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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 35



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 35 (MLS Cup Final) – ending November 23, 2008

WEEK 35 (MLS Cup Final) OVERVIEW

It is fitting that the 2008 MLS season finished as strong as it started. Yes, there were some bumps in the road, but officials made significant strides and progress during the season. The MLS Cup was the culmination of 35 weeks of sweat, daily fitness training sessions, courageous and controversial decisions, as well as the wear and tear on family and relationships caused by the eight month season.

Congratulations to the officiating team that conducted the MLS Cup final with professionalism and executed a fantastic game plan allowing the teams to exhibit their skill and provide the platform for an entertaining 90 minutes:

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

With four stupendous and creative goals, MLS Cup reminded fans of why soccer is called the “beautiful game.” With only three cautions and 24 fouls, the game mirrored the officiating model being expounded upon all season: flow (reducing the number of fouls called for trifling/minor challenges), and utilization of personality/presence to manage the game while dealing with the 100 percent misconduct situations.

- *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 35 (MLS Cup Final) COMMENTARY

Offside: Not Involved in “Active Play”

Last week, in “Week In Review 34” ([click on this link to access](#)), an offside situation was presented in which an offside positioned attacker “interfered with an opponent” by blocking the goalkeeper’s line of vision on a shot on goal. This week, another interesting offside situation is presented but, this time, the player does **not** participate in “active play” and, thus, should not be declared offside. The assistant referee’s (ARs) decision to keep the flag down by using the “wait and see” technique, leads to a goal.

Involvement in “active play” refers to an offside player who (when the ball is played or touched by a teammate) either:

- **Interferes with play**

Plays or touches the ball passed or touched by a teammate

- **Interferes with an opponent**

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.

- **Gains an advantage by being in the offside position**

Playing a ball that rebounds to him off a goalpost or the crossbar having been in an offside position or playing a ball that rebounds to him off an opponent having been in an offside position.

Video Clip 1: New York vs. Columbus (3:17)

As the shot is taken, focus on the back post and the shooter's teammate who is running in toward the goal. At the time of the shot, this streaking attacker is in an offside position. He is "nearer to his opponent's goal line" than both the ball and the second to last opponent.

Seeing the ball headed in the direction of the offside positioned player, the AR must show restraint in making the final offside decision. By exhibiting restraint and keeping the flag down ("wait and see" technique), the AR is then able to observe the outcome of the shot and make a definite determination as to whether the far post attacker is involved in "active play" by either interfering with play, interfering with an opponent or by gaining an advantage by being in the offside position.

In this clip, the attacker is **NOT** involved in "active play" as he does NOT:

- **Interfere with play**

The attacker does not play or touch the ball as it passes by him. Even though only a few feet separate the offside player from the ball, the fact that the player does not make contact with the ball eliminates this element of involvement in "active play."

- **Interfere with an opponent**

The offside player does not prevent the opponent running with him from playing or being able to play the ball because the attacker does not clearly obstruct the defender's line of vision or movements nor does the attacker make a gesture or movement which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts this defender.

As an AR, take the offside positioned attacker out of the picture. Then, ask yourself:

"Would the defender or goalkeeper have been able to make a play on the ball?"

If the answer is "no," as it is in this case, then the offside positioned attacker should NOT be declare offside because he has not interfered with an opponent's ability to play the ball. The offside positioned attacker is behind both the defender and the goalkeeper therefore he cannot be obstructing either's vision or movements.

- **Gains an advantage by being in the offside position**

Since the offside positioned attacker does not play a ball that rebounds to him off a goalpost, the crossbar or opponent after having been in his offside position, he does not gain an advantage from his position.

By using the "wait and see" technique, the AR is able to promote attacking soccer and provide the enjoyment of a goal in the MLS Cup final. This is a correctly executed no-call on an offside.

100% Misconduct: Yellow Card Required

The Laws of the Game, specifically *Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct*, require that a yellow card be issued for any foul that is "reckless." "Reckless" means that the player committing the foul has acted with complete disregard to the danger to, or consequences for, the opponent. The foul is clearly outside the norm for fair play. In cases of "reckless" challenges, the referee is required by the Laws of the Game to caution the player for unsporting behavior **regardless** of the time in the match.

Video Clip 2: New York vs. Columbus (3:17)

With the game just over three minutes old, a challenge is committed that is "reckless" in nature and, therefore, must be cautioned for unsporting behavior. Although the game is in the very early stages, players cannot feel that they are free to commit fouls because the referee will not caution or send them off due to the fact the game has just commenced. Regardless of the game time, referees must address the 100 percent misconduct situations. Failure to do so can result in loss of game control and loss of respect from the players.

This clip provides an example of a challenge that is "reckless." It is a challenge where the defender is running directly at the attacker at a high speed and therefore does not have the ability to control his actions or stop. Simply, the challenge is executed in a manner that the defender completely disregards the danger he is putting the attacker in. The defender stays on his feet which is a sign to the referee that the foul is not done with "excessive force" and is not done to injure the opponent which would mandate a red card. Because it is early in the game, it may be a tactic by the defending team to "send a message" to the attacker that they hope would resonate in his mind for the remainder of the match. The referee recognizes the tactic being employed and correctly cautions the defender for unsporting behavior.

Handling the Ball: Making Yourself Bigger

“Week In Review 19” ([click on this link to access](#)) as well as “Week In Review 27” ([click on this link to access](#)) thoroughly provided criteria referees can use to make a determination regarding handling the ball. More and more, players are using their arms/hands to gain tactical advantages over opponents with the ball. Generally, they use their arms to take away space and passing lanes. In other words, they place their arms/hands in positions to eliminate options that the attacker may have if the arms were not in that position. Officials should keep in mind the following criteria when evaluating situations involving “making yourself bigger:”

- **Making yourself bigger**

Refers to the placement of the arm(s)/hand(s) of the defending player at the time the ball is played by the opponent. Should an arm/hand be in a position that takes away space from the team with the ball and the ball contacts the arm/hand, the referee should interpret this contact as handling. Referees should interpret this action as the defender “deliberately” putting his arm/hand in a position in order to reduce the options of the opponent (like spreading your arms wide to take away the passing lane of an attacker).

Some of the critical signs referees should consider in making the determination as to whether a handling situation is a foul are (further details can be found in “Week In Review 19”):

- **Is the arm or hand in an “unnatural position?”**
- **Hand to ball**
- **Distance**
- **The result of the action**

Video Clip 3: New York vs. Columbus (65:05)

The defender uses the “make yourself bigger” technique to prevent an opponent’s ball from getting past him or behind him into space. The defender extends his arm out and throws his body in front of the player and the ball causing his arm to contact the ball. The defender attempts to disguise the handling or “making yourself bigger” offense by his actions and the referee does well not to be fooled.

The result of the defender’s action was to take away the space from the attacker and prevent the ball from getting behind him. The defender turns his body and arm into the path of the attacker and the ball. The result is a deliberate action by the defender to reduce the options of the opponent. Consequently, the referee is correct to award a direct free kick for handling the ball.

POST SEASON FOCUS

Now that the 2008 professional season has concluded, there will be periodic future “Week In Reviews” published to discuss and address relevant issues surfacing from U.S. Soccer Development Academy games. So, stay tuned and keep reading.

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