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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 26



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 26 – ending September 21, 2008

WEEK 26 OVERVIEW

In last week's version of the "Week In Review," ([click on this link to access](#)) we placed emphasis on reviewing and further defining the use of elbows and forearms where contact is made above the shoulders. This past week, such violent conduct arose in two games and went unpunished by the referee team. Player safety is severely endangered in these situations and officials, whether it be the referee, one of the assistant referees or the fourth official, have an obligation to the game to ensure that such violent conduct is eliminated. Player safety is severely endangered. Simply put, players are not permitted to make contact with an opponent's face in an aggressive or intimidating fashion. Such contact must be treated as violent conduct or serious foul play (red card).

Officials must have heightened awareness for contact above the shoulder and, when it occurs, one of the members of the officiating team must be able to identify it and ensure that the appropriate disciplinary action is taken. This week, two scenarios involving contact above the shoulders will be examined in which three red cards should have been issued for violent conduct. These incidents are not camouflaged, hidden or disguised in any manner, and the referee team needs to take action.

Remember, a **100 percent** misconduct situation means a red or yellow card is mandated. The score, the time of the game, or the implications of the game **cannot** factor into the referee's decision when faced with a **100 percent** misconduct scenario.

As MLS and USL-1 head into the playoff stretch, officials must sense the atmosphere of the match prior to the game and come fully prepared for intense matches. Officials cannot rely on their reputation to orchestrate matches. All match officials need to approach the game with the perspective that they are "only as good as their next match." Consequently, every match and every minute within the match must be approached as it is the deciding match or minute. Take a proactive and anticipatory approach that prevents unsporting situations from arising.

- *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 26 COMMENTARY

Contact Above the Shoulder: A Red Card

First and foremost, as the clips below unfold, ask yourself:

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

Consider where the contact is made: above the shoulders, the facial region in each of these cases.

Consider what is used to make the contact: a solid object (forearm or palm of the hand).

Consider the consequences of a solid object connecting with a soft object: injury, broken jaw, broken nose, blackened eye (results of such contact in earlier games this season).

After consideration of these factors, it is clear that the safety of the opponent is endangered and, hence, a red card is mandated for such

situations. In addition, the idea of “excessive force” is important. Contact with a solid object (forearm or hand) with a soft object (the face) can be interpreted as “excessive force” as the amount of force necessary to injure the opponent is significantly less. Also, consider that when contact above the shoulder is initiated, players do not have the opportunity to defend themselves; as a result, the player receiving the contact is extremely vulnerable.

Video Clip 1: Chivas at Real Salt Lake (76:20)

The game provides warning signs that misconduct is brewing or warning signs that precipitate or cause player actions. This clip illustrates such a warning sign that leads to violent conduct. Whenever a player possesses the ball (especially in their hands) in an attempt to prevent the opponent from getting it or putting it back into play, the referee can anticipate a conflict. A quick whistle or immediate presence on the scene can send a message that the referee is aware of the situation and will deal with it. The referee's quick intervention (with presence and/or audibly with the whistle) lets everyone know that the referee is aware of the gamesmanship and, hopefully, prevents the situation from escalating. In this clip, the referee blows the whistle only after the contact above the shoulder occurs. Additionally, the referee should consider quicker movement into the space between the confronting players.

Watch as the player grabbing for the ball uses his forearm to contact the facial and neck region (under the chin) of the opponent. Despite the action seemingly in clear view of the referee, the referee only cautions the player. This should have been recognized as violent conduct (striking an opponent) and the player sent off. Was the referee's perspective influenced by his late arrival and his closeness to the elbow at the time the act is committed? Possibly, but he must “sense,” “feel” or read the situation based upon the reaction of the player (the player's head, neck and chin go back quickly in an unnatural manner). If the referee “senses” this action, he can take the time to confer with the near assistant referee (AR or fourth official, if applicable) thereby ensuring that the correct decision is made.

The AR is approximately 20 to 25 yards from the incident and should feel empowered to draw the referee's attention to the action of the player. Like the referee, ARs can anticipate these type of actions given the manner in which the situation plays out (starting with the gamesmanship of delaying the restart by holding the ball). If the AR sees the infraction, he has the responsibility to bring it to the referee's attention in spite of the referee already having taken action that conflicts with what the AR has observed. FOCUS: Get the decision correct!

In this clip, the player using his forearm to contact the opponent above the shoulders should be red carded for violent conduct. The referee should also caution the opponent for delaying the restart of play (withholding the ball from the opponent preventing the opponent from putting the ball into play as well as provoking a confrontation by deliberately touching the ball after the referee has stopped play).

Video Clip 2: Carolina at Chareston (28:44)

In this USL-1 clip, mass confrontation arises that leads to two players making contact above the shoulder with their opponent. In both instances, the players should be sent off for violent conduct (striking an opponent) as required by Law 12, Fouls and Misconduct, within the Laws of the Game. As the play unfolds, the referee whistles for a foul and sprints toward the spot of the infraction anticipating issues. As he approaches the spot, the situation escalates to mass confrontation. Refer to “Week In Review 15” for more information on mass confrontation.

Despite the effort of the referee to defuse the situation, by getting to the infraction early, splinter groups erupt. As the referee is initially moving to admonish the player committing the foul, he should observe the surrounding situation. As the splinter groups gather, the referee should adjust his tactic and change his focus from the fouler to the larger situation. The referee can and should come back and address the fouler once everything else has settled.

By changing his direction and tactical approach, the referee should be better positioned to see the actions of the group as opposed to being focused on a single individual (the fouler). The nearest AR can also move into the field and begin forming the “triangle of patrol.” As he does in this clip, the near AR should *not* turn his back to the bigger situation. Instead, he should step back and observe. The far side AR should begin to sprint across the field in the event his presence or intervention is required. If need be, the far side AR can form the third point on the “triangle of patrol.” The fourth official remains at the bench area to monitor behavior. All officials should position themselves so they can observe the “hot spots.”

Once the situation has settled down and the teams have retreated to neutral/non-confrontational positions, the referee team can convene and decide on the appropriate action. By utilizing the “triangle of patrol,” the officiating crew should be properly positioned to identify the perpetrators and take action.

As indicated by the yellow circles, players from both teams make deliberate contact above their opponent's shoulders. As a consequence, each player should be sent off for violent conduct as they have endangered the opponent's safety and used excessive force toward the facial area.

Red Card: Serious Foul Play

Certain situations in games are “flash points” or warning points for potential problems for referees. One such flash point is the final five minutes in a game where a team has the lead. Contemporary tactics call for attacking players to hold the ball in one of the attacking corners in an attempt to waste valuable seconds. The longer the attacker shields or holds the ball in the corner, the less time the opponents have to play. The longer the attacker shields/holds the ball in the corner, the greater the likelihood an opponent is going to take a shot at him to gain possession of the ball or look at the situation as an opportunity to send their own “payback” message out of frustration. Examples of flash points include:

- Attacker shielding/holding ball in the corner in the last few minutes of a match in an attempt to protect the lead.

- A defender delaying the restart by holding a ball that belongs to the other team.
- An untimely challenge on a goalkeeper near the goal mouth.
- A foul in close proximity to the team bench area.

Preventative refereeing recognizes the potential for problems before they occur and ensures steps are taken so the problems might not materialize. When a referee is faced with a flash point, they should have a tool box of solutions primed to meet the challenge especially since they are typically recurring themes throughout the game at multiple levels.

Video Clip 3: New York at Columbus (87:44)

This clip provides an example of one of the flash points noted above: the attacker shielding/holding ball in the corner in the last few minutes of a match in an attempt to protect the lead. With just over two minutes remaining in the game and the attacking team leading by two goals, the referee should be prepared for attacking tactics aimed at wasting time while the ball is in and out of play. Watch the clip and identify the opportunities, as they unfold, that are presented the referee to prevent the eventual red card.

- **The short corner kick played back to the kicker**

As the ball is played short and back to the kicker, the referee must leave his normal corner kick position and impose his presence on the players.

- **The short throw-in**

Like the short corner, as soon as the referee sees that a short throw-in will be taken, the referee must revise his positioning and move to the ball and the area where potential challenges for the ball may occur.

- **The attacker turns the ball back to the corner instead of taking it to goal**

The attacker has the opportunity to take the defender on and potentially beat him along the goal line. Instead, the attacker dribbles the ball back to the corner flag.

- **The attacker shields the ball *fac*ing the corner flag with his back to the defender and the goal**

An attacker holding the ball with the defender marking him from behind is a sign that contact with the attacker's Achilles or the back of his legs is inevitable. Noting this, the referee should **call the first foul/kick** to the shielding player's leg. In all likelihood, the early whistle would have prevented the last kick that results in the player being sent off for serious foul play.

Additionally, the referee's presence very close to the ball should be a deterrent. The referee's presence needs to be "felt" (physically seen and verbally heard) by the defender thereby serving as a preventative reminder that any negative actions will have consequences.

If these preventative measures do not work and the defender decides to commit the same foul, then the referee has no recourse other than red card the player for serious foul play. In the clip, the referee correctly sends the guilty player off for serious foul play. However, the question remains, "Could the send off have been prevented if the referee had used the preventative measures outlined above versus waiting and reacting to the player's violence?"

Simulation or Diving: Cheating the Game

"Week In Review 15" provided a thorough perspective of a deceptive form of gamesmanship: simulation or diving. An act whereby players attempt to challenge the referee's authority in a manner aimed at getting the upper hand. One of the key signals that referees can call upon in determining whether an act is simulation or embellishment is the location on the field. The closer to goal, there is an increased likelihood an attacker will cheat. As play enters the penalty area, the likelihood of simulation/diving increases exponentially because the result of a successful dive is a penalty kick and almost certain goal.

Video Clip 4: New York at Columbus (7:45)

The attacker is in possession of the ball and is entering the penalty area. Hence, the attacker is in an advantageous location. The attacker sees that his chances of advancing the ball are minimal as there are four to five defenders within range to close him down. Sensing his chances for advancement are almost nonexistent, the attacker takes a risk that the referee will be fooled and dives. The attacker falls to the ground, within the penalty area, hoping to cheat the game and gain an unearned penalty kick. Notice, there is no contact by the defenders and the attacker's immediate reaction to the "no call" by the referee is to get up and chase the ball.

In this case, the referee would be justified in cautioning the player for unsporting behavior. Law 12, "Fouls and Misconduct" and FIFA's recent addendum to the Laws entitled "Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees," state that a player must be cautioned for unsporting behavior if the player "attempts to deceive the referee by feigning injury or pretending to have been fouled (simulation)."

Note, this case of simulation occurred early in the match and served as a model for similar additional simulation/embellishment later in the match. Early recognition and management of this form of gamesmanship should work as a deterrent for the remainder of the game.

Offside: A Courageous Decision

There were several close offside decisions this past weekend. No fewer than five offside calls were made per game. Attacking soccer is up as teams look for the game winning goal that may eventually mean the difference between being playoff bound or vacation bound. ARs must continue to exhibit patience in making offside decisions and ensure they are optimally positioned to get every decision correct. The "wait and see" principle and giving the benefit of doubt to the attack should continue to be at the forefront of the ARs approach to their responsibilities.

Video Clip 5: DC at Galaxy (45:04+)

Just before halftime, a surprising one touch through pass is made to an attacker who has attempted to time his run in conjunction with the pass. The one touch pass can catch an unaware or unprepared AR off guard. In this clip, however, the AR is focused on the task at hand: the ball, the line of defenders and the attacker's run. Timing is critical in making the correct decision as is the ARs ability to instantaneously filter the decision making factors and make an accurate onside or offside call.

At first glance, it looks as though the AR has made a poor decision. The speed of play and the fact that the defenders are flat footed (stationary) while the attacker is running diagonal/forward add to the difficulties facing the AR. Even the first replay from the side angle does not support the decision on the part of the AR. It is only at the last freeze frame picture that the ARs decision can be appreciated.

This freeze frame picture is the same picture the AR must take during dynamic play and the picture must be broad enough to catch and consider all the factors raised above. From this picture, the AR must make a split second decision to keep the flag down or to raise it and deny the attack. The defender in the middle of the field puts the attacker in an onside position at the time the ball is played by the attacker's teammate. Therefore, the AR makes a correct decision that provides a scoring opportunity for a team and increases the entertainment value for the spectators.

Assistant Referees Following the Ball

ARs not only have the responsibility to maintain their position with the second-to-last defender but they have the responsibility to follow **ALL** balls to the goal line or to the goalkeeper. ARs cannot relax when balls are seemingly played "safely" back to the goalkeeper nor can ARs relax when they think balls are going out over the goal line. ARs must possess the fitness, stamina, speed and quickness to be able to either maintain the offside position with the second-to-last defender or to chase every ball back to the goalkeeper or to the goal line for the entire match.

There have been several instances where ARs have failed to follow the ball all the way back to the goalkeeper because they assume there will be no challenge. Many times the balls are passed to the keeper inside the penalty area and near the goal area. Goalkeepers can slip or misplay balls (with pressure and without pressure) and an AR who fails to follow the ball will be out of position and unable to "sell" the resulting decision.

WEEK 27 FOCUS

Preventing the Next Foul

Referees must ensure they are taking preventative measures and not reacting. The ability to "think one step ahead" will become even more critical as the playoffs draw near. Officials should be thinking about the "next phase of play" and what players and teams will do in that next phase. Hence, officials must use all their tools (like personality, presence, voice, body language and energy) to influence the next outcome. Remember, the game is the best teacher. Learn from it and adjust to it during and after the game.

Now that the playoffs are in sight, referees cannot modify their approach nor veer from the direction that has been provided thus far this season. The game remains the same; however, the intensity and importance of each match is on the rise. Consistency is critical.

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