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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 7



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 7 – ending May 11, 2008

WEEK 7 OVERVIEW

This week saw some extremely difficult and challenging matches requiring referee teams to work hard in order to match and exceed the intensity level of the game in terms of their performance. Game intensity is on the increase as is evident by the fact that there were three games in which the foul count exceeded 30 (35, 31, and 31 fouls called per game). These three games averaged 5.33 cards issued for misconduct. On the other end of the spectrum, one game featured a mere 16 fouls and only one caution. This season, the fewest fouls called in a game was 14. The MLS low for fouls in a match is 11, which happened twice once in 1996 and once in 2003.

This week also featured two team personnel (a substituted player and an assistant coach), from the same team, being dismissed and sent off from the technical area – correctly and appropriately. This was the first such expulsion this season. A synopsis of the two scenarios is provided below.

Overall, solid performances. As a result, this Week In Review has fewer items to cover. It is obvious that the games are being called with more consistency in the application of the Laws of the Game and in the utilization of personality to manage the games.

- *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 7

Positive Encouragement and Team Work

Issue: Build teamwork through positive encouragement thereby setting the foundation for strong game-time execution. Start with your pregame discussions and interchange. At halftime, be honest and supportive. Reevaluate your game plan at half and make the appropriate adjustments. Everyone needs to participate in this discussion. Stay focused, stay energized, and keep the “big picture” in mind.

Result: Last week’s focus of building the foundation for solid teamwork paid dividends. With the difficulty of some of the matches, it was evident that referee teams made halftime adjustments as the second halves of many games had much more flow and required less intervention on the part of the referee. Referees set the tone and the players responded.

Despite the excellent teamwork, there was one game situation in which enhanced coordination would have benefited both the referee and the game. At one point in the first half, a coach and an opposing player had “words” as the player went to retrieve the ball from the bench area. This action was noticed by the fourth official but not by the referee. As the half-time whistle was blown, the same player kicked the ball (from some distance) toward the coach’s bench. The referee chose to deal with the situation with a strong verbal admonition. Hence, heading into half, there were two issues involving the same player and coach.

Unfortunately, the fourth official did not connect the two actions nor did he communicate the bench incident involving the coach and player. It is critical that all officials be cognizant of the actions on/around the field and have the foresight to help the other officials put the “pieces of the puzzle” together for the good of the game. Remember, things that are seemingly small can explode later if not recognized and dealt with appropriately. By communicating the actions of the player and coach, the fourth official would have provided the referee with information needed to prevent and ensure repetition was avoided.

In this situation, the referee was only able to address the ball being kicked toward the bench as he did not have all the necessary facts relative to the bench confrontation. At the time the ball was kicked at the bench, the referee immediately approached the player as did one assistant referee. The two officials spoke to the player who, in turn, acknowledged his mistake. The referee's action seemed to calm the opposing bench. These specific actions of the referee team illustrate good player management.

WEEK 7 COMMENTARY

Bench Decorum

For several weeks we have been discussing the inappropriate behavior taking place within the technical area. Most of the focus has been on the actions of coaches – actions that are outside the guidelines established by U.S. Soccer in several "Week In Reviews," reinforced by MLS, and detailed in the March 22, 2006, U.S. Soccer position paper entitled, "Management of Behavior in the Technical Area." ([Click here to access the position paper](#))

This week a referee team took appropriate action and dealt with irresponsible behavior that exceeded the position reiterated multiple times by U.S. Soccer. In the Colorado vs. Houston game, on two separate occasions, the referee correctly dismissed and sent off an assistant coach and a player who had been substituted out of the game. In both cases, the referee, fourth official, and senior assistant referee applied common sense before taking official action. In both cases, warnings were issued. In both cases, the individuals in question were held accountable for their actions.

Prior to taking official action, the referee team exercised preventative techniques that were not heeded by the teams. The following summarizes the excellent preventative work of the referee team and they are applauded for the manner in which they dealt with both situations:

- **Roster Exchange.**

During the pregame roster exchange, the referee reminded both team staffs of their responsibilities within the technical area.

- **Pregame Warm-up.**

While on the field warming up, the referee approached BOTH coaches and had a friendly word, again, reminding them of the importance of proper bench decorum.

- **During the Game.**

Prior to the dismissal of the Colorado assistant coach, the senior assistant referee had warned the assistant coach for his dissenting behavior in the first half. In the second half, another warning was issued by the fourth official. The player who was red carded was also warned earlier by the senior assistant referee as well as the fourth official for leaving the technical area to complain.

- **Official Action.**

After the various warnings issued to the assistant coach and player, the officiating team decided action was in order. The fourth official informed the referee that the assistant coach must be dismissed and, later, that the player must be red carded.

In the case of the dismissal of the assistant coach, the decision of the referee was based upon: the language used, the gesturing, the volume of the negative comments and who could hear them, and the persistence of the behavior.

Although the red card issued to the player was for "offensive language and gestures" as provided for in the Laws of the Game, the decision of the referee is supported by several other reported facts like: the language used, the visual gestures of waving arms, the entering of the field, and the persistence of the behavior.

- **Post-game Incident Reporting.**

Following the game, the referee submitted the appropriate reports detailing the reasons for the red card and the dismissal. Both reports were descriptive and accurate. The reports were written in a manner that aids the disciplinary committee. The referee team wrote the disciplinary report as covered in the "Week In Review 6" dialog. 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](#))

The following is the report submitted on the dismissal of the assistant coach (it details who, what, where, when and clearly spells out the preventative actions taken during the game)

"In the 69th minute, XXXXX, a member of the Colorado coaching staff was dismissed from the match by the referee. The fourth official reported that he jumped up wildly waving his arm and yelling 'XXXX XXX' loudly to the referee so that many people in the area could hear. He had previously been warned by the senior assistant referee for his dissenting behavior in the first half. He was also warned in the second half by the fourth official to relax, sit down, and stop dissenting. When his irresponsible, offensive and abusive behavior continued in the 69th minute, the fourth official called the referee over to dismiss XXXXX. He left the field without further incident."

Video Clip 1: Colorado at Houston (70:10)

This clip shows the Colorado assistant coach being correctly dismissed by the referee. Notice the coordination between the referee and the fourth official. Information is exchanged, the person identified, and the referee swiftly dismissed the coach. Notice that the referee did not display a red card as the Laws of the Game specify that only players, substitutes, and substituted players may be shown a card. Instead, the referee merely points to the party being dismissed, tells them they are being dismissed, and points to the locker rooms.

Video Clip 2: Colorado at Houston (88:00)

Colorado player no. 20 is shown the red card even though he has been substituted from the game and is within the bench area. The referee signals that the player has been sent-off and then realizes that he must show the red card as no. 20 is a substituted player and is governed by the requirement to show the red card to players, substitutes, and substituted players.

Tactical Fouls

“**Week In Review 5**” set the foundation to assist referees with understanding and dealing with tactical fouls in order to ensure more consistency. Remember, tactical fouls are primarily fouls that don’t necessarily endanger the safety of an opponent but are committed in order to either strip a team of an effective attack (like shirt pulling) or are committed to gain an advantage in attack. Although improvement has been seen, more focus is needed in our application. This past week, seven cautions were issued for tactical fouls. So, we are showing increased awareness and the ability to identify this classification of fouls. Referees need to ensure they are able to quickly identify tactical fouls and then penalize them. Tactical fouls are not only a foul but may also be considered misconduct. Here are some characteristics of tactical fouls:

- **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.

- **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 situations.

- **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.

These are just a few of the characteristics of tactical fouls. Work on training your eye to recognize them. Ask yourself, “why did the player commit the foul here?” Often times the fouls occur in the wide channels of the field so it is critical that assistant referees also be aware of these characteristics and provide the referee with the necessary assistance.

Video Clip 3: Colorado at Houston (66:00)

This is the classic example of a tactical foul. In this clip, a caution must be issued for unsporting behavior (UB 1c – **see the “7 + 7 Cautionable and Sending-Off Offenses position paper for 2008 by clicking on this link**). The referee must “sense and feel” this foul just by reading the build up: where the ball came from and the fact that it is a one-versus-one match up and the space behind the defender. Most all of the characteristics are there.

- **Attacking third.** Prevents attacker from entering the penalty area.

- **Time to defend.** Defender needs to slow the attacker down because there is no supporting defender to support his marking of the striker.
- **Prevents the attacking player from advancing.** The holding foul is committed to deny the attacker the opportunity to get the ball into open space in the penalty area. Should the attacker get by, the attacker would be in open space progressing to goal with speed.
- **Defender is beat.** Without committing the foul, the defender would be on the wrong side of the attacker and the ball.
- **Minor nature of the foul.** This is a holding foul. A foul that committed elsewhere on the field would be simply a foul (not necessarily misconduct).

Note: *The assistant referee is also flagging for the foul. Additionally, the assistant should indicate – using a prearranged signal – that the foul should be cautioned.*

Video Clip 4: Chicago at D.C. (75:19)

Not only does this clip show a tactical foul committed in the center circle but also provides some critical lessons for effective officiating. After the initial foul, the referee indicates (by the raising of his arms) that he is applying advantage. As the two players get off the ground, they tussle; however, the referee exhibits awareness and immediately moves to the potential confrontation thereby preventing its escalation. The attacking team has a clear and effective attack into space, so the advantage is well deserved. Once the ball goes out, the referee proves his awareness of the tactical nature of the foul and returns to the player to caution him for unsporting behavior. Despite the application of the advantage, the referee did not ignore the actions of the defender. Well done on the part of the referee.

Goalkeeper Time Wasting

Last week the subject of goalkeeper time wasting was addressed. In particular, the issue of goalkeepers taking advantage of holding the ball in their hands longer than the six seconds prescribed in the Laws of the Game. Prior to last weekend's games, a conference call with referees who work MLS games was held in which this issue, amongst others, was addressed. As a consequence of referees' actions, no discernable violations were noticed. On the other hand, there was visible evidence that referees actively encouraged goalkeepers to not delay putting the ball into play. Referees were seen moving toward the penalty area, toward the keeper thereby using their presence as encouragement to expedite play. This is the type of preventative work we need game in and game out. We have set the expectation level, now keep communicating this on a daily basis.

Offside Decisions and Assistant Referee Positioning

Every week there are multiple decisions by assistant referees that test their concentration level and ability to focus as well as test their ability to be in the correct position to make the call. This week is no exception. We will review one fantastic offside decision and two errors in positioning. Keep in mind, poor positioning will lead to poor decisions – decisions that can affect the outcome of games.

Video Clip 5: Dallas at RSL (66:54)

This clip illustrates giving the benefit of doubt to attacking soccer by way of the "WAIT AND SEE" principle. As the attack progresses, two attacking players advance into the attacking half of the field. Watch as one defender suddenly stops (offside trap) his run and takes a step toward the ball. This action makes the assistant referee's job much more difficult – two opposing players (one attacker, one defender) moving in different directions. Upon careful observation, you can see the assistant referee's yellow jersey through the game board at the top of the screen. He is positioned perfectly in line with the second-to-last defender. As the midfielder plays the ball, the assistant must take a quick picture of each player's position. In this case, both attackers are positioned onside. Hence, regardless of who receives the pass, no offside would be called. It is interesting to note that, if the center attacker were in an offside position while the wing attacker was onside, no offside should be called as the center attacker would not have interfered with play, interfered with an opponent, or gained an advantage. In fact, the center forward's actions (slowing down) are a signal to the assistant that he does not want to participate in that phase of play. Overall, a great piece of officiating that results in a bit of exciting attacking soccer.

Video Clip 6: Dallas at RSL (24:22)

The focus of this clip is the assistant referee's positioning. Keep your focus on the assistant and where he is stationed as the flag is raised. You will need to pay close attention as the replay is shown. Ask yourself: "where are the defenders when the assistant referee raises his flag?" There are two defenders on the goal-line. The question then becomes: "where should the assistant be situated?" According to U.S. Soccer's standard procedures, the assistant should be on the goal-line positioned with the second-to-last defender. Instead, he is approximately two yards off the line. Concentration and focus on the defenders is critical. You must know where they are and where the ball is. You cannot ball watch. It is not easy but it is a requirement of a top-class assistant referee.

Video Clip 7: New England at Chivas (2:17)

Again, a similar scenario as the prior clip. A goal line situation in which the ball is close to the goalmouth. Once more, focus on the assistant's position. Then look for the position of the second-to-last defender – on the goal line. The assistant referee must be positioned on the goal line with the second-to-last defender. This decision is even more difficult as there is an attacker on the goal-line also – just outside the goalpost. A seemingly easier decision just got more difficult with the addition of the attacker. Assistant referees must not get caught ball watching and must remain in the correct position to make a split second offside decision.

SUMMARY

A fantastic week highlighted by games that really tested the referee's ability to manage the players, manage the game, and manage their

application of the Laws of the Game. Referees, assistants, and fourth officials exhibited a solid understanding of all areas of the game and, consequently, another week of play where the safety of the players and the enjoyment for the spectators was prominent. Keep up the good work. The message is emanating within the referee community and helping to make things better at many levels.

WEEK 8 FOCUS

Tactical Foul Recognition

As we enter week 8, officiating teams should increase their sensitivity to identifying and dealing with tactical fouls that fall under the definition provided earlier. Let us set the standard at getting these correct. Assistant referees should feel empowered to provide assistance in identifying and bringing these tactical fouls to the referee's attention when the referee has not been successful in identifying the tactical nature of the foul. The assistant referee should feel empowered to indicate, utilizing a predisposed signal, to the referee that he believes the situation warrants a caution.

As a reminder, stay on course with preventative work in the bench decorum area but do not hesitate to take action should the behavior exceed the boundaries of responsible behavior.

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