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## Referee Programs

### U.S. Soccer Referee Week in Review - Week 9



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 9 – ending May 25, 2008

#### WEEK 9 OVERVIEW

Congratulations go out to Assistant Referees (ARs) this week. Overall, performances were outstanding. In fact, in the Real Salt Lake vs. FC Dallas game, there were two correct offside decisions that resulted in goals. Both decisions occurred late in the game (83rd and 91st minutes) from two distinctly different situations.

#### **Video Clip 1:** Real Salt Lake at FC Dallas (81:40)

The first situation came off a long service that was headed past the goalkeeper by an attacker in a crowd. The scorer was even with the second to last defender at the time the ball was played by his teammate and the AR gave the benefit of the doubt to the attacker. This 83rd minute goal tied the game 1-1. The complexity of the decision is evidenced by the long service and the crowd of players in proximity to the landing spot of the ball. The AR had to focus on the touching of the ball by the attacker making the service some 45 yards away while keeping a keen eye on the position of the attacker at the time the ball was played from such a distance. Clear peripheral vision of the ball and the goal scorer's position provided the AR with the tools to make the correct decision – as did the AR's position.

#### **Video Clip 2:** Real Salt Lake at FC Dallas (90:02)

The second goal, a counter attack in the 91st minute, was another example of a good call. The attacking team plays a 30-yard pass over and between two defenders. This counter-attack style has been mentioned on numerous occasions in the "Referee Week In Review" as an area causing ARs problems. The AR must be focused and prepared for the quick release by the passer and cannot be lulled to sleep by the fact that the passer starts with his back to the attacking third of the field. Also impressive is the positioning and fitness exhibited by the referee. Despite the game being in additional time, the referee has closed the gap between the ball and himself as a result of his quickness, fitness, and sprinting ability. Should there have been any penalty area decision required, the referee would have been well positioned to make such a decision.

To understand the importance of concentrating on offside decisions, consider the following statistics from this past weekend:

- 27% of the total goals scored this past weekend came in the 80th minute or later. There were seven goals scored in this 10 minute span.
- Three of the seven goals were game-winners. Therefore, three of the eight games played were decided with ten minutes or less remaining.
- Two goals were scored in "additional time," one of which was the game-winner.
- *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."*

#### A LOOK BACK – ISSUES AND RESULTS – WEEK 9

##### Delaying the Restart and 10 Yards

Defending teams did not challenge the referee by preventing their opponents from putting the ball back into play quickly. The repetitive picture of players becoming statues in front of opponent's restarts thereby denying them the opportunity to restart the game quickly was not

standard practice. There were examples of the referee escorting defending players back quickly after whistling a foul thus ensuring attacking play. Additionally, referees did a much better job of ensuring the 10 yards on free kicks especially in the danger zone of the field (30 or less yards from the goal).

## WEEK 9 COMMENTARY

### Goalkeeper Release and Control of the Ball

On December 19, 2005, U.S. Soccer released a position paper that provided guidance relative to when a ball controlled by the goalkeeper can/cannot be legally played by an opponent. This past weekend a situation arose in which an attacker jumped up and played/headed a ball just released from the goalkeeper's hands as he was in the "act of distributing" the ball. The deflected ball ends up in possession of the defending team at the top of the penalty area. **Refer to the December 19, 2005, position paper entitled: "Control of the Ball by the Goalkeeper" by clicking on this link.**

According to the position paper, the "act of distribution" includes the process of:

- Setting the ball on the ground
- Throwing the ball away
- Punting the ball away
- Drop kicking the ball

Additionally, an opponent may also infringe the Law if he is so close to the goalkeeper that an attempt to challenge for the ball immediately following the act of distribution would be considered interference with the release of the ball into play or as playing in a dangerous manner. Therefore, an opponent would be considered to be committing an offense merely by challenging for the ball before any of the "acts of distribution" is completed.

#### **Video Clip 3:** Chicago at New York (2:00)

Keeping in mind the directives above, while watching the video clip, ask yourself:

- **Is the goalkeeper in the "act of distribution?"**

In this situation, the goalkeeper is in the process of throwing the ball away.

- **Is the player close to the goalkeeper?**

The player's relative closeness (three yards) to the goalkeeper increases the likelihood of his interfering with the release of the ball into play.

- **What is the player's intent?**

Why is the player interposing his body in front of the goalkeeper? Why does the player jump up upon the release of the ball? Why does the player slow down in front of the goalkeeper instead of merely running by him?

Referee awareness and positioning is critical in situations when the goalkeeper has possession of the ball and opponents are in the vicinity. Referees must not turn their back to the ball while moving up field for the next phase of play. It is also vitally important to read the situation. The actions of the attacker to slow down and position himself in the path of the goalkeeper should be an immediate warning that something more may occur.

Given that this offense occurred in the third minute, the referee could have used the foul to set the tone for the match and indicate that he is aware of gamesmanship. The modern game lends itself to quick distributions on the part of the goalkeeper when he is in possession of the ball because he has unlimited steps (not unlimited time) to quickly move to the top of the penalty area to initiate an attack. Defending teams realize this and will look for opportunities to impede his progress and slow him down.

In this case, the referee should award an indirect free kick to the goalkeeper's team for preventing the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands (Law 12). A caution is not mandated in this case.

### Second Cautionable Offenses and Persistent Infringement

A top class referee is able to identify and deal with players who persistently infringe the Laws of the Game. At the same time, referees must possess the courage to issue a second caution to a player and then send him off for receiving a second caution in the same match.

Let us first explore the concept of Persistent Infringement. Managing persistent infringement requires that the referee maintain an on going database of information during the game. As fouls are committed, the referee should use the database to store information regarding the players involved, the time, and the frequency of the fouls. As the referee processes the information, he must decide when the stored information requires official action (yellow card). This is not easy due to the speed of the game and the other game management issues confronting the referee. Despite the difficulty in processing the stored information, it is critical that the referee possess the skills necessary to

identify players who fall into the categories below and then address them.

The difficulty of recognizing persistent infringers can be illustrated with the following MLS game statistics:

- There have been a total of 203 cautions issued to date.
- In the 63 games played through last week, only five cautions were issued for persistent infringement. This is 2.5%.
- Three of the five cautions were given in the first half (minutes 29, 29, and 41).
- Two of the five cautions were given in the second half (minutes 64 and 75).

Persistent infringement falls under two categories:

- **Players who repeatedly commit fouls**

To disrupt play and ruin the entertainment value of a game, players persistently/repeatedly foul opponents. Such conduct often causes the frustration level of opponents to rise and, therefore, the intensity level of the game to increase. This can lead to dissent and retaliation. Recognizing players who persistently/repeatedly foul opponents is critical to game control. Once the referee has identified the disruptive actions, the referee must pick the appropriate time to caution the culprit for persistently infringing the Laws of the Game. There is no magic number of fouls that define persistence. The severity, the frequency, the time between the fouls committed, and the atmosphere of the game are all factors that the referee should consider when determining whether a player is guilty of persistent infringement. In writing the game report, the referee should state that the caution was issued for "persistently infringing the Laws of the Game."

- **Players who are repeatedly fouled**

Often times an individual player is the target of repeated fouls – fouls from not one player but from multiple players. This targeted player can be the skillful/creative play maker, the player who gets repeated touches on the ball. In this case, persistent infringement is evaluated in terms of the number and nature of the fouls committed against a single opponent as opposed to the number of fouls committed by a single player. The referee should also consider the time span of the fouls.

Note: When a referee identifies a case of persistent infringement that falls under category 2 above ("Players who are repeated fouled"), the game report should list the caution as being issued for "unsporting behavior." This should be the case as this is more of a philosophical approach to persistent infringement.

According to U.S. Soccer's DVD entitled, "Persistent Infringement," referees should consider the following when evaluating persistent infringement:

- **Read the game tactically**
- **Be aware of creative players**
- **Be aware of destructive tactics aimed at destroying the rhythm of the game**
- **Be aware of the time span of the fouls: three fouls in three minutes vs. three fouls occurring in minutes 2, 47, and 88.**
- **Promote the beautiful game**

This weekend saw one player red carded for receiving a second caution in the same match. In other words, the player committed two cautionable offenses in the same game. Referees must have the courage to issue the second yellow card despite the possible ramifications (one team playing short handed) and despite the time in the game. In the case of the video clips below, there are two clear cautionable tackles each one, on their own, representing unsporting behavior. Both tackles are reckless in nature therefore requiring the referee to sanction the tackler with a caution.

Remember, that the second caution and subsequent red card is to remove from the field a player who has previously been officially notified through the first caution that the player's behavior is unacceptable and that, upon repetition, the player will not be permitted to take any further part in the game. In the clips below, the referee sends a message with the first caution but the player chooses not to receive the message.

In the 63 games officiated in MLS, three players have been sent off for receiving their second caution in the same match. The second yellow card was handed out in minutes 38, 81, and 83.

**Video Clip 4:** Real Salt Lake at FC Dallas (17:00)

This clip not only shows a reckless tackle but it also contains other valuable lessons. First, the referee is keen enough to award an advantage to the attacker who has sufficient space to advance with the ball. Secondly, when the referee calls the foul, he is excellently positioned. He is close to the play and possesses a clear line of vision to the offense. The tackle is clumsy and late and it is committed at an angle in which the defender cannot play the ball. Hence, a caution is issued for unsporting behavior.

**Video Clip 5:** Real Salt Lake at FC Dallas (37:47)

Just under twenty minutes later, the same two players are involved in another late challenge. This is an unnecessary challenge as the attacker is moving away from the penalty area; however, the speed at which the attacker is moving with the ball leads to the reckless tackle. Also, note the defending player's reaction after the tackle. He seems apologetic as though he knows he committed a cautionable offense. Once again, the referee is correct in deciding that the tackle is worthy of a caution for unsporting behavior. Thus, the referee displays the yellow card and then the red card for receiving a second caution in the same match. Given the game is still in the early stages, this is a

courageous and correct decision.

***For more detailed description of other considerations involving second cautions, refer to the October 12, 2004 position paper entitled: "Send-Offs for Receiving a Second Caution" by clicking on this link.***

### **Encroachment at the Taking of a Penalty Kick**

Managing penalty kick restarts is a complex issue and one that can have significant ramifications depending upon the type of violation that occurs at the taking of the penalty kick. Keeping players in compliance with the requirements of the Law is a difficult task. Players on both teams want to rush in to claim space and the ball should it rebound back into play. The sooner and closer they get to goal, they feel they have an advantage on a missed penalty kick.

On August 1, 2007, a U.S. Soccer position paper, "Violations of Law 14 (The Penalty Kick)," was published outlining the outcomes of various violations relating to Law 14 (***click on the link to view the position paper***). It is important to remember that players are restricted in where they can be and what they can do during the taking of a penalty kick. If there are violations of these restrictions, Law 14 dictates the action the referee must take. Please note, it is no longer mandatory that the referee issue a caution for a violation of Law 14.

#### **Video Clip 6:** New England at Columbus (88:45)

Although it is not shown in this clip, the referee has correctly awarded a penalty kick late in the game. Once the penalty kick has been awarded, the referee must assume the task of managing the restart. The Laws require that players other than the kicker be located:

- On the field of play
- Outside the penalty area
- Behind the penalty mark
- At least 10 yards from the penalty mark (outside the penalty arc)

In the situation provided, the referee does preventative work and a good job getting all players to comply prior to his signaling for the kick to be taken. However, as he whistles and before the ball is in play (it is in play when it is kicked and moves forward), several players from **both** teams enter the penalty area.

At this moment, regardless of the outcome (goal, rebound into play, ball wide), the referee is empowered to retake the penalty kick. This becomes especially critical when the outcome of the kick is influenced by one or more of the players who violated the Law by entering too soon.

Watch carefully, the ball rebounds off the goalkeeper to an attacker who has encroached. This attacker then scores directly off the rebound. Hence, the referee should ask himself: "Did anyone gain an unfair advantage as a result of their entering the penalty area early?" In this case, the goal scorer gained an advantage. Given the fact that multiple players from each team violated the Law, the referee should disallow the goal and have the penalty kick retaken. If just the a teammate of the kicker entered the area early and the ball had rebounded into play, the referee would be required to restart with an indirect free kick from where the player encroached. The aforementioned position paper contains all the appropriate restarts for the potential violations of Law 14.

#### **Video Clip 7:** New England at Columbus (88:45)

This clip offers a still picture of the players who have encroached as well as a good picture of the referee's position. At the top of the penalty area, you can see the attacker who eventually puts the rebound into the goal. In terms of positioning and prevention, consider the following:

- **Communicate requirements**

Move to the top of the penalty area and verbalize the requirements. Visually remind players by pointing to the line may be helpful. Make eye contact with as many players as possible thereby letting them know that they are on notice.

- **Wide angle of vision and no one positioned behind you**

Take a position that gives you a wide angle of vision. Do not allow any players to be behind you where they can run into the penalty area prior to the ball being in play. All players must be in view.

- **Presence**

The players must feel your presence. Assuming a position closer to the top of the penalty area is becoming more standard so that the players see you and feel your presence. Don't position yourself in the running lanes of players.

### **SUMMARY**

As we get deeper into the season, the teams are very evenly matched across the board. As a consequence, results of games are critical for all teams and referees must prepare themselves to exceed the intensity of the matches and of the players. As the season progresses, every

decision on the part of officials will be more critical and will be more scrutinized. For this reason, continue your efforts on being focused for all 90 minutes plus any additional time. Prepare yourself for all eventualities. This past week was evidence that your preparation as either a referee or AR can positively influence performance. There were several excellent decisions that were both courageous and gutsy. These decisions exemplify how the season has been going thus far from an officiating perspective.

## WEEK 10 FOCUS

### Surpassing the Intensity of the Game

Ensure that the performance of the referee team surpasses the intensity level of the game. This is critical in the second half of games. Referees and ARs must remain focused and anticipate changes in the intensity of the game. Don't become comfortable or too relaxed. The referee team must keep open lines of communication during games which will keep everyone on track and assist with managing performance.

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