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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 28



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 28 – ending October 5, 2008

WEEK 28 OVERVIEW

At the completion of week 28, only three MLS teams have booked their tickets to the postseason round. This means, five playoff positions are still available with three weeks left in the regular season. Referees can expect intense matches and must ensure that their intensity level surpasses that of the competing teams. Referees must be focused on ensuring their personality matches the game situation or moment. Of the 20 goals scored this past week, more than one third (7) found the back of the net in the last 25 minutes of play.

This end of season push puts additional pressure on officials to ensure that their focus and concentration remain high for the **entire 90 minutes of play**. Additionally, it is equally critical that officials do not get too comfortable which may lead to a failure to identify and “feel” the ebbs and flows of the game. Lack of a “feel” for the match hampers an official’s ability to adjust their approach in anticipation of the requirements of the game and of the moment.

Remember, the game is the best teacher. Learn from it and make adjustments that coincide with changes during the game. Have a game plan but do not be rigid in the approach if the situation requires the plan to be modified. Modify your approach during the game as needed. Modify your approach at halftime after seeking input from the referee crew. Evolve as the game evolves. Be flexible but do not break.

In last week’s version of the “Week in Review 27,” ([click on this link to access](#)) the topic of energy levels was broached. Officials were urged to take note of their physiological and psychological energy levels and preparation. In addition, officials were asked to bring a sense of urgency to their efforts in regards to work rate, hustle and effort. Referees and assistant referees (ARs) who failed to heed this recommendation struggled in their performances. Not only did these officials suffer but the game suffered.

One match this past week involved several decisions that negatively impacted the outcome of the game. This game serves as an example of a game in which the official failed to recognize warning signs and failed to raise his standard to match the requirements set forth by the game. The referee’s failure to surpass the intensity level of the game resulted in several decisions that do not meet the standards of the professional game.

Prepare yourself. Be current on the “Week In Reviews.” Be current on the teams and the players. Being current means being relevant!

Jerry Seaman, former NFL Director of Officiating, is quoted as saying:

“Your willingness to PREPARE must EXCEED your willingness to SUCCEED.”

Think about how this applies to your game and your approach to your game. Therein lies the first step to succeeding over the remainder of the season.

- 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 28 COMMENTARY

Assistant Referee Positioning and Work Rate

U.S. Soccer's "Guide to Procedures For Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" specifically states that the ARs position during play should be "in line with the second to last defender or the ball, whichever is closer to the goal line." This requirement is supported by FIFA in its 2008/2009 "Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees" which supplement the Laws of the Game. This requirement was addressed in "Week In Review 26" ([click on this link to access](#)) and it is evident that lapses in adherence still exist.

An alarming trend has been noticed of late where many ARs are not following balls to the goal line or back passes all the way to the goalkeeper. In many instances, the goalkeeper is either under pressure, about to be pressured, or is in or near the goal area when he is to receive the ball. There have been instances when goalkeepers have miss trapped or slipped when receiving balls.

ARs must be prepared and positioned to account for any of these and many more similar actions. This means that ARs must follow **every** ball back to the goalkeeper or to the goal line if it is closer to the goal line than the second-to-last defender. This puts the AR in position to handle the next phase of play and any resulting challenge on the goalkeeper or mishandling by the keeper that may be part of the next phase of play.

Failure to follow this procedure exhibits a lack of hustle, energy and concentration on the part of the AR and can lead to increased scrutiny and questions regarding future questionable decisions. ARs must possess the speed to recover to the offside position. ARs must possess the stamina to make these streaking runs for 90 minutes. **Officials cannot leave anything for chance while preparing for everything.**

As one of our more experienced ARs stated: "Following every ball to the goalkeeper and the goal line keeps you in the game and keeps you focused."

Video Clip 1: Chicago at Kansas City (28:53)

This clip provides a clear example of an AR who is too comfortable and who has failed to follow the guidelines of following the ball to the goalkeeper. Watch as, during the throw-in, the ball is directed to the opposing goalkeeper. The AR stays with the second-to-last defender and does not follow the ball to the keeper who is stationed just outside the goal area some six yards from the goal line. Initially, it looks to be an innocuous, harmless or safe decision on the part of the AR to remain approximately 22 yards up field from the next phase of play. However, this innocuous decision becomes questionable when an attacker rushes into the picture to pressure the goalkeeper to play the ball with his hands. Even as the attacker runs to pressure the keeper, the AR is comfortably standing and observing and not moving to cover the danger zone.

If the AR had followed the guidelines and stayed with the ball as it was in route to the goalkeeper, the AR would have been positioned to monitor any issues that may have resulted from the challenge or a goalkeeper error. Leaving the second-to-last defender makes the offside line vulnerable. However, as the ball is played out by the keeper, the AR will have sufficient time to recover and return to a position to monitor offside decisions.

ARs must be physically and mentally prepared to chase every ball to the goalkeeper and to the goal line.

Preventative vs. Curative Refereeing

As was mentioned in the "Week 28 Overview" above, game intensity is at a season high. Hand-in-hand with this is player intensity. Players are looking for an edge. Players are not only fighting for the playoffs but, in many instances, for a job. Frustration will expose itself by way of player actions, both physical and verbal. Referees must be prepared for acts of intimidation. In addition, officials must be prepared for players to react with much more emotion even when the trigger issue is seemingly minor.

This is where anticipation and "reading the game" become vital. By "reading the game," the official can anticipate player actions and reactions and then work to prevent future actions. By "reading the game," the official makes a mental note of prior actions, conflicts and responses by players and stores these notes for future reference. Players may take the "I'll get you later" mentality. In other words, they will wait to send a message or they will wait to get even. Why do players wait? They anticipate that the referee will have forgotten and will not be able to connect the dots or the actions. For this reason, a world class official possesses the ability to connect the dots and to use the stored information as a basis for interpreting future actions.

Professional class officials do not wait for something to happen, they prevent it. Professional officials smell the problem before it occurs and are able to influence the outcome by their actions.

Video Clip 2: Chicago at Kansas City (10:50 – second half)

This clip illustrates excellent officiating. It shows a referee who "smells" trouble and uses his presence to defuse and prevent the trouble from escalating. In this case, the referee recognizes a warning sign: the goalkeeper is being challenged. Consequently, the referee sprints to the scene and immediately intervenes preventing game disrepute from escalating to mass confrontation. Due to his fast response and actions, the referee is able to correctly manage the situation without issuing a caution. This is an example of anticipatory work on the part of the referee. Note, if the referee deems the attacker's actions to be unsporting behavior, he may decide to caution him accordingly but the focus of this clip was not the players actions but on how the referee was able to influence the outcome by his quick response to the warning sign (the challenge on the goalkeeper).

The key to success in this situation and most others is anticipation and presence.

Teamwork: Referee and Assistant Referee

Teamwork is an essential part of success. Referees must feel comfortable seeking information from ARs and ARs should feel equally comfortable seeking the referee out to provide critical information. Referees must empower ARs with the responsibility to ensure the refereeing team gets the decision correct. Referees must also be comfortable asking for assistance in critical situations. The ultimate goal is getting the decision correct. For further information of AR involvement, review "Week In Review 22." ([click on this link to access](#))

Video Clip 3: Toronto at New York (75:35)

A situation of game disrepute arises in which the referee uses his presence to positively channel the players away from each other and into neutral space. In the background, you can see an AR observing, making mental notes and ensuring he is positioned to have a broad view of the action. The referee may directly intervene until such time as the situation has escalated to a point that he cannot handle it and then he must step back and observe like the AR. The referee's intervention prevents the situation from turning into mass confrontation.

As you watch the clip, take notice of the teamwork utilized to get the misconduct correct (unsporting behavior). Once the situation had calmed and players were channeling themselves to neutral locations, the referee and AR confer. During this quick conference, they identify the player, decide upon the punishment (yellow card for unsporting behavior), and then act (display the card) accordingly. Positive teamwork in which the AR felt empowered to provide information and the referee was comfortable seeking the ARs input. The result is a correct decision. To improve the process, the referee should have consulted with the AR while facing up field toward the players and not with his back to the majority of the players. In this manner, should there be any further issues, the referee would be able to observe and act.

Note: The decision by the referee to caution the above player is correct as no elbow was thrown above the shoulder and the player's actions were not done with excessive force or in a manner that would endanger the safety of the opponent.

Red Card for Violent Conduct

According to Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct, a player is guilty of violent conduct if he uses excessive force or brutality against an opponent when not challenging for the ball. Additionally, "excessive force" means that a player has far exceeded the necessary use of force and is in danger of injuring his opponent.

As you watch clip 4, ask yourself the following questions as the action unfolds:

- Did the defender/fouler exceed the necessary force to win the ball?
- Did the defender/fouler put the safety of the opponent at risk?
- Could the defender/fouler's actions have injured the opponent?
- Was the defender/fouler's actions intended to fairly win the ball or send a message?
- Did the defender/fouler have a chance to play the ball?
- What was the intent of the defender/fouler's actions?

Video Clip 4: Toronto at New York (34:02)

This clip provides a clear example of a challenge that must be punished with a red card. By answering the above questions in rapid succession, the referee should be armed with enough information to send the defender off for violent conduct. "Week In Review 13" provided several specific factors that the referee should consider when making a decision relative to the fairness and/or severity of a tackle:

- **Speed of play and the tackle**

The speed at which the attacker and the defender are running at the time and the force of the tackle. The faster the tackler is moving, the greater the force.

- **Intent**

Is the tackler's intent to take the player out and "send a message?"

- **Aggressive nature of the tackle**

Lunging, distance from ball/opponent when the tackle was initiated, cleats exposed.

- **Position of the tackler**

In particular, the legs of the attacker and the direction from which the tackle was initiated – from behind, straight on.

- **Opportunity to play the ball**

Given the factors above, does the tackler have a chance to play the ball? Where is the position of the ball relative to the timing of the tackle?

- **Atmosphere of the game**

Consider the overall spirit in which the match has been played. Look at the "big picture" and determine how your decision will impact the way the remaining game time is played.

For a red card tackle or challenge to occur, all of the aforementioned factors do not have to be present. However, the referee must be able to identify a number of them when making his determination. Specifically, of the specified factors, the referee should be able to immediately recognize the following:

- **Intent**

The manner in which the defender approaches the attacker and the fact that the ball is no where near the defender's challenge, should signify the intent. The intent is seemingly to send the opponent a message through force and potentially injure the attacker. The defender makes no attempt to go around the attacker despite the opportunity to do so as he is on his feet and can easily control the force of the challenge. His intent is to go through him. Watch also the right foot of the defender as he goes over the top of the player laying on the ground. What was the defender intending to do with that foot? Disguise additional contact?

- **Aggressive nature of the tackle**

The aggressive nature of the tackle is evident in the fact the defender raises his leg and uses his cleats to drive into the back of the opponent's leg versus attempting to wrap or reach his foot around the attacker in an attempt to win the ball.

- **Position of the tackler**

The tackler is coming directly from behind. The body and legs of the attacker are shielding the ball.

- **Opportunity to play the ball**

Due to the position of the attacker (shielding the ball with his back to the defender) the type of tackle initiated by the defender cannot fairly play the ball.

- **Atmosphere of the game**

Although it is difficult to determine given the entire game is not viewed, consider the score at the time as a factor in determining the intent of the player's actions. The tackler's team is losing 1-0. Is this score a source of frustration that may exhibit itself in a player's actions? Having said this, **the challenge executed in this case is a red card regardless of the atmosphere, score and/or time of the match.**

WEEK 29 FOCUS

Managing the Little Things

Officiating teams are asked, through heightened awareness, to pay special attention to detail. This will be especially critical in the final 15 to 20 minutes of the match. As mentioned above, referee teams should work together to ensure the little things that occur in a match that could have future consequences are not ignored or forgotten. Often times, the little things accumulate and add up and can ultimately result in much larger issues. Manage the little things so that they do not explode thereby causing your game to implode.

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[Top](#)

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