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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 31



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 31 – ending October 26, 2008

WEEK 31 OVERVIEW

The final seven games of the 2008 MLS regular season concluded this past weekend with the final three playoff berths decided in dramatic fashion. As expected, all games were played with energy and at playoff intensity. Even the games involving teams that had previously qualified for the postseason where filled with vigor, decisive tackles and emotion. Despite the low number of average fouls per game (22.86 versus a season average of over 24), there were five red cards in the seven games.

Three of the five red cards will be the focus of this week's "Week In Review." Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO) was the factor behind two of the send offs. One of these decisions, involving the goalkeeper, will be explored in commentary below. Overall, referees displayed courage to take correct actions despite the consequence that many of the teams would be hampered entering the "second season" (playoffs).

With the final run to MLS Cup beginning this weekend, referees and assistant referees (ARs) will be further tested, as will the teams. For the teams, as it should be for the officiating crew, it is a new season: a four game season. It is an arduous three-week season in which the top team gets to raise the MLS Cup as the 2008 champions. Previous records and previous results mean nothing. Everything is on the line. Seven months of grind and 30 games come down to a mere four games. Referees need to ensure that the on field intensity and emotion do not boil over into frustration and stupidity.

- *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 31 COMMENTARY

Second Cautionable Offense

Throughout the year, the "Week In Review" has focused on 100 percent misconduct situations and on the fact that referees must not shy away from taking appropriate action when such situations arise. When players commit offenses that have clearly earned them a yellow or red card, referees have a responsibility to the game to ensure the correct misconduct is given. Such action must be taken despite the game time, the score, the players involved or the importance of the game.

In addition, referees cannot let the fact that a player already has a yellow card prevent the referee from issuing a second caution if the situation falls into the category of 100 percent misconduct. Referees can fall into a trap of wanting to "keep a player in the game" and not issue a second yellow card when the situation demands it because the he believes it is the "safe" thing to do. Unfortunately, "safe" is not necessarily the "right" thing to do for the game.

Review the next two clips and as you watch them individually decide:

Is the action alone a 100 percent misconduct situation and therefore requires the referee to issue a yellow card?

Keep in mind the following three classifications of fouls, according to the Laws of the Game (Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct):

- **Careless**

“The player has shown a lack of attention or consideration when making a challenge or that he acted without precaution.” In other words, the player has not exercised due caution in making a play. Normally exhibited as a miscalculation of strength or a stretch of judgment by the player committing the foul. **No disciplinary sanction is required.**

- **Reckless**

“The player has acted with complete disregard to the danger to, or consequences for, his opponent.” Clearly outside the norm for fair play. **A caution is required.**

- **Using excessive force**

“The player has far exceeded the necessary use of force and is in danger of injuring his opponent.” The challenge places the opponent in considerable danger of bodily harm. **A red card is required.**

Video Clip 1: Dallas at Galaxy (27:43)

This clip is of a correct first yellow card issued to the player who will receive his second caution in video clip 2. The foul committed by the defender falls under the “reckless” classification. It is “reckless” because it is done with complete disregard to the consequences to the opponent. Further, it is unsporting behavior because the foul is committed for the “tactical purpose of interfering with or breaking up a promising attack.”

As the attacker progresses with the ball, look for the space in front of him. This is the space that the attacker would be able to exploit if it were not for the foul. Getting the ball and the player into the more than 30 yards of open territory would provide the attacking team a “promising attack.” Hence, the defender is cognizant of the opportunity for the attacker and decides that the best course of action is to prevent him from getting into the space behind the defense by fouling. Watch the defender’s legs as he executes the tackle. One leg is raised as contact is made in order to prevent the attacker from being able to jump over the tackle and keep possession of the ball.

This is not a red card tackle as it is not done with “excessive force” or done in a manner that could potentially injure the opponent. The tackle is from the side, not straight on, and the contact is made with a bent leg of the defender and not with a straight leg with cleats exposed. Given these characteristics, the referee is correct in determining the tackle is unsporting behavior and, thus, a yellow card.

Video Clip 2: Dallas at Galaxy (3:26 – second half)

The game is still relatively early (41 minutes remaining). Despite the time remaining, the referee is faced with a difficult decision: Do I send a player off for his second cautionable offense? The same defender who was cautioned in video clip 1 above, is again the focus of another unsporting tackle.

The attacker is in possession of the ball and progressing with speed. Similar to the example in video clip 1, the attacker has space in front of him that he can exploit. There is approximately 12 yards of open field facing the attacker, in the attacking third, if he is able to get around the challenging defender. The defender must track the attacker down and trip him up from the side to prevent the advancement of the player with the ball.

Once again, this is another tactical and reckless foul intended to impede the progress of the attack and the attacking player. Although the foul is not committed with malice, it is committed in a manner that is “reckless” and meets the criteria for unsporting behavior in that the foul committed was tactical in nature so that the opponent’s attack is broken up.

Remember, often times, defenders, who may be beat, result to tactics to ensure that the man/attacker will not get by them because it is easier to take out (foul) the man/attacker than cleanly win the ball.

The referee correctly cautions the player for unsporting behavior and then sends him off for receiving a second caution in the same match.

Note: The referee uses proper mechanics to issue the second yellow card and ensuing red card. First, the referee must show the yellow card. Once this card has been displayed, the referee may then display the red card to indicate that the player has been sent off. This is an example of a well executed issuance of a second yellow card and resulting send off.

Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO)

Decisions involving denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO) usually draw debate. In particular, DOGSO events that also involve a penalty kick raise the ire of fans, players and coaches even more. Why? Because DOGSOs with penalty kicks involve two strikes against the offending team: a penalty kick and a red card. This “two strike” stigma is why referees must be positioned close to play and ensure they have the best line of vision when making such a call. The ability to “sell” the decision is greatly enhanced when positioning and a clear line of vision are present as is the ability to decipher the critical components that make a situation a candidate for DOGSO. As early as “Week In Review 14,” the DOGSO criteria was presented:

- **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? In this case, the "likelihood of keeping or gaining control of the ball" must be considered.

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct, mandate a red card for any DOGSO offense: "denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offense punishable by a free kick or penalty kick."

Video Clip 3: Houston at Chivas USA (49:02)

Only four minutes have ticked off the second half clock. With 41 minutes left in the game, a referee decision to award a penalty kick and simultaneously send the goalkeeper off for DOGSO would certainly have an impact on the game as would not making the correct decision. Despite this potential game impacting scenario, the referee in this clip makes a correct decision in deciding the goalkeeper's foul meets the DOGSO criteria listed above.

This play starts from a long counter attack in which the ball is played in the air more than 35 to 40 yards. In this situation, the referee must read the play and notice the streaking attacker and the two defensive players closing down on the attacker. The fact that the ball hits the ground is another warning sign that the attacking team/player has an advantage over the onrushing defenders. Recognizing these warning signs, the referee must increase his work rate and speed so that he can make up as much ground as possible as quickly as possible.

Once the attacker is behind the defenders, the referee team needs to read/anticipate the next potential phases of play and put themselves in the best possible position to see the next phase of play and/or the next challenge (ARs need to be prepared to assist the referee in identifying whether the ensuing event involves DOGSO). The fact that the attacker is behind the two defenders and is headed toward a one-on-one confrontation with the keeper should heighten the awareness of the referee and near side AR.

Assessing the situation, the officials must realize that the following three decisions are a possibility:

- **Foul or no foul**

Will there be contact with the goalkeeper and will the resulting contact be a foul or a fair challenge?

- **Penalty kick or no penalty kick**

As the attacker rushes toward the penalty area, the referee and AR must be ready to determine the location of the challenge and contact by the goalkeeper. Often times, the AR will be better positioned to assist as they will have a better view of the top of the penalty area.

- **DOGSO or not**

Does the foul meet the criteria for DOGSO? The referee must also scan the field as the whistle is blown to ascertain the positioning of the defending players in relation to the ball.

Foul or no foul: The challenge by the goalkeeper meets the criteria for a foul. The keeper, who is the last defender, is beat. The goalkeeper dives in a manner intent on preventing the attacker from reaching the ball he has pushed by the keeper. The goalkeeper extends his body in front of the attacker making contact and preventing the attacker from getting a shot off. The goalkeeper does not play the ball, his body and arms/hands are off the ground in unnatural positions since the ball is rolling on the ground. The goalkeeper seemingly raises his left hand in an attempt to make it more difficult for the attacker to hurdle him to get to the ball. It is important to note that just there is no requirement that the attacker must fully fall to the ground in order for a foul to be present.

Penalty kick or no penalty kick: In this case, it is clear that the foul occurs inside the penalty area. In close situations, the AR must be prepared to provide information to the referee regarding the location of the foul. If the foul occurs inside the penalty area, the AR, after the whistle from the referee, would stand at attention and hold the flag across his waist mimicking the substitution signal. This would indicate to the referee that the foul the referee called was inside the area and a penalty kick should be awarded.

DOGSO or not: All four of the criteria listed above are evident in this challenge by the goalkeeper.

(1) Defenders: With the exception of the goalkeeper, there are no players who could have dispossessed the attacker of the ball or prevented

the goal scoring opportunity. All opponents are well behind the attacker and ball at the time of the goalkeeper's foul.

(2) Direction: The attacker is headed directly to goal. The attacker's touch of the ball positions the ball directly in the middle of the penalty area toward the penalty mark.

(3) Distance to goal: The attacker is in the penalty area; consequently, distance to goal is not a question.

(4) Distance to ball: The ball is under the attacker's control and he is only hampered from playing/shooting the ball as a direct result of the keeper's unfair challenge. No other player would have gotten to the ball before the attacker.

Given the clarity of all these factors, the referee should award the foul and a penalty kick as well as send the goalkeeper off for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity.

Mechanically and procedurally when calling the foul, the referee placed himself in a poor position. As the referee signaled the foul, he ran toward the penalty spot thereby allowing players to surround him in mass confrontation. Referees should consider improving their mechanics by blowing the whistle and pointing to the penalty spot as they run to neutral space on the field. By taking this course of action, players would be required to chase the referee in order to surround him. By creating distance between himself and the upset players, the referee not only ensures he does not get surrounded but he is better able to control and warn the players as they approach him from the front.

The red card to the goalkeeper does not need to be displayed immediately. Within a reasonable time, once the referee feels that the situation is under control, he may then show the goalkeeper the red card. This provides two benefits. First, the players have calmed slightly and, second, this gives the referee time to visualize and mentally review the DOGSO decision. If need be, the referee can also make eye contact with the AR to receive any pertinent information regarding the ARs perspective on the DOGSO. In the pregame meeting, the referee team should discuss DOGSO and designate a clear signal (normally a pat to the back pocket by the AR) to indicate that the challenge requires a red card.

Finally, the referee must deal firmly with the dissent exhibited by the players. Referees are advised not to take the abuse being demonstrated by several of the players. The referee should identify the main culprit and caution him for dissent if the referee has taken appropriate action to defuse the situation. Persistent and demonstrative dissent should not be tolerated.

Serious Foul Play

One of the seven reasons a player, substitute player, or substituted player may be sent off is for serious foul play. Serious foul play occurs when a player:

"Uses excessive force or brutality against an opponent when challenging for the ball when it is in play. A tackle that endangers the safety of an opponent must be sanctioned as serious foul play."

Beginning with "Week In Review 8," six criteria were provided to aid referees in determining whether a tackle was worthy of a red card for serious foul play because the tackler "used excessive force and endangered the safety of the opponent:"

- **Speed of play and the tackle**

The speed at which the attacker and the tackler 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.

An understanding of these criteria is vital when the referee is making a split second decision to either caution or red card a player for a tackle they have committed.

Video Clip 4: Kansas City at New England (41:26)

The tackle illustrated in this clip is a calculated tackle that is intended to, at a minimum, endanger the opponent's safety. The tackle is executed with "excessive force" and is "brutal" in nature. Hence, it is a clear red card for serious foul play. There should be no question, when applying the aforementioned criteria, that the player committing the tackle should be sent off.

The aggressive nature of the tackle should be the first warning sign. The defending player initiates his lunge toward the opponent from a long distance and at a high speed. Hence, the force of contact is tremendous. The cleats are exposed and the legs/knees are locked and headed straight at the opponent's leg. No attempt is made for the ball; solely the opponent.

Aside from a correct red card for serious foul play, the clip illustrates solid assistance by the AR. The AR not only calls the foul but the AR can be seen indicating that the foul is deserving of a red card. Watch closely as the AR pats this back right pocket in order to indicate to the referee that a red card is warranted (this is a pre-arranged signal established in the pre-game meeting amongst the referee crew).

The referee does well to bring out the red card immediately. This urgency dispels any potential frustration and escalation resulting from a perception of inaction on the part of the officials. By issuing the card quickly, the referee sends a message that he is dealing with the incident and the players do not need to take action into their own hands.

PLAYOFF WEEK 1 FOCUS

Playoff Focus and Attitude

As officiating teams enter the playoff stretch read the following which have been mentioned in prior "Weeks In Review" and consider how they apply to your game, your game strategy and your success as an official:

- Prevent the next foul
- Use personality to influence outcomes
- Match your personality to the game situation and/or the moment
- Influence the future with actions in the present
- Referee for the future not just the moment
- Does the game or player need the card?
- The game is the best teacher. Learn from it and make adjustment during it
- Send appropriate messages
- Energy and intensity of the referee team must exceed that of the game
- Chase every ball to the goal line and the goalkeeper
- ARs should fall into the "rhythm" of the referee
- Stay focused for 90 minutes
- Don't let your guard down
- Don't leave anything for chance while preparing for everything

Remember, with the new "second season" upon us, it's only just begun and it won't be over 'til it's over!

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