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Referee Programs

2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 11

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.

Week In Review**Week 11 – ending May 31, 2009****WEEK OVERVIEW**

MLS games have been competitive and challenging requiring officials to maintain focus and concentration from the first to the last minute. There have been multiple games in which the deciding or tying goal has been scored in “added time.” Games ending in ties have been the rule not the exception over the past three weeks of competition. Over the last 23 games, 47.8 percent have ended in ties. Another 26.1 percent have been decided by a single goal.

Close games require match officials remain attentive for 90 minutes or more. Referees and assistant referees (ARs) cannot afford to let their guard down. Due to the number of games (73.9 percent) finishing with a difference of one goal or less, each decision by the referee team can be magnified and carry with it ramifications that could potentially impact the outcome of the game. Hence, all match officials have the responsibility to keep a heightened awareness regardless of the time of the match and resist becoming “too comfortable.” One uncontrolled tackle, one shot that hits the crossbar and bounces along the goal line....Referees must ensure that they do not get caught off guard despite the fact that the game has been well under control to that point.

WEEK 11 COMMENTARY**Assistant Referee Involvement**

Assistant referee (AR) involvement in the game can be of critical importance to the overall success of the referee team. In “[Week In Review 6](#)”, the topic of AR involvement in making game critical decisions was addressed. At the time, two questions were presented for ARs to consider prior to becoming involved in making a game critical decision:

- Will I fail the referee if I do not get involved?
- Will I fail the game if I do not get involved?

These are two valuable questions that ARs must ask themselves in a split second when they observe a game critical situation that they believe the referee has not observed. In addition, ARs are asked to supplement their thought process by asking an additional question prior to raising the flag:

“If I raise the flag, do I interfere with the referee and if I don’t raise the flag, do I fail the game?”

Let’s define two important terms:

1. Game Critical Decision

A situation in which the AR is 100 percent certain of what they observed. These are situations in which the AR has **clearly** seen the action. The actions, however, must be consistent with the manner in which the referee is managing the game to that point.

ARs should utilize the “wait and see” approach prior to involvement. The referee should be given the first opportunity to be engaged. If, due to the referee’s attention being engaged elsewhere, the referee is not aware of a critical situation, then the AR should be empowered to provide assistance.

Game critical decision examples:

- Off-the-ball incidents
- Foul inside / outside the penalty area
- Goal / no goal decision

- Misconduct – yellow or red card

2. **Over-Involvement by ARs**

ARs should refrain from “taking over the game.” In other words: **ARs must get into the same “rhythm” as the referee while developing a “feel” for the game in terms of being involved when the referee’s rhythm is not sufficient for the game.**

Additionally, ARs need to refrain from becoming over exuberant in flagging calls that interfere with the referee’s performance and game flow or game management.

Over-involvement examples:

- Fouls called not consistent with the referee: Not reading the game like the referee. A violation that the referee would have considered doubtful/trifling. Neither the game nor the referee needs the call.
- Over-extending beyond the ARs “area of control:” As the ARs distance to the event increases, AR involvement generally should decrease.
- 50/50 call: Decisions that may be too difficult for the AR to sell from his position. Fouls that are not clear and obvious. *Think: If I see this on replay, would I be confident enough to make the call? In all cases, when making a “game critical decision,” the AR must be 100 percent certain of the decision.*

Key: Involvement by the AR will make the referee successful.

Officials can review the criteria and the topic of “Assistant Referee Involvement” by reviewing the associated 2009 U.S. Soccer directive.

There is a fine line between over-involvement and providing assistance because the game or the referee requires it. Having a “feel” for the way the referee is calling the game is vital to determining whether to be involved or not as is an ARs ability to ascertain whether the incident/challenge clearly meets the criteria that demands involvement. The two clips that follow will provide contrasting examples pertaining to AR involvement.

Video Clip 1: Chicago at Chivas USA (22:28)

The first clip is an excellent example of a situation in which AR involvement is justified given the criteria outlined above. In addition to illustrating successful “involvement,” the clip also provides examples of two other items of interest: dissent and bench decorum/behavior.

1. **AR Involvement**

Cooperation and involvement go hand-in-hand. Video clip 1 shows good cooperation between the referee and the AR. It also allows the viewer to see positive and correct “AR involvement” in a “game critical decision.”

On a free kick service into the penalty area, the defending team commits a direct free kick offense (holding the opponent’s shirt) that eventually results in a penalty kick being awarded by the referee. The AR recognizes the hold and is 100 percent certain a foul has been committed that is worthy of a penalty kick.

Upon seeing the hold/foul, the AR asks himself:

“If I raise the flag, do I interfere with the referee and if I don’t raise the flag, do I fail the game?”

In this case, the referee’s position is not optimum. As the ball is played/served into the penalty area, the referee does not adjust his position so that he will have the best angle of vision to judge any eventual challenge. So, for this challenge, the AR is best positioned to clearly see the resulting foul. Aside from asking the aforementioned question, the AR correctly decides:

- He has a better view than the referee.
- The foul is **clear** and **obvious**. The length and exaggerated nature of the shirt pull coincides with the fact that the attacker is prevented from playing the ball. Such obvious and clear actions help to sell the decision. The defender prevents the attacker from having unimpeded movement to the ball. It is **not** a 50/50 call.
- The challenge is **not** doubtful or trifling.
- The call is in the same “rhythm” as the referee. It is consistent with the way the referee has called the game to that point. This is not to say that 100 percent situations should not be addressed by ARs.

Once the AR has communicated the foul to the referee by raising his flag, the referee must then decide whether to whistle for a foul or not. The referee must decide if he clearly observed all aspects of the incident or not and, in some cases, depending upon how much of the incident he observed, consider his “gut” feeling, instincts or inner feelings if he does not agree with the ARs attempt at involvement. By raising the flag, the AR is drawing attention to a “situation” that will then draw attention to the referee team. Hence, it is important that the AR be 100 percent certain and consider the guidelines outlined above.

Once the referee has whistled to stop play, he goes to the AR to confer regarding the awarding of a penalty kick. This is a valuable step due to the critical nature of the decision. This will give the referee the opportunity to compare what he saw with what the AR observed and make the final decision.

2. **Dissent**

The management of dissent (verbal and visual) is a 2009 U.S. Soccer Directive. Referees have been instructed to take a proactive role in defusing dissent and in cautioning players whose actions can be defined as dissent (more than an emotional outburst).

This clip shows several players protesting the decision of the referee team. The referee works to defuse the situation by moving to neutral ground and by motioning for the players to leave. The persistent nature of the protesting players must translate into at least one of the players being cautioned for dissent. The referee chooses to caution the player (number 5) who is most vocal and visual with his dissent. An additional caution could be considered to the captain (number 15) as he also is persistent and does not heed the referee’s verbal and visual warnings to stop.

3. **Bench Behavior and Decorum**

“Managing the Technical Area” is another 2009 directive. This directive emphasizes the need for match officials to enforce proper behavior in the technical area. Why is this important? Because irresponsible or poor behavior reflects negatively on the presentation of the game. Usually, behavior in the technical area is loud and demonstrative thereby it can be seen and heard by the spectators and television cameras (as is the case in this clip).

Match officials (including fourth officials in games in which they are used) have been asked to utilize the “ask, tell, remove” process to manage behavior in the technical or bench area. Coaches, substitutes, substituted players and other team personnel must be held accountable for their behavior.

The coach, in this example, is exhibiting behavior that is outside of the norm. Match officials (in this case, the fourth official) should use the “ask, tell, remove” process to channel the coach’s behavior. If the coach’s behavior requires the match officials to dismiss him immediately from the game for irresponsible behavior, the escalation steps associated with “ask, tell, remove” do not need to be followed. Depending upon the severity of the behavior, match officials need to decide from which step they should begin the process. If the behavior is severe (like the use of offensive, insulting or abusive language or gestures), the coach must be removed or dismissed from the game immediately (without utilizing the “ask and tell” steps) for irresponsible behavior. This procedure applies to substitutes and substituted players also; however, these individuals would be shown the yellow or red card depending upon their actions.

“Week In Review 10” also provided guidance to match officials relative to managing conduct within the technical area. Referees are encouraged to review the commentary provided in week 10 to supplement the information provided this week.

Video Clip 2: D.C. United at New England (88:14)

Like clip 1, this decision comes directly off a free kick service into the penalty area. Like the prior clip, the referee’s movement to the next phase of play or the “drop zone” (where the ball will land) is not anticipatory. The referee has the opportunity to improve his angle of vision and be closer to play. Improved positioning could be accomplished through more urgency and by not relaxing in the last minutes of the game. By taking a better position, the referee can control the situation and, eventually, provide a presence that might deter AR involvement and create the opportunity for the referee to take ownership of the final decision.

Compared to clip 1, this is an example of **over-involvement** on the part of the AR. Using the criteria outlined in this section, the AR calls a foul that leads to a penalty kick that should not be called. Several factors should be taken into consideration:

1. There is minimal contact. The contact is doubtful, soft and trifling. It does not prevent the attacker from playing the ball nor does it cause him to misplay the ball.
2. The attacker is falling backward on his own volition. The minimal contact by the defender does not contribute to the attacker’s fall.
3. This is a 50/50 call that must be left to the referee who is positioned much closer.
4. The AR is not in “rhythm” with the referee’s decisions as they have developed throughout the match. In other words, the decision is not clear enough to differ from the management style exhibited by the referee to that point in the match.
5. Although not the best line of vision, the referee does have a decent perspective and is much closer to the situation than the AR. Given the unclear nature of the contact, the challenge should be considered “beyond the ARs area of control.”

As a consequence of this evaluation, the AR should leave this decision to the referee. If the AR does flag this challenge, the referee must consider his view of the play. If the referee is uncertain of the call and he has stopped play, the referee should go to the AR and discuss what each has observed. Based upon this quick conference, the referee can then decide if the call is warranted. In this clip, look at the response of the players from the attacking team that has been awarded the penalty kick. The attacking players continue to play and show no signs of discontent after their teammate goes down. This is a sign that can help confirm any instinctual feelings the referee may have. Overall, if the referee feels that the challenge was trifling or doubtful, he should wave off the AR and continue with play.

Looking Forward – Week 12

Movement. Anticipation. Drop zone. Maximize the angle of vision. These words are key to ensuring the referee can take ownership of most decisions and not need to rely on ARs to make game critical decisions – especially decisions for which the referee is much closer.

- **Movement**
Always move your feet. Do not be flat footed or stagnant especially in the final stages of the game. Do not assume a challenge will be clean or uneventful. Expect and prepare for the unexpected through positive movement.
- **Anticipation**
Don’t react. Think two steps ahead just like a chess player would. If a ball is going to be played into the penalty area, anticipate/expect an aerial challenge or holding. Move to a position where you can see the challenge. Don’t wait for the ball to get there. Move before the pass/service or as it is being executed as this will also allow you to observe any action prior to the ball arriving.
- **Drop Zone**
Know the end point or drop zone of a pass/service. Through anticipation and movement, put yourself in the best possible position to view action when the ball arrives.
- **Maximize the Angle of Vision**
By moving toward the drop zone before the ball arrives, you can take up a position that gives the optimum sight angles or view. Get to a position where you can see between the players and NOT through them. Position yourself so you can see the light between opponents.

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