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## Referee Programs

### U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 6



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.

#### U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review Week 6 – ending May 4, 2008 WEEK 6 OVERVIEW

Referee team performances were solid in 5 of our 7 games. In two of the games, the referee's performance failed to match the intensity level of the game and, consequently, the games lacked the entertainment value that has been a hallmark of many matches thus far this year. Referee teams need to sense the flow and "atmosphere" or spirit of the game and recognize the danger signals as the game develops. In the two aforementioned games, the referee relied too much on personality and too much on flow to manage the game. Referees must recognize that, as the game/situation changes, they must adapt their personality to EXCEED the intensity levels of the players.

Despite efforts to encourage officials to address bench decorum, the issue continues to arise. Once again, there were several instances in which behavior by a coach exceeded the boundaries of acceptability and, once again, the officiating team ignored the need to take action. This will be addressed further below.

Unfortunately, this past week's performance included the denying of a valid goal in a 2-2 contest. As you will see later, the assistant referee was out of position and, consequently, incorrectly disallowed a team's third and go-ahead goal.

Finally, there were a few technical related issues that hampered the overall strong performances by the referee teams. Some of the technical issues addressed below were disciplinary report writing and free kick mechanics.

- *On the ussoccer.com web page, you can listen to weekly podcasts highlighting the main issues from the "Week in Review" document. On the ussoccer.com homepage, look mid page for the tab that says "Podcasts."*

#### A LOOK BACK – ISSUES AND RESULTS – WEEK 6

##### Application of Advantage

**Issue:** Both referees and assistant referees need to coordinate efforts to allow the rhythm of the game or flow of the game to continue uninterrupted in cases where there is a clear and effective advantage in accordance with the guidelines provided by the "4 P Principle."

- **Possession of ball:** control by team or player.
- **Potential for attack:** ability to continue a credible and dangerous attack.
- **Personnel:** skill of attackers, numerical advantage.
- **Proximity to opponent's goal:** closeness to goal.

**Result:** There were many instances of excellent application of advantage where the safety of the players and game control were not jeopardized and the "4 P Principle" was clearly applicable. At the same time, referees and assistant referees need to continue to work on identifying instances where advantage can be applied and on instances where there may be possession but there is no clear and effective advantage. Let's continue our due diligence in the application of advantage ensuring that the attacking team reaps benefits as does the flow of the game. The correct application of advantage has resulted in several goals thus far this season. REMEMBER, the risks of applying advantage are low as the referee possesses the ability to come back and call the foul if the advantage does not materialize. Review the clips below for more clarification:

**Video Clip 1:** New York at Toronto (3:47)

In this case, the “4 P Principle” can be clearly applied. The result is a good advantage decision by the referee.

#### 1. Possession of the ball.

The attacking team has clear possession of the ball with while under no pressure from the opponent.

#### 2. Potential for attack.

There exists a high probability for a credible attack as the left wing player who receives the ball has no opponent within 15 yards. Hence, he has the ability to assess his options and make a reasonable decision on the ball.

#### 3. Personnel.

At the professional level, when players possess 15 yards of space they will have sufficient skill level and time to make a decision on the ball.

#### 4. Proximity to opponent’s goal.

The ball is in the attacking third of the field and the second pass is made to a teammate who is further advanced. So, the attacking team has the opportunity to continue to move the ball forward toward their goal.

#### Video Clip 2: New York at Toronto (7:47)

The same game as the previous clip but 4 minutes later. In this case, the referee is better off calling the foul as no clear or effective opportunity is provided the attacking team to continue possession of the ball and advance it toward goal. The “4 P Principle” does not work in this situation. There is no clear possession, there is a defender pressuring the ball on each pass, the passes are done in a confined area, and there is no proximity to goal (the players are limited by the fact they are up against the touchline). Simply, the attacking player is disposed of the ball in a manner that forces a bad pass. Not only is this not a good advantage candidate, it should not be interpreted as allowing game flow.

#### Video Clip 3: Dallas at San Jose (82:53)

This is a case of Referee – Assistant Referee (AR) coordination relative to advantage and flow. When deciding to raise the flag or whistle the foul, the officials must consider the “atmosphere” of the match on the field. The game will be the best gauge to direct your decision. In this particular game, there have been no conduct issues and, therefore, the “atmosphere” permits more risk taking. Regardless of whether a foul exists or not, what is clear is that the ball goes directly to the defending goalkeeper. A goalkeeper that seemingly has the time to play the ball out without undo pressure by the attacking team. So, it is advisable for the Assistant Referee to hold the flag and the Referee to hold the whistle until it is clear the goalkeeper will NOT have the opportunity to play the ball out of the back. In other words, utilize a “wait and see” mentality and hold the flag. If the attacker continues his run to the keeper and pressures the keeper’s distribution, then a late flag or whistle would be warranted. Referees, remember, you are empowered to wave off the AR or hold your whistle and acknowledge the flag later. Should the goalkeeper have a reasonable play on the ball, by allowing play to continue, the referee team has contributed to the overall rhythm and flow of the match.

### WEEK 6 COMMENTARY

#### Game Disrepute – Player Actions

Game disrepute by players usually involves at least one player and sometimes two or more opposing players going at each other in an aggressive manner. The actions of the players bring the game into disrepute. Usually the ball is dead (out of play). Players feel at liberty to have a “go” at each other because they don’t have to chase a live ball. These are volatile situations. Because the ball is dead, a specific foul cannot be called but that should not inhibit the referee from taking appropriate action. Game disrepute can be dealt with in multiple ways:

- **Sprint to the Situation.**

If the referee or AR senses a problem, SPRINT to the situation. Presence is critical in terms of carefully separating the players in a non-forceful manner.

- **Stern Warning vs. Caution.**

In some cases, you can deal with disrepute with a stern warning while isolating the players. See “Week In Review #3,” Video Clip 1 for an example. A caution is not always the answer but the referee must raise his intensity and address the case by sending a strong verbal and visual message.

- **Misconduct.**

If the situation escalates in numbers and intensity, then the referee must deal with the scenario more stringently as misconduct. Referees must not hesitate to caution players for unsporting behavior. In many instances, game disrepute requires two players to be cautioned (one

from each team) as it takes two players to initiate and continue the situation.

- **Player Escalation.**

Be aware of players that run to the fray from long distances and from the bench. The fourth official can play a role in preventing escalation by controlling the benches and by assisting with the identification of players. If the situation warrants, AR's should also feel comfortable entering the field to provide presence.

**Video Clip 4:** Galaxy at RSL (87:16)

This is a classic example of game disrepute and one in which two cautions are warranted. Two players go chest-to-chest and there is very obvious physical contact amongst them. Contact is not necessary but it makes the disrepute more obvious. Look at the time. Despite the fact there is less than three minutes remaining in the game, the referee identifies that the players' actions need official attention and represent a threat to the "atmosphere" of the match – regardless of the remaining time. The referee uses common sense and correctly cautions both players for unsporting behavior.

**Bench Decorum**

Coaching behavior is still an issue and we are directly to blame. We have been given the support and tools to address the issue yet we continue to ignore it or identify it. You must not hesitate to address the behavior in the technical area. Remember, "addressing the behavior" does not have to start with dismissal. At National Camp, a lengthy discussion ensued covering behavior in the technical area. At the time, it was agreed that we would find creative yet effective ways of positively addressing the coach and, then, if this did not work, we would take official action – dismissal. Remember, consider using an approach of "ask, tell, remove" to deal with escalating behavior. What follows are clips from games in which the referee took no action. In each clip, look for the location of the referee, fourth official, and nearest AR. Can they see or hear the coach's actions? Then decide what action should be taken. Please refer to the March 22, 2006, U.S. Soccer position paper entitled, "Management of Behavior in the Technical Area." ([Click here to access the position paper](#))

If the opportunity arises, referees should consider a proactive approach to bench decorum by positively addressing the issue with both coaches prior to the game. The referee can remind them of their responsibilities and the fact that bench decorum is a point of emphasis for the 2008 season.

**Video Clip 5:** New England at Dallas (84:05)

Although the clip is from a prior week, in this situation, the coach is visually dissenting, yelling at the referee, and has left the technical area. And, the decision is against the opposing team. Freeze the picture at 84:05 and you can see the coach is along the touchline, outside his technical area. Look at the attached photo (**at the right**) and ask yourself: Is this appropriate behavior? The referee probably cannot observe the behavior of the coach. However, the fourth official should have a clear view of the coach's actions. No action is taken. In this case, given all the actions by the coach, the demonstration is so egregious that the referee is within his rights to dismiss the coach from the game. The question is, why did the fourth official not converse with the referee and provide information relative to the unprofessional behavior? In the pregame, Referees, ARs, and fourth officials **MUST** discuss these situations and how they will be addressed. Note: the decision by the referee to caution the player for simulation is textbook.



**Video Clip 6:** New York at Toronto (84:10)

The coach is seemingly loud, demonstrative, and potentially having a not-so-friendly conversation with the opposing coach as well as the referee. The fourth official is lending presence to the situation. However, the fourth official is not taking official action. Several similar clips can be made of this coach, in the same game, acting similarly and being dealt with by the fourth official. The referee team must be aware of the constant negative behavior throughout the game and take this into consideration.

- The referee should also be able to intervene as the free kick is near the team bench and the referee's position should put him in view of the coach's actions.
- The referee cannot use the excuse that he did not "see or hear" the coach since these actions were evident throughout the first and second halves (did the referee team discuss the behavior at half-time and prepare a preventative action plan and increase the referee team's sensitivity?).
- With several of these situations on-going in the game, the referee team must take action.
- Start with holding the game up, approaching the coach, providing a stern word, and then hold the coach accountable for his actions. If this does not work, US Soccer and MLS will support your decision to dismiss the coach from the game.

The recipe provided here will work as the coach has been warned at least twice (via preseason meetings, US Soccer memorandums on "Bench Decorum," by the fourth official during the game, and by the referee) prior to his dismissal. Take sensible action but do not ignore this behavior.

## Disciplinary Report Writing

Report writing and the content of reports are critical in the decision making process relative to suspensions and fines. Reports can be submitted for, amongst other items, post-game behavior and for misconduct that occurs during the game. Unclear, incomplete, or misleading reports do not lend themselves to effective reviews of player and coach behavior. Reports must indicate: who, what, where, when, and how. Reports should include specifics about what was said, how it was said, any preventative action taken by the referee team, a description of distances traveled, how long the action took, was it visual as well as verbal, and a specific reference to the reason as stated in the Laws of the Game. If you dismiss a non-player you **MUST** use the term **DISMISSED** in your report. Merely writing the circumstances is not sufficient. This past week, a report was written about a coach who entered the field after the game to complain; however, the referee crew failed to use the term "dismissed" in the disciplinary report. A poorly written description of the coach's actions was provided but this is not sufficient for the Disciplinary Committee to take action. The REFEREE TEAM must take official action first. For further detailed information on disciplinary report writing, refer to the April 4, 2008, U.S. Soccer position paper entitled, "Match Reports Involving Discipline." ([Click here to access the position paper](#))

- **Post-game misconduct:** referees may issue and display yellow or red cards to players, substitutes, or after the game. In terms of non-player personnel, the referee should inform the coach on the field and/or via a supplemental report that he has been dismissed after the game. Referees must ensure the report is delivered to the team coach by the referee liaison. These reports must be as descriptive as reports made for misconduct during the game.

## Red Card Offenses

There were two red card offenses this past week that are representative of the type of fouls that warrant the issuance of a red card.

### **Video Clip 7:** Kansas City at Columbus (35:48)

It is still early in the match and the referee displays excellent execution in issuance of a red card and yellow card in the clip. The red card is precipitated by the innocuous shirt pull and the referee is playing advantage and allowing the attacker to breakaway as there is space in front of him to continue to carry the ball (a case can be made that an early whistle would have prevented the red card but the player's reply does not correlate to the hold). The attacker's response to the hold is violent conduct – a shove directly to the face of the opponent with both hands.

- The referee was not influenced by the time of the game.
- The referee exhibited a keen awareness of the "big picture." He sends the player off for violent conduct but he also cautions the player for the hold (unsporting behavior) and awards the free kick to the team receiving the red card.

In this single situation, the referee makes three tactically correct decisions: red card, caution, and restart for the first foul.

### **Video Clip 8:** Chivas at Houston (83:02)

A red card is issued for Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO). This is a clear cut example of DOGSO. Remember:

- Defenders: there are no defenders between the attacker and the goal.
- Direction: the attacker is centered on the field and moving directly to goal.
- Distance to goal: as the attacker plays the ball he is at the top of the penalty area; hence, his proximity to goal is approximately 18 yards.
- Distance to ball: the attacker is playing the ball with his head.

## Free Kick Mechanics

Often times, referee actions can be misconstrued or misinterpreted. For this reason, signals/mechanics are somewhat standardized and uniform. This past week, a situation arose in which a referee's signal to "hold the ball" on a free kick while the distance was being provided, was misread by a team as an Indirect Free Kick signal. Unfortunately for the referee, a goal was scored directly from the restart.

### **Video Clip 9:** Galaxy at RSL (38:43)

- This example illustrates the mechanics outlined above. It also, however, shows how the manner in which the referee signals "wait for my whistle" (ceremonial free kick) can be misinterpreted by the defending team as an indication of Indirect Free Kick. Look at the height of the referee's arm. His signal to hold the kick is similar to the indirect free kick signal. For this reason, US Soccer recommends that the referee hold the whistle no higher than his face and point to it clearly distinguishing an indirect signal from the "wait for my whistle" signal. In the press, the coach was quoted as saying the goal should have been disallowed because the free kick was indirect. Also remember that a foul that looks like dangerous play can be a direct free kick when contact is made with the opponent.

### **Video Clip 10:** New York at Toronto (21:48)

Quick free kicks are an important aspect of creating attacking soccer and catching the defending team off-guard. However, especially in the "danger zone," they are often passed up for ceremonial restarts. In this clip, the referee moves to the spot of the ball but there is no direct interference by the defending team so he decides not to interfere. The result: a quick restart and a goal. It is important to note that the players did not ask for 10 yards and the position of the defenders is such that they are sufficient distance from the ball that they do not present a distraction. The referee shows good sense for what the players and the game requires. Note that the referee's position could be enhanced

by being more aware of the taking of the kick and moving sharply to the free kick's "target zone."

### Offside Decisions

A normal weekly feature is offside decisions. This week is no different as we have three clips intended to continue to educate officials and heighten awareness as to the importance of this decision in providing entertaining and attacking soccer as well as its importance in deciding outcomes of games. The job of the AR is not getting easier especially as the speed of the game and the ball improves. As a result, ARs need to be in better physical condition than ever particularly as it relates to sidestepping and changing direction and running styles (moving from sidestepping to sprinting). Note the following observations which need to be considered for ARs:

- The speed of attacking players is increasing at a greater rate than the speed of defenders. Teams are bringing in young, creative, and fast attackers.
- Offensive teams are relying more on counter-attacks. Quick, long balls to strikers often by-passing the midfield. So, ARs must be ready to make decisions sooner.
- With modern formations, players are making more penetrating runs. This is especially true of midfielders who make long runs onto balls served over the top of the defense.
- The flat-back-four defense means defenses are flat and teams try to beat them with diagonal runs by the forwards into the gaps between defenders.

#### Video Clip 11: DC at Colorado (32:40)

This is the classic "wait and see" example. Excellent work by the AR to hold the flag until he is certain who will play the ball. As the kick is taken, notice that there are two players potentially in offside positions. One of the players actually moves toward the serviced ball. However, the player shows that he is not participating by stopping his run. A player who starts his run 8 yards outside, receives the ball. It is very tempting to put the flag up as soon as the offside player moves to the ball but a strong AR will show restraint and wait to see who participates. Key is the ability of the AR to assess the situation and wait to see who touches the ball – the onside player or the offside player.

#### Video Clip 12: Galaxy at RSL (42:15)

This decision is very unfortunate as it takes away a potential game winning goal as the score is tied 2-2. At the professional level, this type of decision cannot be made as the attacker is at least 1 yard outside when the ball is passed by his teammate and there is plenty of time and space for the AR to make a proper decision. Notice the ARs position, 2 or more yards behind the second-to-last defender. Therefore, the ARs view of the goal scorer is skewed. With the ARs position, the goal scorer will seem to be in a more advanced position than he is in actuality. We must get this right!

#### Video Clip 13: Dallas at San Jose (64:47)

This is a difficult offside decision for the AR to make because the defender and the attacker are running/moving in opposite directions (often considered an offside trap). However, the defender moves up too late thereby putting the attacker 1 yard or so outside. The AR must be positioned correctly (shoulders square to the field) and must give the benefit of the doubt to the attack. This clip provides a good example for giving attacking soccer the benefit. In slow motion, you can see the attacker is outside. Do not be anxious with the flag, show restraint. Remember, after 6 weeks of games, NOT ONE GOAL ALLOWED HAS BEEN JUDGED TO BE OFFSIDE while multiple onside goals have been disallowed. Note the following input from two senior ARs:

- **Be Square to the Field.**

Critical for AR to be square to the field viewing this situation. AR needs widest view option and to use peripheral vision to see the ball being "touched", played by attacker's teammate from distance back field, position of attacker making run and position of second to last defender at moment of "touch" to make correct offside decision.

- **Total Focus, Concentration, and Awareness.**

AR position for viewing this play needs be square to the field and side-stepping with total focus and high level of concentration on the attacker making forward run, defender running out in opposite direction and attacking teammate passing the ball. ARs need to be aware of the positions of both the attacker(s) and defender(s). Maintain focus on the role of an AR: primarily offside.

- **Watching Play vs. Offside Position.**

It is imperative that the AR maintains focus at all time throughout the match by fairly judging offside decisions and not be distracted in this job by "watching play." ARs must not get caught up in "watching play" versus focusing on their primary objective of judging offside.

- **Awareness of Players and Style of Play.**

ARs should understand the style of play of both teams and players involved while being prepared for quick transitions.

### Goalkeeper Time Wasting

In recent weeks, the tactic of the goalkeeper holding the ball longer than the 6 seconds prescribed in the Laws of the Game has been prevalent. In addition, goalkeepers are taking extended time restarting the game on goal kicks and free kicks that they take. The score and the time of the game is important. Referees should be cognizant of these factors as they directly influence the goalkeeper's actions.

- **6 Second Delay.**

The delays have been extended to 15 or more seconds. We are not asking that referees immediately penalize (with an indirect free kick) REASONABLE delays that exceed 6 seconds but we do want referees to exhibit due diligence in encouraging goalkeepers to put the ball into play. Use preventative techniques. Don't start the count until the goalkeeper gains full control/possession of the ball. Possession means the goalkeeper has the ability to distribute the ball. Do not count the time verbally or visually. A goalkeeper who is making reasonable efforts to put the ball into play should be offered the benefit of doubt. Finally, before you penalize with an indirect free kick, issue a verbal and visual warning to the keeper that can be seen and heard by everyone.

- **Restart Delay.**

Using the same criteria provided for the 6 Second Delay, ensure the goalkeeper is not delaying the game and is making every effort to put the ball back into play in a reasonable timeframe. Goalkeepers who slow down to wave teammates up-field, who walk to get the ball, who toss one ball aside for another must be dealt with using the verbal and/or visual warning criteria first. If this is not sufficient and the behavior persists, a caution for delaying the restart may be in order.

## **SUMMARY**

This past week, two officials whistled their first games of the season in MLS. Both officials performed well managing their game following the guidelines that have been set forth to date in the "Week In Reviews" and US Soccer position papers. In fact, two games (Chicago at New England and DC at Colorado) were appropriately managed without the need to issue cautions while a third game had only two cautions.

It seems as though referees are stepping-up their management styles and using proactive communication, personality, and smart refereeing to prevent and anticipate negative play. Referees are being creative in finding ways to "influence the future" with their actions in the present.

## **WEEK 7 FOCUS**

### **Positive Encouragement and Team Work**

Team work built around positive encouragement for all officials will be this weekend's focus. Performances have exceeded expectations thus far this season so all officials should be excited about their contributions to date but we still have a lot of room to improve. Given this, let us focus on building the foundation for strong game-time teamwork. Start with your pregame discussions and interchange. At half time, be honest and supportive. Reevaluate your game plan at half and make the appropriate adjustments. Everyone needs to participate in this discussion. End the game with a positive review of how the team executed against the overall game plan. Stay focused, stay energized, and keep the "big picture" in mind.

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