this disturbing trend can be eliminated.

- *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 25 COMMENTARY

Aerial Challenges: Forearms and Elbows

After reviewing the three "Week In Review" above, examine the three clips that follow. There are two examples of aerial challenges that should have resulted in red cards due to two factors: (1) they were executed with disregard to the opponent's safety; and (2) the way they were initiated, with the forearm contacting the opponent's face/head with excessive force.

Referees should consider the following when evaluating aerial challenges:

- Does the player **lead** with the forearm and/or elbow as he jumps at or toward the opponent instead of straight up? An **arm extended** from the jumper's body is like a battering ram (solid, hard and unforgiving). Think "up and in" toward the opponent.
- Is the aerial challenge done in such a manner whereby there is disregard to **the safety of the opponent**? When a solid, extended arm makes contact with a player's face (soft tissue), the player's safety is endangered. The referee needs to take into consideration the safety or well being of the opponent. The fact that the facial/head region is involved should be a signal to the referee that the safety of the opponent is jeopardized.
- The **result** of the forearm and/or elbow contact, not just whether the player swung his arm/elbow to make contact.

Do not focus solely on the swinging of the arm. Referees need to modify their approach and consider the three factors above. By including these factors in the decision, officials will be better prepared to take the appropriate action.

Referees must take optimal and strategic positions as they anticipate aerial challenges. The position should permit the referee to have an unobstructed view of the challenge and, in particular, of any resulting arm, forearm or elbow contact. Often times, the side view provides the referee with the best perspective.

Video Clip 1: Houston at San Jose (38:00)

Following the criteria above, this aerial challenge should be sanctioned as serious foul play and a red card issued. As the replay unfolds, note the following:

- **Does the player lead with the forearm and/or is the arm extended from the jumper's body?**

The jumper leaps "up and in" to the opponent. The arm is extended out and he jumps into the opponent leading with the forearm. Carefully watch how the arm is also moving forward.

- **Is the safety of the opponent endangered?**

The solid forearm of the jumper strikes the face of the opponent. The jumper needs to consider the consequences of putting his arm in that position and the potential result of his solid, extended arm making contact with the soft tissue of the opponent's face. The jumper must consider the opponent's safety as he executes his aerial challenge.

- **The result of the contact**

The result of the challenge is contact to the opponent's head/face.

Video Clip 2: Real Salt Lake at New York (86:00)

Similar to clip 1, the jumper extends his arm toward the opponent. This time, the arm involves more "swing" as the opponent is challenging from the side and the jumper leads and swings his arm toward the direction his opponent is coming. The result is contact with the opponent's face and an injury. This challenge should be considered serious foul play and the referee should send the player off.

Video Clip 3: Chicago at Colorado (10:08 – second half)

This clip shows correct judgment on the part of the officiating team to only caution the defender for unsporting behavior. Although the defender slows the attacker down by swinging his forearm toward the opponent, the key factor is where the contact is made. In this case, the contact is below the shoulders in the chest and shoulder blade area. Although the attacker's actions seem to indicate that he was struck in the face, the referees, based upon their position and view of the play, interpret the contact was below the shoulders and outside the facial area. The referees felt that the safety of the opponent was not endangered as the foul was reckless and tactical in nature and not a red card offense. Note: If the referee deemed that contact was made above the shoulders in the facial region, the referee would have been correct to give the defender a red card for serious foul play.

Given the proximity of the challenge to the AR (assistant referee), the AR should feel obligated to provide assistance to the referee in managing the situation and in deciding whether the foul was a yellow or red card. On this foul, the AR may have a better view of the actual contact area than the referee as he is closer and can see the front of the players as they approach him down the touchline. The referee, on the other hand, will have a side or trailing view. At 10:18 on the clip, you can see the AR using the prearranged "silent signal" (touching his breast pocket) to tell the referee that the foul was cautionable. The referee crew should be commended for the teamwork utilized to get this decision correct.

Also of note is the presence and personality the referee uses in dealing with the defender and issuing the yellow card. First, watch as he exhibits urgency in sprinting toward the defender after he whistles for the foul. This establishes his presence and immediately defuses the situation and the potential reaction from the opposing team. Second, watch how the referee deals with the cautioned player. The referee uses personality to calmly interact and get his message across. The players around the ball also respond positively as they sense the referee is in control of the situation. All in all, the referee has sent an appropriate message.

Video Clip 4: Real Salt Lake at New York (14:15)

This clip provides more of a challenge to officials. However, this is an example of a fair aerial challenge where no misconduct action on the part of the referee is warranted. Notice that there seems to be no contact with the opponent's face/head by either player; hence, the safety of neither player is in danger. Plus, both players are jumping with their backs to each other and did not jump "up and in" leading with their arms. The referee is well positioned to view the contact and to make the appropriate decision.

Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO)

Beginning with "Week In Review 14" standards for evaluating fouls that could be classified as "denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity" (DOGSO) were provided. As outlined, officials must consider the following "4-D's Criteria" as a foul occurs that may be construed

as DOGSO:

- **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: Houston as San Jose (78:33)

As with several other prior examples of DOGSO featured in the "Week In Review," this opportunity for DOGSO results from a quick counter attack. It is a counter that requires the referee to close down play quickly and a counter that requires heightened attention on the part of the AR.

Upon review of the situation, it is clear that all "4-D's" exist. The foul is seemingly also clear. Both the AR and the referee must be able to identify that the attacker goes down quickly and sharply to the side – the same side as the challenge by the defender. Additionally, both officials should be able to see the shirt collar being grabbed. The result of the foul should be a red card for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity and a penalty kick as the holding foul continued into the penalty area.

Watch the replay from behind the goal. The referee is following straight and immediately behind the play. By moving to a wider position and angle of vision, the referee may have enhanced his view thereby providing a better perspective of the defender's foul. Trailing play directly behind the two players does not provide the optimum view. Get wider sooner.

Despite his distance from the foul, the AR needs to share ownership of this situation and similar situations with the referee. This is a critical decision that the referee team needs to get correct. Given the attacker is a step ahead of the defender, the AR should be able to see the reach of the defender and the grab of the shirt collar. Again, watch the replay from behind the goal. Look at the two player's position as the attacker finally goes down inside the penalty area. The attacker is a step in front. The defender's arm is now grabbing/reaching out in front. The AR should be focusing on the upper body as he sees the defender reaching out. The side angle should provide the view of the defender's extended arm, the collar grab and the space between the attacker's and defender's bodies. An AR who makes this decision would be serving the game and the referee.

If the referee were to make the call, the AR must then provide assistance by indicating that the holding foul finished in the penalty area therefore a penalty kick is in order. Upon hearing the referee's whistle, the AR would stand at attention and drape the flag across his waist (similar to the substitution signal). This would be the "silent signal" to the referee that awarding a penalty kick was needed.

Offside Decision: "Wait and See" Leads to a Goal

A critical offside decision is featured this week. In this case, the AR makes an excellent decision that gives the benefit of doubt to the attack and results in the game winning goal with 25 minutes remaining in the match.

Remember, ARs must be able to call upon the following principles when making offside decisions: "wait and see," give the benefit of doubt to the attack and "if in doubt, keep the flag down."

Video Clip 6: Real Salt Lake at New York (62:53)

By "giving the benefit of doubt to the attacking team," the AR adds to the entertainment value of the game as his decision provides the opportunity for the game winning goal to be scored. There are several factors that make this a difficult decision:

- **Defenders pulling out**

The defensive line is quickly moving out to attempt to place the attackers in an offside position (offside trap). Notice how two defenders raise their hands to attempt to influence the decision. ARs must not take the defender's gestures into account.

- **Attackers pulling out**

Not one but two attackers are moving out with the defenders in attempt to ensure that they will be onside at the next phase of play. This is complicated by the single attacker in the middle of the penalty area who is clearly in an offside position. Note, however, that this player should **not** be penalized for this offside position because he has not "interfered with play" (touched or played the ball passed by his teammate) and he has not "interfered with an opponent" since he does not prevent an opponent from being able to play the ball due to obstructing the goalkeeper's line of vision.

- **Attacker meant to shoot not pass**

The attacking player who makes the so-called pass to the goal scorer actually intends to shoot the ball but miss-strikes it. An AR who is not alert, may lose focus because he does not anticipate that one of the two furthestmost attackers may be on the receiving end of a poorly struck shot. The AR must keep his focus and be able to immediately process all options as play develops.

By delaying the offside decision, the AR can correctly identify which of the two attacking players actually plays/touches the ball. Consequently, the "wait and see" principle provides the AR with sufficient time to recall every player's position at the time the first attacker shoots/passes the ball. The freeze frame shot shows the goal scorer's position and the position of the second-to-last defender. The goal scorer is even with, if not slightly in front, of the defender just placing him in an onside position. A smart AR will use the field markings (football lines or the cutting lines of the grass) to aid in making the proper decision.

Penalty Kick: Requiring a Retake

The Laws of the Game require that, at the taking of a penalty kick, the goalkeeper "remain on his goal line, facing the kicker, between the goalposts until the ball has been kicked." Simply, the goalkeeper cannot move forward off the line until the ball has been kicked by the shooter. Movement **along the line** is permissible. If a goalkeeper moves or jumps forward from the line prior to the taking of the kick in order to gain an advantage and thereby reduce the shooting angle, the referee may order the kick retaken if a goal is not scored (goalkeeper save, ball rebounds into play or ball goes out of play).

Video Clip 7: Columbus at Toronto (12:15)

This is a clear case of the goalkeeper leaping forward off the goal line prior to the kick being taken. In fact, the goalkeeper takes one or two stutter steps off his line prior to the kick being taken. As a result of his actions, the goalkeeper gains an advantage and is able to use the advantage to save the shot. Notice the distance the goalkeeper jumps from the line (two to three yards) and how early he does it. Both factors should resonate with the referee and the referee, in this case, should call for a retake of the penalty kick.

Assistant Referee (AR) Positioning

ARs must maintain a steady work rate and exhibit discipline in maintaining the offside line throughout the match. ARs cannot leave their appropriate position with the second to last defender or the ball because they assume it is "safe." ARs must show urgency in their tracking/following the ball. Lack of urgency and lack of precise positioning opens the doors for future questioning of decisions within that game. Lack of hustle may also be interpreted as being "unfocused" and not into the rhythm of the game and deliver the wrong message to players, coaches, spectators, the media, and the referee.

Video Clip 8: Chicago at Colorado (16:18)

Early in the game, the AR can be seen not tracking the ball and not staying in line with the second to last defender. The AR is caught in "no man's land." The AR, like the referee, must be in "perpetual motion" (constantly working hard, moving, exhibiting urgency in movement). Watch as the AR starts approximately four yards out of position (not with the second-to-last defender) and then the distance increases with the movement of the ball and the players off the ball. If one of the defenders makes an errant pass or slips, or if an attacker decides to pressure the ball at the last second, the AR will be ill-prepared to respond.

Game Disrepute: Proper Management

Dealing with and identifying potential situations involving game disrepute is critical for referees because, if not handled quickly, it can escalate to mass confrontation. "Week In Review 6" ([**click on this link to access**](#)) first addressed the issue of game disrepute and established guidelines for dealing with it.

- **Game Disrepute: The Definition**

Involves two opposing players going at each other in an aggressive manner. The actions of the players bring the game into disrepute. Usually the ball is dead (out of play) but game disrepute can be initiated while the ball is in play typically by two players off the ball. Players attempt to provoke an opponent or the benches. Players feel at liberty to have a "go" at each other because they don't have to chase a live ball. These are volatile situations.

The following four items were provided in an attempt to prevent game disrepute from escalating to mass confrontation (more than two players involved):

- **Sprint to the Situation**

If the referee or AR senses a problem, SPRINT to the situation. Presence is critical in terms of carefully separating the players in a non-forceful manner.

- **Stern Warning vs. Caution**

In some cases, you can deal with disrepute with a stern warning while isolating the players. A caution is not always the answer but the referee must raise his intensity and address the case by sending a strong verbal and visual message.

- **Misconduct**

If the situation escalates in numbers and intensity, then the referee must deal with the scenario more stringently as misconduct. Referees must not hesitate to caution players for unsporting behavior. In many instances, game disrepute requires two players to be cautioned (one from each team) as it takes two players to initiate and continue the situation.

- **Player Escalation into Mass Confrontation**

Be aware of players that run to the fray from long distances and from the bench. The fourth official can play a role in preventing escalation by controlling the benches and by assisting with the identification of players. If the situation warrants, AR's should also feel comfortable entering the field to provide presence.

Video Clip 9: Houston at San Jose (59:50)

The focus of this clip is the manner in which the referee positively deals with game disrepute between the two players and how he ensures, through prompt action, that the situation does not escalate to mass confrontation. Debate can be made over whether the referee should have called either of the challenges before the foul that causes the game disrepute but that is not the focus of this clip.

The referee followed the script presented above. His immediate intervention (exhibited by his presence) between the opposing players was vital. He sprinted to the situation and positively interposed his body between the players involved. The referee's presence prevented further body contact among the players and prevented a third player from joining in.

The referee decides that a stern warning versus a caution to both players is the appropriate solution for managing the game disrepute. The stern warning is issued by the referee only after he has, again, followed the script and isolated the two offenders. This prevents further interaction with third party players and allows the referee to slow the game down and send the appropriate message.

Immediate intervention and presence is the key to handling game disrepute.

Getting the Most Out of a Card

Presence and personality. Player management and communication. Getting the most out of a card and sending appropriate messages. Each of these terms are interrelated and vital to a referee's success at any level. Referees who utilize these terms in their approach to the game are often more successful than not. Officials must pick and choose the moments in the game to make their presence known and to send messages that will guide the future actions of the players on the field. In other words, referees must use their tools to influence outcomes.

Video Clip 10: Columbus at Toronto (41:37)

Clip 10 provides an example of a referee who understands the importance of managing the game with more than just his whistle. In this clear cut yellow card situation, the referee uses his presence and personality to "prevent the next foul." The referee's actions of isolating the offender and then conversing with him not only sends a message to the player being cautioned but also to the other participants in the game. Through his actions, the referee has "drawn the line in the sand" and can use his actions to set the tone that will guide future actions on the field.

At the time of the initial foul, the referee can be seen in the background sprinting to the spot of the foul and then changing his course toward the fouler as the defender moves away from the incident. This is the first visual action from the referee that indicates his displeasure with the foul. Consequently, even before the referee has initiated a conversation or has shown the appropriate card, the referee has sent a message (his sprinting and urgency in movement) that the foul will not be permitted in this game.

Once he begins interaction with the player, he tailors or fits his method of communication to fit the player and the situation/game. The result is a clear and distinct message to the fouler and to all other game participants, spectators and media.

WEEK 26 FOCUS

Aerial Challenges with Elbows and Forearms

Referee teams must pay closer attention to challenges in the air. Referees should anticipate such challenges and take positions that permit clear, unobstructed views of how players use their elbows, hands, and arms. Referees need to be familiar with the guidelines and ensure contact that utilizes excessive force and is in danger of injuring the opponent is dealt with by a red card. ARs and fourth officials should also take responsibility for calling the referee's attention to such challenges if the referee does not take appropriate action.

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