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Referee Programs

U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 8



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 8 – ending May 18, 2008

WEEK 8 OVERVIEW

Game flow was the hallmark of this past week's performances. With little interference by the referees, foul calls were kept to a minimum. Referees worked hard to penalize only those fouls required to ensure game control and the safety of the players. Officials took risks by allowing the minor or trifling fouls to go unpunished. Consequently, an average of only 23.14 fouls were called per game over this week's seven matches. At the same time, an average of 3.4 cautions were handed out per game.

As referees work to manage game flow and take risks, there is a subtle increase in player dissent both verbal and visual. In the past, due to players becoming accustomed to trifling fouls being whistled they developed a reliance on the referee stopping the game. To date, many players have yet to adapt to this season's objective of referees taking risks relating to game flow. Players often react to the lack of a call by showing their emotions both visually and verbally. Hence, dissent can be an issue as the players adjust to the new game flow objective. Players that are involved in regular, ongoing contact with opponents also tend to get frustrated and will take their frustration out on the referee, in the form of dissent, if they feel they are not being managed correctly. Referees must be aware of dissent by word or action – be cognizant of its causes and work to prevent it from taking away from the beauty of the game.

The excitement and beauty of this week's games were marred by two red cards correctly issued for violent conduct. More will be said about these send offs below.

- *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 8

Tactical Foul Recognition

Last week, officiating teams were asked to increase their sensitivity toward identifying and dealing with tactical fouls. Additionally, continued emphasis on managing bench decorum and behavior in the technical area was requested.

There were two fouls that could be categorized as tactical: Fouls that don't 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 destroy an advantage in attack. **[\(Click here to link to access "Referee Week In Review 7" for a detailed list of tactical foul characteristics\)](#)** Both fouls met identified criteria but only one was sanctioned by a caution.

Conduct within the technical area became an issue in the Kansas City vs. New York game. In this game, the New York coach was dismissed from the game for inappropriate behavior and the use of language that was either offensive, insulting, or abusive. The dismissal did not come without prior warning which ensured proper escalation steps were used.

WEEK 8 COMMENTARY

Assistant Referee Awareness

The speed of the game and how it impacts assistant referee (AR) positioning and decisions has been part of every week's focus. The increased speed of play makes decisions in tight spaces even more difficult as there is little time to recognize the build up and little time to think about the decision. Consequently, the need for ARs to be focused and concentrating on all aspects of a game situation are amplified. As play is developing, ARs must learn to be more anticipatory, think ahead and be more prepared by asking themselves: "If X happens, I will need to do Y." Then, when "Y" happens the AR is not reacting because he has already played the event through in his mind. This is a preventative approach to the game.

Video Clip 1: Real Salt Lake at Colorado (23:00)

This clip shows a normal corner kick being taken. As the ball is served in, there is a header which is parried by the goalkeeper over the crossbar for another corner kick. However, freeze the clip just before the corner is taken. Is there anything out of the ordinary? Yes, there is an attacker **behind** the goalkeeper in an offside position. In front and to the side is the norm but behind is not normal on a corner kick? Prior to the taking of the kick, the AR and the referee must recognize potential issues from this corner and prepare an action plan in the eventuality something out of the ordinary results. Concentration and focus should allow the AR sufficient time (between the time the attacker places himself in the unconventional position to the time the corner is taken) to identify the options and prepare his "mind's eye" for several outcomes.

Now, watch what happens just prior to the goalkeeper's save of the header. The strategically placed attacker makes contact with the keeper via a subtle push to the back. The AR has the best view – unobstructed – of the situation. Plus, the AR should have been prepared for something out of the ordinary given the attacker's unnatural starting position. In this case, if the AR made the call, he would be applauded for recognizing the foul (a foul, not offside as contact is made with the goalkeeper and Law 5 requires referees to penalize the more serious of two simultaneous offenses). **Note:** the attacker is in an offside position and would normally not be considered offside if there was no physical contact or other influence on the goalkeeper. However, in this case, due to the contact with the goalkeeper the attacker would be considered having "interfered with an opponent."

Remember:

- Identify the unconventional position of the attacker: behind and close to the goalkeeper.
- Ask yourself: "why is the player occupying the immediate space behind the goalkeeper?"
- Play out the options thereby preparing yourself for any eventual outcome.
- Stay focused on the attacker and do not follow the ball.
- Despite two infractions having occurred (foul or push and offside), the referee should punish the foul.

Assistant Referee Involvement at the Right Time

There is a fine line between AR involvement and too much involvement. In other words, between the time the referee has a clear view of the situation and does not need assistance and the time when the referee does not see the situation and the game demands AR involvement. The following clip is a prime example of when the game demands the AR be involved. Despite the fact that the ARs decision will result in a penalty kick, the ARs involvement was necessary and should be based upon several factors like those noted below.

Before raising the flag and committing the referee team to a decision, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Does the referee have a clear view of the incident?**

Was the infraction such that the referee can clearly see the play and make the decision? Where is the referee positioned? Is he close enough to the play to make the decision on his own? If you answer, "no, the referee did not see it" then you can consider the next question.

- **Did I clearly see the infraction?**

If there is any doubt as to what you saw, leave the decision to the referee unless the referee looks to you for assistance because he also senses there is an issue. If this is the case, then you need to balance your participation based upon your "gut" feeling and how committed you are to the other questions you must answer.

Simply put, ask yourself: "If I raise the flag, do I interfere with the referee, and if I don't raise the flag, do I fail the game?"

Video Clip 2: Real Salt Lake at Colorado (81:15)

This clip illustrates excellent teamwork by the referee and the AR as well as an AR who has instantaneously asked himself the questions above. Because of the position of the players and ball, the referee is unable to have a clear view of the defender intentionally playing the ball with his hand. The AR has the best angle of vision and decides that the referee and the game needs his participation. Note, that although it is not evident in the clip, the referee and AR make eye contact thereby indicating that the referee needs help. Having made this assessment and visual contact, the AR raises his flag and follows the proper mechanics to signal the foul and the associated penalty kick. Once the AR has raised and wiggled his flag, notice how he drops it and holds the flag across his waist at arm's length (similar to the substitution signal but across the waist – in the soon to be released version of the "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" this mechanic will be introduced as the new penalty kick signal replacing the flag between the legs and the running to the corner flag). The referee then sharply and convincingly whistles the penalty and points to the penalty spot – a courageous and correct decision on the part of the AR.

Advantage, Foul, or Offside

Referees must be prepared to make technical decisions very quickly and be able to multi task in their decision making. In other words, referees must be able to process multiple, concurrent inputs and situations in a game and react appropriately – often times in a split second. This is the case in this clip. The referee is faced with a foul, the resulting opportunity to give the advantage, and an offside decision – three separate inputs that require processing to make the correct decision.

Video Clip 3: Kansas City at New York (4:30)

The referee correctly applies the advantage clause (signaling such) and then the fouled attacker quickly releases the ball to a teammate. Unfortunately, the attacker receiving the ball is in an offside position. So, the referee must decide:

- **Apply the advantage**

Decide that the advantage materialized.

- **Call offside**

Having decided that the advantage materialized, whistle the attacker who has received the ball for being in an offside position and participating in the play.

- **Call the original foul**

Decide that the advantage never materialized and call the foul that precipitated the attempt to play advantage.

Calling the original foul and bringing the ball back is the most appropriate solution as the advantage was never realized. Referees are permitted by the Laws of the Game to penalize the original offence if they do so within a few (approximately three) seconds after the foul is committed. So, despite the attacker being able to make the pass, the fact that the teammate is offside negates any advantage his team would have realized and the referee should, upon seeing that an advantage will not ensue, penalize the original foul. This is common sense refereeing and ensures the team committing the foul does not end up with the advantage.

Violent Conduct

Two red cards were issued for violent conduct. In both cases, excessive force was used against an opponent when not challenging for the ball. Additionally, both actions clearly endangered the safety of the opponent. Referees must take immediate and strict action by sending the players off.

Video Clip 4: Kansas City at New York (76:00)

The referee is able to identify two forms of misconduct. The first is a tactical foul or hold (unsporting behavior) on the defender attempting to slow the progress of the player with the ball. The second is the violent conduct for the elbow to the opponent's head. As prescribed, the referee shows the red card for the violent conduct and then issues a caution for the foul the precipitated the elbow. By issuing both cards, the referee shows his awareness of the "whole picture" and his feel for what initiated the elbow. It is important that referees not lessen the punishment for the elbow (violent conduct) because it was a reaction to a cautionable offense committed by an opponent. Violent conduct is a red card and the referee has no other option in this situation.

Referees should be aware of elbows as their prevalence in the game is on the increase. The use of elbows is increasing in situations, as shown in this clip, where holding is involved and in situations where there are challenges for the ball in the air. The acronym **F-I-R-E** can be used to assist officials with identifying elbows that should be dealt with as violent conduct (red card):

- **Frustration.**
- **Intimidation.**
- **Retaliation (payback).**
- **Establish Territory or Space.**

Video Clip 5: Galaxy at Dallas (29:37, second half)

This is a clear example of a two footed tackle that is intended to injure an opponent. There is no intent to play the ball and it is being committed to "send a message." In no uncertain terms, referees must punish this type of behavior with a red card (violent conduct). In this case, the defender may feel more confident in his attempted tackle because it is directly in front of his team bench and feel that the pressure from the bench will force the referee to forgo the red card. Fortunately for the game, the referee has the courage to take the appropriate action and red card the defender.

Because of the foul's proximity to the team benches, the tackle turns into several different confrontations. The focus of this clip is, however, the tackle and not the ancillary actions. But, it is important to mention:

- The referee should pull the red card as quickly as possible thereby communicating he is taking official action. The hope is that seeing the immediate red card, the players will temper their response to the foul.
- The assistant referee should try to move to the situation quicker.
- The fourth official's rapid intervention helped to prevent further escalation.
- It is recommended that when mass confrontation (several players surrounding the referee) occurs, the referee should ensure he sends an appropriate message that such conduct will not be tolerated. Referees should consider a yellow card in this situation. The issue of "mass confrontation" will be addressed in a future edition of the "Referee Week in Review."
- The team of officials should attempt to channel or escort the involved players away from each other and, preferably, to a position on the field away from the benches and the original confrontation.
- When a red carded player is escorted from the field, in front of the opponent's bench, the referee team must have heightened awareness that further confrontations may arise.

When viewing the tackle above, aside from a determination that the tackler is "using excessive force and is in danger of injuring his opponent," apply the following six criteria when deciding whether the tackle is merely cautionable or should result in a red card:

- **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.

Offside

As the season has progressed, offside decisions by ARs have also become more precise and have contributed to many entertaining goals and opportunities at goal. This past week was no exception. Once again, focus and concentration paid dividends as is witnessed by the following clip.

Video Clip 6: Kansas City at New York (8:08)

Early in the game, when it is easy for referees and ARs to be relaxed and not fully focused, a unique foul and offside situation arose. In this clip, you will see the shooter is behind the second-to-last defender seemingly in an offside position. However, there is one critical factor missing – the shooter is behind the ball at the time the ball is headed to him. Hence, the shooter cannot be offside since he is behind the ball at the time the ball is played to him by one of his teammates. Initially, the AR makes a solid "no call" on the original pass to the right wing player. Although there are attackers positioned in the middle of the penalty area in offside positions, they should not be penalized for being in that position because they have not interfered with play, not interfered with an opponent, and have not gained an advantage from being in the offside position. An overall excellent decision by the AR that can only be made by being aware of all the possibilities each time the ball is played and by being in the correct position as well.

In summation, the following key factors are involved in ensuring a correct decision:

- Being in front of the ball is one of the three essential requirements for being in an offside position (along with being ahead of the second to last defender and being in the defender's half of the field). Too often, this requirement is forgotten because being ahead of the second to last defender is emphasized so much.
- Being behind the ball means no offside position.
- Not being in an offside position means there can be no offside violation, no matter how obviously the attacker becomes actively involved in the play.

Assistant Referee Work Rates

After 55 games into the season, an alarming trend is being noticed: ARs have become lackadaisical, forgetting to chase balls to the goalkeeper or to the goal line especially when there exists the opportunity for another challenge or a goal line situation. ARs need to chase the ball all the way to the goalkeeper on back passes and need to chase balls to the goal line on shots that are on frame or may be played by the keeper. There have been instances when the goalkeeper has slipped on a back pass due to poor footing or a wet field. There have been many instances where a back pass has been made to the goalkeeper who is forced to play the ball with his feet inside the goal box and the AR is more than 15 yards from the play and has stopped tracking the ball. There have been instances where the goalkeeper misplays a ball with his feet. There have also been instances where seemingly trivial shots end up with goal line decisions.

ARs cannot relax and be complacent. Remember your role and the importance it plays in the overall management of the game. The perception of hustle must be evident at all times. Fitness and mobility levels need to be high enough that ARs can chase balls and stay in the correct offside position for the entire duration of the game. Remember, normal positioning requires the AR to be in line with the second-to-last defender or the ball whichever is closest to the goal line. Common sense should also be used in that once it is clearly determined that a shot is obviously wide of the goal and no challenge will be made, the AR may slow his progress; however, this should not occur until such time as it is evident that the ball is safely wide of the goal.

Video Clip 7: Galaxy at Dallas (18:20)

In this case, there is a seemingly innocuous long shot on goal from 40 or more yards out. At first, it looks as though the goalkeeper will have an easy play on the ball and will be able to control it without issues. But, the keeper is unable to secure the ball and the ball goes over the goal line for a corner kick. Look at the position of the AR at the bottom of the screen – he is not sprinting to keep up with the ball. Although the AR will never be able to match the speed of the ball, the AR must sprint with the ball until such time as the ball is safely in the keeper's possession or out of harm's way.

The AR in this clip is not smartly sprinting to minimize the distance between him and the ball. AR work rates must attempt to match the rate/speed of the game. Consider this: what would have happened if the goalkeeper parried the ball while standing in front of the goal line and the ball went over his head? Without sprinting and attempting to close the gap between the ball and the ultimate decision, the AR would have an even harder time selling his decision. Remember, ensure that we work as hard as possible to match the speed of play or the ball and work to ensure we close the gap between our position and the correct position as rapidly as possible.

Delaying Restarts

A trend is starting to appear regarding defending teams becoming more involved in delaying the restarts after fouls. This is a normal but unacceptable trend in the attacking "danger zone" of the field. After the whistle is blown for a foul, defending players (usually the player committing the foul) are immediately taking a position directly in front of the ball thereby denying the attacking team the right to put the ball into play quickly. Often times, the defender is standing only two to four yards from the ball. Referees must intercede and work hard to provide the attacking team a clear and effective restart void of any interference by the opponent. Referees must manage this and cannot assume it will take care of itself. Additionally, once the referee has signaled for a ceremonial restart, ensure that the entire 10 yards is given. In many instances, referees are only getting six to seven yards. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Prevent it early by setting the tone**

Interject yourself at the first instance and send a message to everyone that such delaying tactics will not be tolerated. Manage early and frequently in the game and do so with consistency.

- **Go to the spot of the foul**

As soon as you see the possibility that the defender will become a "statue" in front of the ball, move to the situation. Presence is critical.

- **Verbally and visually encourage the defender to move back**

Immediately communicate that you want the defender to move away from the ball. Do this verbally as well as visually by motioning them back. This will provide a message to everyone that you are being proactive and, should official action (caution) be warranted, you will have displayed your displeasure and will be better able to sell your yellow card.

- **Caution**

After preventative measures have been exhausted and the players are not responding, the referee should consider cautioning the player for "failing to respect the required distance when play is restarted."

Administrative Issues

As you prepare for your games, please consider the following administrative items:

- **Injuries**

When there is a concurrent injury to the goalkeeper and any other field player (regardless of team) and the trainer is called onto the field to attend to the goalkeeper and the other field player, both the player and the goalkeeper may be treated on the field of play and are **not** required to leave the field. ***Refer to the October 12, 2007 position paper entitled: "Handling Injuries" by clicking on this link.***

- **Climate Changes**

The weather is changing as are temperatures at game time. Referees and ARs must prepare their bodies for the summer temperatures. Hydration is critical. Don't be caught unprepared. Additionally, be aware of the placement and use of water bottles ensuring they are not thrown on the field and they do not inhibit the movement of the AR. Finally, keep an eye on the goalkeeper's towel hanging in the goal. Ensure that the towel is far enough back that it will not interfere with shots on goal nor block the vision of the AR. ARs should be proactive in examining this during their checking of the nets.

SUMMARY

As evidenced by the 23.14 fouls called per game, referee teams are projecting themselves in a positive manner on the game and the final product is beginning to have a consistent look and feel. Games are being played in similar environments week to week and game to game. The result is that players and coaches can now approach games with a certain level of expectation regarding how the games will be called. Implementation and execution may differ given the referee's personal characteristics but the end result will be similar in each game.

WEEK 9 FOCUS

Delaying the Restart and 10 Yards

As mentioned above, increased awareness at preventing defenders from delaying restarts by interposing their bodies immediately in front of the ball is important. Referees should focus on early and effective intervention through a preventative approach – promote attacking soccer. Additionally, referees must ensure that they give the attacking team the full ten yards on all restarts. Again, set the tone early and be consistent in the application. It is not easy and it takes work but it is critical to providing attacking soccer.

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