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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 34

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 34 (Playoff Week 3) – ending November 16, 2008****WEEK 34 (Playoffs Week 3) OVERVIEW**

After 34 weeks of competition, the MLS season will come down to a single game. This past week, the two Conference Championships were completed and officials can be proud that their performances contributed to fair and entertaining matches that showcased the great effort put out by the players. As anticipated, the Conference Championships were challenging for the referee teams as officials worked hard to proactively manage the games and channel player efforts in positive directions. From the first whistle of each game, the referees set the tone and maintained game control by taking appropriate/calculated risks and by dealing with 100 percent misconduct situations. This approach led to games that permitted the teams to compete with minimal interference on the part of the officiating team while keeping player safety at the forefront.

It was evident that team work was also at the forefront of successful performances. Knowing the importance of the two games, referee teams spent additional time preparing their mental and psychological approach. Such preparation successfully contributed to seamless game management and communication. Overall, officials stepped up to the task at hand and should be congratulated for solid performances that will assist in setting the tone for week 35 and the 2008 MLS Cup.

- *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 34 (Playoff Week 3) COMMENTARY**Offside: Interfering With an Opponent**

Law 11 – Offside provides three cases in which a player in an offside position may be declared offside:

"A player in an offside position is only penalized if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by one of his team, he is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in active play by:

- Interfering with play or
- Interfering with an opponent or
- Gaining an advantage by being in that position."

Additionally, the Laws of the Game provide a definition of the three cases mentioned above. For this clip, "interfering with an opponent" will be the focus. "Interfering with an opponent" is defined as:

"preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent's line of vision or movements or making a gesture or movement which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts an opponent."

Video Clip 1: Chicago at Columbus (61:14)

As this clip is viewed, keep in mind the definition of "interfering with an opponent" provided above. There is an initial shot or pass on goal. As often occurs when several players are gathered around the goal mouth on a shot, many attackers crash/run toward the goal hoping to be on the receiving end of the shot/pass. These attackers can end up in an offside position if the ball is cleared out by the defense as the attackers'

momentum continues their runs toward the goal while the defenders are quickly pushing out in an attempt to put attackers in offside positions. With the attacker's momentum carrying them toward the goal and the defensive effort pushing them away from the goal, the assistant referee's (ARs) job is difficult. Players can be seen rushing in from different directions and the AR must suddenly change his direction and push out with the second to last defender. Consequently, focus and concentration are critical to successful application of the offside law.

This clip shows the dynamics of opposing players running in different directions as a ball is intercepted by the defense in the penalty area and then cleared only a short distance to another attacker at the top of the penalty area. Watch the attacker who is pushing out inside the goal box and directly in front of the goalkeeper. This player is in an offside position because he is "nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent."

There are two important points to consider as this offside situation develops:

- **The final shot on goal "deflects" off a defender**

As the final shot is taken from just outside the top of the penalty area, the ball deflects off a defender who is "crashing" toward the ball at high speed from a close distance. This deflection **DOES NOT** remove any attacker from being in an offside position at the time of the ball was originally shot (played) by his teammate. Why? Because the defender did not "play" (have control of) the ball and the deflection (the fact the ball played off the defender) does not negate the offside.

- **The attacker is attempting to show he is not participating**

The offside positioned attacker is attempting to show he is not participating or "interfering with play" by standing at attention and by putting his hands behind his back. Despite this attempt, the offside attacker **IS** "interfering with an opponent" as defined above. The referee and AR cannot merely look at the attacker's actions but must consider the impact of the offside attacker's position on the goalkeeper.

In this clip, the offside attacker is not only in an offside position but he should be sanctioned for BEING offside. Despite actions to show he does not want to participate, the offside attacker is "interfering with an opponent." This attacker is obstructing the line of vision of the goalkeeper which distracts the goalkeeper's attempt to play the ball. As a consequence, the attacker should be declared offside.

In the event the AR is not sure whether the offside player is "interfering with an opponent" (in this case, with the goalkeeper), the following procedures should be followed. Each of these scenarios should be reviewed by the officiating team prior to the game.

- **Goal is scored by the shooter**

If a goal is scored directly from the shot and the AR is not certain whether the offside positioned attacker interfered with an opponent like the goalkeeper, the AR should stand at attention on the goal line, with the flag down. This is a signal to the referee that the AR is not sure the goal should stand due to uncertainty over the offside positioned player's interference. This signal/procedure gives the referee the opportunity to make a decision as to whether he felt "interference" occurred. Often times, the referee may have a better view of the offside positioned attacker's actions/position and the impact on the opponent. If the referee believes the offside positioned attacker "interfered," then the referee can whistle the offside. On the other hand, should the referee believe there was no "interference," the referee would merely signal a goal by pointing to the center circle.

Note: The AR should ensure he holds his position until he is sure the referee is making a conscious ruling of a good goal. Eye contact with the referee and a clear goal signal (referee pointing to the center circle) by the referee are needed before the AR sprints up the touchline to indicate a good goal.

- **Goal is scored by the offside positioned player**

If the ball goes off the offside positioned player and a goal is scored, the AR should follow the normal offside procedure which is to raise the flag to indicate offside.

- **Shot rebounds into play off the goalkeeper/goal post or goes out for a corner kick**

If the ball rebounds off the goalkeeper or a goal post back into play or the ball goes out for a corner kick, the AR should stand at attention. The referee is then required to make a decision relative to whether the offside positioned attacker "interfered with an opponent" or not.

- **Goalkeeper gains clear possession of the ball on the shot**

If the keeper gains clear and unchallenged possession of the ball on the shot, as is the case in this clip, the AR can keep the flag down but be prepared to indicate offside if the goalkeeper's possession comes into question or if the AR believes there is a potential for injury due to a challenge.

Tactical Foul: Yellow Card Required

Tactical fouls are a regular occurrence in games as they are an effective mechanism for defenders to stop an opponent's progression with the ball and give their team sufficient time to reorganize and get numbers behind the ball. Additionally, because tactical fouls are generally non-aggressive in nature, players hope that by committing such a foul they will avoid official sanction (yellow card).

“Week In Review 7” first introduced the concept of tactical fouls and provided guidelines referees can utilize to ensure that tactical fouls do not go unpunished. Here are the tactical elements referees should consider when evaluating a challenge to determine its tactical nature:

- **Usually in attacking end of the field.**

Defensive players commit the foul because they acknowledge that the attacking team will have a credible opportunity to go-to-goal with a high degree of effectiveness. It normally involves speed of the attack.

- **Numerical advantage.**

Committed by defenders to prevent an attacking team or player from gaining a numeric advantage – not to be confused with denying a goal scoring opportunity.

- **Time to defend.**

Tactical fouls are committed to give the defending team time to get goal-side of the ball. In other words, to give the defending team (as opposed to the attacking team) time to get a numeric advantage between the ball and the goal.

- **Prevent the ball and/or player from advancing.**

Normally, committed to prevent the ball and/or attacking player from getting into space behind a defender or behind the defense. This assists in developing a numeric advantage. It is the “if the ball gets by, the player doesn’t or if the player gets by, the ball doesn’t” theory. Look for open areas of space that the ball would normally be played into or where an attacking player would run into if they were to receive the ball. Again, behind a defender, into space. Often this occurs on the flanks (the wide areas on the field) where the attacking team has speed and has the opportunity to take advantage of the space behind the defense leading to the goal.

- **The defender knows he is beat.**

Defenders commit this foul because they know they have been beat by the attacker. Look for one vs. one situation.

- **Minor nature of the foul.**

These fouls are often times considered minor because they normally don’t involve hard, physical contact. Because of this “soft” classification, they often go unpunished. Shirt pulling or using their body to make contact with the opponent and impede their progress are frequent examples.

Video Clip 2: Chicago at Columbus (21:44)

Watch the clip and several of the elements of a tactical foul will be evident. Remember, when players are traveling with speed, it does not take much contact to knock them off the ball unfairly. Hence, fouls do not have to be hard challenges just sufficient to unfairly dispossess the opponent of the ball and to deny the opponent of their tactical advantage. As with most tactical challenges, the foul is of a minor nature like holding, grabbing and obstructing. The slight hold is just sufficient to impede the attacker’s progress. The foul is committed because the defender knows he is beat and the defender sees the open space facing the attacker’s. In order to deny the space and the advancement of the ball, the defender resorts to pulling the shirt. A “soft” foul but a foul nonetheless. The referee does a good job of recognizing the nature of the foul and makes a correct decision to caution the defender for unsporting behavior. The fact that this is a playoff game and only 22 minutes into the match does not deter the referee from taking appropriate action.

Assistant Referee Work Rate and Positioning

One of the continual focal points for ARs during this season has been work rate and positioning. In part, this has been due to the speed at which games have been played and the additional pressures it puts on ARs when they are not in position to make critical decisions whether they be offside decisions or decisions intended to provide game critical information to the referee. Additionally, hustle and work rate translate into increased focus and concentration for ARs who often are faced with lapses in time in which their involvement is required.

As discussed in “Week In Review 28” ([***click on this link to access***](#)), ARs have the responsibility to follow every ball to the goalkeeper and/or goal line. This procedure is part of U.S. Soccer’s “Guide to Procedures For Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials” as it is part of FIFA’s 2008/2009 “Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees” which supplement the Laws of the Game. ARs cannot leave for chance any ball that is headed toward the goal line or the goalkeeper. At all levels, ARs must possess the ability (in terms of fitness, agility, mobility and endurance) to maintain the offside line with the second to last defender and/or follow every ball to the goal line for the entire 90 minutes of the match.

The following clips provide two examples of ARs who fail to maintain the offside line and who do not chase the ball all the way to the goalkeeper thus putting themselves in a poor position to make the next decision should the game require it.

Video Clip 3: New York at Real Salt Lake (46:32)

In this clip, the AR is out of position (not in line with the second to last defender) and would have jeopardized the validity of the offside decision if he were called upon to make it. Freeze the clip at 46:32. The AR is not in the correct offside position as he is not directly in line with the second to last defender who is positioned at the top of the penalty area. As the ball is further advanced by the attackers, the AR struggles to close the gap with the second to last defender.

Part of the cause of the positioning issue may be a result of the ARs running style. The AR is caught between sidestepping (being square to the field) and running forward. Additionally, the AR seems to be too focused on the ball causing him to lose track of the position of the second to last defender. The combination of these two issues contributes to a positional issue.

ARs must work on running mechanics so that they are able to sidestep at high speed which keeps their bodies square to the field and enables them to better observe the offside line. The ability to sidestep at a fast rate must be supplemented by the ability to transition to a different running style (sidestepping to forward sprint or forward sprint to sidestepping) without losing much speed. This is an art that must be trained and practiced.

Video Clip 4: New York at Real Salt Lake (64:33)

Simply, ARs are required to chase every ball to the goalkeeper and/or goal line. This is not optional. This clip illustrates an AR who fails to follow the procedures established by U.S. Soccer and FIFA and that have been reiterated in multiple "Week In Reviews." By not following the ball as required, the perception is that the AR is exhibiting a lack of hustle and is placing the officiating team in a compromising position should there be a challenge on the goalkeeper or the goalkeeper misplays the ball. By the time the 'keeper receives the ball, the AR has stopped his run and is 18 yards up field. Every attempt must be made to keep pace with the ball and the play.

MLS CUP FOCUS

The "Game"

MLS Cup is the most important annual club match in the United States. It is the "game," the final, the end to a 35 week season. As a consequence, officials must focus on the "game" and its overall presentation. Assigned officials should ensure that the players play and the fans enjoy the game without risking player safety and the Laws of the Game. Referees must focus on execution in the "game." Being in the right place to make the call and an enhanced sense regarding the requirements/significance of the game are expected. The assignment is an honor as there is only one such "game" every year. The entire referee crew must make the most of their officiating skills with a heightened awareness to conduct the "game" so that the participants have no choice but to channel their energy in a positive direction.

MLS Cup Referee Assignments

Congratulations to the officials who have been awarded with the honor to work the MLS Cup Final on Sunday, November 23, at The Home Depot Center in Carson, California:

Baldomero Toledo, Referee
Kermit Quisenberry, Assistant Referee
Greg Barkey, Assistant Referee
Mark Geiger, Fourth Official

Of special note is that this game marks the last game that Greg Barkey will wear the FIFA Assistant Referee badge. Due to FIFA requirements, Greg is forced to retire from the FIFA AR list but not after a fantastic career representing the United States internationally (for 13 years) while working in the MLS since its inception. As mentioned last week, Kermit Quisenberry was named the 2008 MLS Assistant Referee of the Year. This is the first MLS Cup assignment for Baldomero and Mark.

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